**Study on International Students Not Selecting India as an Education Destination**

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**Abstract**

*In the last few years, India's emphasis on inbound international mobility has noticeably increased. With less than one per cent of international students globally selecting to study in India, this study tries to find the primary reasons for not choosing to study in India. The study also analyzes the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on inbound international student mobility in India and finds if online education can be an alternative for these students. The primary data was collected using an online questionnaire sent to students who decided not to study in India. The study finds that lack of financial assistance was the most crucial reason for international students not selecting India as an education destination, followed by safety concerns and cultural differences. These reasons varied based on demographic factors. The study also observed that few students decided not to study in India based on the covid-19 pandemic. Finally, the research finds that online education in India can be a good alternative for students rejecting to study in India. The study suggests that the government of India and HEIs should make relevant changes in the policies to mitigate these reasons and look forward to promoting online education in India.*

**Keywords**- international student mobility in India, study in India, covid-19, inbound mobility in India

**1. Introduction**

India, as a nation, hosts less than 1 per cent of the internationally mobile students across the world (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO, 2021). There exists a high imbalance between the inflow and outflow of international students in India as only 49348 international students from 168 countries selected India in the year 2019 (AISHE, 2019-20) against 461,792 students from India selected to study abroad (UNESCO, 2021). India belated has realized the importance of inbound international students and their impact globally (Pushkar, 2019). With the series of initiatives like the Institute of Eminence and Study In India program, the government of India is seriously thinking to reduce this deficit in higher education trade and aims to take this number to a staggering 2,00,000 with an over four times increase by 2023 (Pawar et al., 2020). International students represent a lucrative revenue source and enhance diversity on campus, promoting integrated learning and acting as a vital ranking parameter for HEI in India (National Institutional Ranking Framework, 2021).

The outburst of the Covid-19 pandemic across the globe has drastically affected the higher education system, be it shifting to the online class mode of learning and treating it as a 'new normal' (Mok, 2021). India, too, witnessed multiple lockdowns across different states with closing and reopening educational institutions. The risk is still not over; despite the vaccination drive in India receiving appreciation globally, the new variants of the virus are emerging and posing a threat to this normalizing world. Moreover, the current state of affairs also induces a fear psychosis in the student's mind to deter away, at least for a short time, for higher education purposes, especially from nations where the virus had severely affected. However, as the world is learning to live with the mutating virus, several nations have already revised their strategies and taken initiatives to attract international students to their country. Against this backdrop, these unanticipated commotions during the post-Covid 19 periods would considerably affect the cross border movement of students and could be beneficial for those nations which are getting ready to take advantage of such evolving scenarios. Recent research suggests that one of the opportunities of the covid-19 pandemic is the shift from academic mobility to virtual mobility (Finardi and Guimaraes, 2020). Most of the Higher Education Institutes in India offered education online during the pandemic; however, online education has its challenges, especially for developing countries with inadequate technical infrastructure for online learning. Although the HEIs in India did not face scarcity of student enrolments due to their high reliance on domestic students and less dependency on international students' supply (Gurukkal, 2020); to develop India as a South Asian education hub and beyond, necessary arrangements have to be made especially in post-Covid 19 period. Therefore, it becomes imperative to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the most critical reasons prompting international students not to complete their admission process at Indian Institutes?

RQ2: If the current Covid-19 pandemic impacted inbound student mobility in India?

RQ3: Can online education be an opportunity for international students deciding not to study in India?

With these research questions in focus, this study tries to bridge the gap available in current literature by conducting a survey using an online questionnaire to understand the crucial factors impacting the decision of international students’ dithering their plans to study in India, to what extent covid-19 pandemic situation is responsible for the same and can online education bridge this gap? This paper satisfies the research questions by first emphasizing the 'status quo of India's HEIs and the challenges posed by Covid-19, and understands the interest of international students in online education as an alternative to academic mobility. The following section conducts a thorough review of the literature, explains the research methodology, data analysis and results. Finally, it discusses the study's essential findings and presents the conclusion.

**2. Literature Review**

The research first understands and evaluates the existing literature on the internationalization of higher education in India and the status of international students in India, followed by a review of higher education and the covid-19 situation in India. Finally, the research evaluates the role of online education as an alternative to international student mobility.

**2.1. Internationalization at Higher Education Institutes in India**

The internationalization of Higher Education is an essential aspect for higher educational institutes across the globe. For various institutes, internationalization is an essential source of revenue, and it is also crucial for the overall development of a higher educational institute and its stakeholders. Van der Wende defines internationalization as' any organized, sustained efforts leading to the responsiveness of higher education to the want and challenges connected to the globalization of societies, economy and labour markets' (Van der Wende, 1997). There are various reasons and incentives for embedding internationalization to the higher educational institutes, explained under four different approaches activity approach, process approach, ethos approach and competency approach (Yang, 2022). Full-time international students, exchange programs for students and faculty, curriculum internationalization, short-term study abroad programs, research collaborations, and many more are integral parts of internationalization. Full-time international students are one of the most critical aspects of internationalization.

With almost 900 universities and around 37 million students, India is the second-largest education system globally, but only a few Indian universities are ranked globally (Dar, 2020). The internationalization of education in India can be traced back to thousand years when scholars from different parts of the world came for education in the universities of Takshashilia, Nalanda and Vikramshila of India (Goel and Goel, 2021). Despite India's long history of international students, India's trade deficit has constantly increased in the higher education sector (Kumar, 2014). In the last decade, the number of international students in India has only increased from 5323 in 1998 to 49348 in (AISHE, 2019-20), whereas 620156 students from India selected campuses abroad (UNESCO, 2022). Despite an increase in the number of countries from 35 in 1998 to 168 in 2019 (UNESCO, 2022; AISHE 2019-20), these international students come for study, more than half of them are from five neighbouring low-income economies of Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the United States and Nigeria (UNESCO,2022; AISHE 2019-20). It becomes vital to understand why students do not select India as a study destination in the above context.

**2.2. Higher education and Covid-19 situation in India**

World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 disease a global health emergency on 30th January 2019 and pandemic on 11th March 2020 (WHO, 2020; Pelmin, 2020, Kapasia et al., 2020). The cause of the covid-19 disease was a newly discovered coronavirus that spreads through respiratory droplets and causes illness ranging from the common cold to severe acute respiratory syndrome (WHO, 2020). The highly contagious virus spread worldwide, with the first known case reported at Hubei province of China on 17th November 2019 (Pekar et. al., 2021) to over 276 million cases, including 5.37 million deaths reported to WHO 21st December 2021. The first case of Covid -19 in India was detected on 30th January 2020 (Prajapati and Parikh, 2021). Since then, India has witnessed two peaks in the covid cases, and the first peak was in September 2020 and the second peak in May 2021, where the second peak was much more severe, with covid cases reaching 2.7 million and the number of deaths reaching to almost 28982 per day (WHO, 2021). The second peak in India coincided with the admission period at higher educational institutions in India and globally presented India as the second most affected country in the world (Rocha et. al., 2021). To combat the rapid spread of the Covid-19 outbreak in India, the Union Government of India announced nationwide lockdown in different phases starting 24th March 2019, whereas all the educational institutions were declared close w.e.f. 16th March 2019, followed by the cancellation of all the examinations on 18th March 2019 (Saha et. al., 2020). The lockdown helped the country delay the peak's arrival in the covid-19 cases by two and half months and allowed the government to make adequate medical preparation to take the situation on the ground (Youkta and Pramanik 2021). Similar restrictions like lockdown, social distancing, travel and immigration restrictions (Gössling et. al., 2020) were imposed in most parts of the world, leading to more than 90% of the world population living with international travel restrictions. The government informed educational institutions to close down, which disrupted the entire academic schedule and admissions process, as entrance exams were cancelled. All the educational institutions closed during lockdown led to unrivalled repercussions on education (Kapasia et. al., 2020). After the government decided to close the educational institutes in India, many international students started travelling back to their home countries. International students were one of the most vulnerable population groups during the pandemic (Anandavalli et. al., 2020). In the above context, it becomes essential to find if the covid-19 pandemic situation made students postpone or cancel their studies in India.

**2.3. Online Education as an alternative to international student mobility during the pandemic**

The best alternative to classroom education is an online education, especially when learners feel the need to study at their comfort, and it may be because of any other reason (Journell, 2010). Various studies suggested that there was hardly any difference found between the program outcomes and assessment between online versus classroom education; in fact, many studies state that there is better learning through online education, it is more cost-effective and makes the learner more acquainted with the technology (Kong and Jacobs, 2012).

With the advent of covid-19 pandemic and schools getting closed for face to face education, teachers were informed to teach through online platforms during lockdown (Kapasia et. al., Abidah et. al., 2020). Online education became the new normal where technology played an increasingly important role in continuing education in pandemics (Xie et. al., 2020). The government of India also took various measures for the education sector during the pandemic. The Digital India movement, to some extent, helped in making education reachable to far-flung areas in India through various initiatives, as mentioned in the e-Brochure of MHRD https://mhrd.gov.in/ict-initiatives (National Informatics Centre (NIC) and Prajapati, 2020, Aich, 2021) both for secondary education and higher education. A few crucial initiatives for secondary level students are Diksha, e-Pathshala, National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER). For students in higher education, initiatives like Swayam, Swayam Prabha, e-PG Pathshala, e Yantra, National digital library are important. Initiatives like Swayam provides online programs designed by top-ranking universities; these programs were not limited to India but also made available to other countries from Asia and Africa. Lockdown due to covid-19 pandemic had both positive and negative impacts on education where positive impacts resulted from online education reaching masses, more spread of digital understanding and use of open resources.

In contrast, negative impacts resulted from lack of job opportunities, both students and teachers not being prepared for online education, lack of adequate equipment and internet facilities in remote areas (Patil et. al., 2020). Non-availability of technologies with international students, lack of clarity about the changes in the academic schedule, poor internet connection for students staying at remote locations, electricity disruptions during online classes, cost of upgrading technologies and high cost of internet connections required for online classes were amongst the most common challenges during the online classes (Oyedotun, 2020; Joshi et. al., 2021). International students, who travelled back to home countries with higher time zone differences, faced more issues comparatively. Libraries play an essential role in facilitating as an academic resource to students and faculty in higher education, whereas digital libraries are still not perceived to be highly effective and relevant given the content available; they are misunderstood as only visual and multimedia resources (Xie, 2018). Only a few students having proper access to technology, undisrupted power and good internet were able to effectively utilize online assessment and examinations (Shohel et. al., 2022). Considering the above, it becomes imperative to understand, given an opportunity, if online education can attract and retain international students postponing or cancelling their study in India.

India being the world's second-largest pool of international students, there is a plethora of research on Indian students selecting foreign institutes. In contrast, fewer international students selecting India as a study destination is more diminutive and limited research exists on this topic. Also, there is little research on students who change their plans (cancel or postpone) and select not to study in India during their application process. This research targets those students who understand their reason for rejecting India and find the role of the covid-19 pandemic in their rejection. Also, the research will try to find the opinion of these students about an opportunity to study through online mode. A majority of studies on international students states that there is a significant difference in the behavioural factors like motivations, expectations, experience and satisfaction of students based on their country or region of origin, gender and level of study (Huang and Chen, 2022). The study also tries to find a significant change in why international students refuse to study in India based on the region of origin, gender and level of education. Another essential parameter closely studied in most international students' studies is a behavioural difference based on their economic and social status (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). This study also finds if international students refuse to study in India based on their plans to fund education.

The hypothesis assumed in the research are:

H1: The reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination differ based on their region of origin.

H2: The reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination differ based on their gender.

H3: The reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination differ based on their level of education.

H4: The reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination differ based on how they plan to fund their education.

H5: The decision of international students not to select India as an education destination due to the covid-19 pandemic differ based on their region of origin.

H6: The decision of international students' regarding online education preference differ based on their region of origin.

These hypotheses are applied only to international students interested in studying in India by initiating their admission application but not completing their admission process in India.

**3. Research Methodology**

This study applied the quantitative method to examine the intentions of international students deciding not to study in India after initiating their admission process. The process followed for conducting the research includes a thorough review of the relevant literature, designing the survey instrument, determining the sample size, sending the questionnaire link to all the participants, collecting and analyzing responses, and discussing the findings.

**3.1. Survey Instrument**

In order to find the answers to the three research questions mentioned above, the study uses a self-administered online questionnaire as a data collection instrument where the response was anonymous. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, and the first part collects the demographic information of gender, level of education and country of origin. The second part of the questionnaire collects the information about the source from where they got information about Indian education, their financial aspect, and reason for unsuccessful application and not selecting India, their final education destination, the effect of covid-19 on their study in India plans and interest in the online mode of education. The questionnaire uses a nominal scale to collect responses with multiple choice answers. Most appropriate multiple-choice options were given to each question through understanding from a broader literature review. The study uses the internet as a medium to send the link of a survey by email to all the participants, which is recommended to study international students (Hughes, 2004, Sherry et. al., 2009).

**3.2. Target Audience**

Since the audience size is unknown, the population's size uses Cochran's formula, Where n = required sample size, p = proportion of the population having the characteristic, q = 1-p and e = the desired level of precision. Since the population (p) is unknown, we consider p = 0.5, assuming maximum heterogeneity (i.e. a 50/50 split). The degree of precision (e) is the margin of error. A 95% confidence level gives us Z = 1.96 as per the normal table. e = 0.05. The calculated sample size from the above formula comes to 385.

For this survey, a self-administered online questionnaire google form link was sent to 10000 international students to have a sample size above the required number.

In order to reach the relevant target audience, judgement sampling was used to select a list of 10000 international students who applied to study in India and later selected not to study or postpone their study in India plans.

Judgemental sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling technique, where the sample is selected from the entire population based on the researcher's judgment because of a particular purpose (Thomas, 2022). These 10000 students were randomly selected from a data of 46000 international students who applied to 'Study In India' in the year 2021 but finally did not complete their admission process and refused to study in India. The list had students from all 86 countries, both male and female, with their level of study ranging from diploma to Ph.D. level. In order to maintain the confidentiality of applicants, personal information like name, email id and phone numbers were not collected in the responses. If any student shared this personal information, the same was deleted while compiling the responses. Since the researcher was aware of the easy access of the required target audience being available at a single source, the study uses judgement sampling to get the data of international students from different countries worldwide applied under self-sponsored and scholarship programs at 'Study In India'. These 10000 international students were communicated to finish the questionnaire sent through google within 15 days of receiving. Finally, 2417 students from 61 countries completed the questionnaire, out of which six responses were incomplete, resulting in 2411 final responses, which is a response rate of almost 24 per cent.

**4. Data Analyses**

This section summarises the survey findings and presents the survey data in graphs and diagrams.

4.1. Sample Characteristics

The data shows that out of 2411 responses received, 70% were male students, and 30% were female students. The ratio of male to female respondents in the many responses is in line with the gender ratio of a total number of incomplete international student applicants targeted, which intern is similar to the gender ratio of international students selecting India as a study destination in the year 2020 (AISHE, 2019-20).

Almost 88 per cent of the respondents were from two regions of the world, Africa and South Asia (SA). From the remaining 12 per cent of respondents, 7 per cent were from the 'Rest of the Asian countries' (ROA), and 5 per cent from the 'Rest of the world' (ROW), where ROW excluded Aisa and Africa. Asia and Africa are the same two regions representing the majority of the international student population in India (UNESCO, 2022, AISHE, 2019-20). Total responses received from African students were 1690, which was 70 per cent of the total responses received. Among African students, 1216 were male, and 474 were female respondents. African students were from Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Djibouti, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mayotte, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Responses received from SA were 443, 18 per cent of the total responses received. Among these, 312 were male, and 131 were female responses. SA students were from Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Responses received from the ROA were 170, 7 per cent of the total responses received, with 118 male and 52 female respondents. The ROA students were from Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Iraq, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, and Timor Leste. Responses from ROW were only 108, 4 per cent of the total responses received, with 34 male and 72 female students. These students were from the USA, Australia, Netherlands, Papua New Guinea, Turkey, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The majority of respondents were students applying for Under-Graduate or Diploma level, with 1474 students, 61 per cent of the total responses received. Of these, 1036 were male, and 438 were female students. Students applying for Postgraduate programmes were 775, which was 32 per cent of the total responses received with 461 male and 178 female students. Doctorate applicants were 162, which was 7 per cent of the total responses received. Among these, 92 were male, and 49 were female students.

In order to understand what the most critical factors are influencing the decision making of students' selecting India as an education destination, six different factors, as explained in the study on international students in India, were considered (Pawar et. al., 2019). These factors considered the structural factor of safety, the quality factor of recognition of education, financial factors of job prospect and financial assistance, the difference in cultures and technical factors important at the time of application.

Diagram 1: Reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination

As depicted in Diagram 1, the response indicates the dominance of lack of financial assistance as the most critical factor, with almost 67 per cent of the total respondents considering it as the reason for not selecting India as an education destination. Safety concerns were the second most crucial factor, especially in the ROW that comprises more developed countries. The third important factor contributing to the reason is cultural difference, which is more dominant in the case of students from ROA and Africa. These factors also answer the study's first research question, making lack of financial assistance the most important factor for international students not to select India as an education destination. Since most international students selecting India as an education destination belong to countries with low GDP, affordability is one of the major concerns in these countries. Affordability makes scholarship the most crucial motivating parameter for students to study abroad from these countries. There are various scholarships available for students when they apply to study abroad. The classification of the scholarships based on their source of origin is a scholarship from their home country, scholarship from the host country and scholarship from a foreign source.

The response suggests that almost 87 per cent of respondents from different regions across the world were seeking scholarships, and only 13 per cent were planning to fund their education on their own. Looking at data from different regions of the world, almost 63 per cent of the respondents were seeking scholarships from the Indian government or higher educational institutes in India. Around 14 per cent were looking for scholarship grants from their country's government, 10 per cent of the students were seeking scholarships grants from other countries. Only 8 per cent were looking forward to self-finance their education. Among African respondents, 69 per cent of students were seeking scholarships from the Indian government or higher educational institutes in India, 12 per cent were looking for scholarship grants from their country government, 11 per cent of the students were seeking scholarships grants from other countries, and only 8 per cent were looking forward to self-finance their education. From the SA respondents, 61 per cent of students were seeking scholarships from the Indian government or higher educational institutes in India, 21 per cent were looking for scholarship grants from their country government, 7 per cent of the students were seeking scholarships grants from other countries, and only 11 per cent were looking forward to self-finance their education. From ROA respondents, 51 per cent of students were seeking scholarships from the Indian government or higher educational institutes in India, 19 per cent were looking for scholarship grants from their country government, 14 per cent of the students were seeking scholarships grants from other countries, and only 16 per cent were looking forward to self-finance their education. From ROW, where most of the students were from developed countries, almost 81 per cent were looking forward to self-finance their education. Only 9 per cent were seeking scholarships from the Indian government or higher educational institutes in India, and 6 per cent of the students were seeking scholarships grants from other countries. Only 4 per cent were looking for scholarship grants from their country's government.

Diagram 2: Effect of covid-19 on international students’ study abroad decision

Diagram 3: Choice of online education for students’ not selecting India as an education destination

In order to answer the second research question, we analyzed the effect of covid-19 on international students' study in India decisions. Diagram 2 indicates that less than 25 per cent of international students changed their decision to study in India due to the covid-19 pandemic or temporarily postponed their study abroad plans.

In order to answer the third research question, which is if online education is an opportunity and can still motivate students to study in India? Diagram 4 shows that almost half of the respondents were still ready to study through an online medium where, as 28 per cent said maybe and only 21 per cent of the respondents disagree to study online.

**4.2. Hypothesis Testing**

In order to test the hypothesis, the research uses SPSS 16 software to evaluate the data and compute results. The study uses the Pearson Chi-Square test of independence to investigate the hypothesis. Since all the variables were categorical and nominal, this test allows checking if two variables are independent of each other or not (McHug, 2013). The research uses Cramer's V to find the strength of the relationship in the case of dependant variables. In the case of more than 20 per cent of cells having an expected count less than 5, we looked at their likelihood ratio. The study uses Goodman and Kruskal tau to check the direction of the relationship between the two variables. Also, it uses crosstables to analyze the variables and answer the research questions.

**5. Results and Discussions**

The first hypothesis stated that students not selecting India as an education destination differ based on their region of origin. By performing the Pearson Chi-Square test of independence, taking the region of origin as the first variable and reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination as the second variable. The results of the Pearson Chi-Square test (see table 1) shows that the value of p is less than .05, but 25 per cent of the cells have an expected count less than 5 violating the basic assumption of the Pearson Chi-Square test. In that case, we look at the value of p under the likelihood ratio, which is also less than .05, indicating that we can reject the null hypothesis.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Chi-Square Tests | | | | | | | Symmetric Measures | |
|  | Valid N | Pearson Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | % of cells with expected count less than 5 | Likelihood Ratio | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Cramer's V | Approx. Sig. |
| Region of origin \* Reason for not selecting India as an educational destination | 2411 | 5.022E2a | 15 | .000 | 25 | 356.789 | .000 | 0.264 | .000 |
| Gender of International student \* Reason for not selecting India as an educational destination | 2411 | 27.578a | 5 | .000 | 16.7 | 26.833 | .000 | 0.107 | .000 |
| Level of education \* Reason for not selecting India as an educational destination | 2411 | 34.192a | 10 | .000 | 16.7 | 34.188 | .000 | 0.084 | .000 |
| Funding of education \* Reason for not selecting India as an educational destination | 2411 | 2.666E2a | 15 | .000 | 16.7 | 212.710 | .000 | 0.192 | .000 |
| Region of origin \* Destination due to the covid-19 pandemic | 2411 | 1.424E2a | 20 | .000 | 40 | 104.872 | .000 | 0.121 | .000 |
| Region of origin \* Online education preference | 2411 | 53.113a | 10 | .000 | 16.7 | 51.339 | .000 | 0.105 | .000 |

Table 1

We can conclude a significant relationship between students' not selecting India as an education destination and their region of origin. In order to find out how strong is the relationship between these two variables, we calculate the value of Cramer's V, which in this case is .264 (see table 1), showing a moderate relationship between the reason for students' not selecting India as an education destination and their region of origin. Goodman and Kruskal tau's values were too low to determine the direction of the relationship between these two variables.

Lack of financial assistance is the major hindrance in the way of international students to select study in India should be looked at while designing fee structures and scholarship programmes by government and educational institutes in India. After lack of financial assistance, the cultural difference is the most crucial factor, especially for students from Africa and ROA. Acculturation of students mainly from these regions can play a vital role to solve this problem. Students from ROW and SA feel insecure in India, as safety is a fundamental reason not to select India as an education destination. Looking at the research outcome, government and educational institutions should impose new measures to ensure more safety and security for international students.

The second hypothesis stated that students not selecting India as an education destination differ based on their gender. By performing the Pearson Chi-Square test of independence, taking the gender of respondents as the first variable and reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination as the second variable. The results of the Pearson Chi-Square test (see table 1) shows that the value of p is less than .05, with less than 20 per cent of the cells having an expected count of less than 5. A value of p less than .05 allows us to reject the null hypothesis.

Thus, we can conclude a significant relationship between students' not selecting India as an education destination and their gender. In order to find out how strong is the relationship between these two variables, we calculate the value of Cramer's V, which in this case is .107 (see table 1), showing a weak relationship between students' not selecting India as an education destination and their gender. Goodman and Kruskal tau's values were too low to determine the direction of the relationship between these two variables. Safety concerns were more dominant in the case of female international students and required special measures from the government and educational institutes. Making female international students feel safer and secure in India can help in boosting more female international students joining HEIs in India.

The third hypothesis stated that students not selecting India as an education destination differ based on their level of education. By performing the Pearson Chi-Square test of independence, taking the respondents' level of education as the first variable and reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination as the second variable. Considering the level of education based on the level of programme these international students applied for, diploma or undergraduate was the first level, postgraduate was the second level, and doctorate was the third level of education. The results of the Pearson Chi-Square test (see table 1) shows that the value of p is less than .05, where less than 20 per cent of the cells had an expected count of less than 5. As the value of p is less than .05, we can reject the null hypothesis.

Thus, we can conclude that there is a significant relationship between the reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination and their level of education. In order to find out how strong is the relationship between these two variables, we calculate the value of Cramer's V, which in this case is .084 (see table 1), showing a weak relationship between the reason for students' not selecting India as an education destination and their level of education. Goodman and Kruskal tau's values were too low to determine the direction of the relationship between these two variables. Looking at crosstabs, we can state that lack of financial assistance and safety concerns have an almost equal effect on students at all levels of education. At the same time, cultural differences tend to affect undergraduate and doctoral students more, whereas lack of job opportunities was more dominant in postgraduate students. Doctoral students showed more concerns regarding the recognition of Indian degrees abroad. Government and educational institutes should give due importance to these factors and make sufficient arrangements to satisfy the need of international students at different levels.

The fourth hypothesis stated that students not selecting India as an education destination differ based on how students plan to fund their education. By performing the Pearson Chi-Square test of independence, taking how students plan to fund their education as the first variable and reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination as the second variable. The research broadly divided the education funding into students looking for scholarships and self-financing students. The study divides these scholarship-seeking students into students looking for scholarships from the Indian government or higher education institutes in India, scholarships from their own country, and sponsorship from foreign countries. The results of the Pearson Chi-Square test (see table 1) shows that the value of p is less than .05, where less than 20 per cent of the cells have an expected count of less than 5; thus, we can reject the null hypothesis.

We can conclude that there is a significant relationship between the reasons for students' not selecting India as an education destination and how students plan to fund their education. In order to find out how strong is the relationship between these two variables, we calculate the value of Cramer's V, which in this case is .192 (see table 1), shows a weak relationship between the reason for students' not selecting India as an education destination and how students plan to fund their education. Goodman and Kruskal tau's values were also too low to determine the direction of the relationship between these two variables. Self-financing students considered safety one of the essential factors for not selecting India as an education destination, whereas lack of financial assistance was more dominant in the case of students seeking scholarships from the Indian government. Students seeking scholarships from foreign countries dropped studying in India due to cultural differences.

The fifth hypothesis stated that the decision of international students not to select India as an education destination due to the covid-19 pandemic differs based on their region of origin. By performing the Pearson Chi-Square test of independence, taking region of origin as the first variable and the decision of international students' not selecting India as an education destination due to the covid-19 pandemic as the second variable. The study takes six different decision factors due to the covid-19 pandemic: cancelling studies abroad, postponing studies abroad, now preferring to study in the home country, still planning to study abroad and unsure. The results of the Pearson Chi-Square test (see table 1) shows that the value of p is less than .05, but 40 per cent of the cells have an expected count less than 5, which violates the basic assumption of the Pearson Chi-Square test. We look at the value of p under the likelihood ratio, which is also less than .05, concluding that we can reject the null hypothesis.

Thus we can conclude that there is a significant relationship between the decisions of international students' not selecting India as an education destination due to the covid-19 pandemic and their region of origin. In order to find out how strong is the relationship between these two variables, we calculate the value of Cramer's V, which in this case is .121 (see table 1), shows a weak relation between the decisions of international students' not selecting India as an education destination due to the covid-19 pandemic and their region of origin. Goodman and Kruskal tau's values were also too low to determine the direction of the relationship between these two variables.

The sixth hypothesis stated that the decision of international students' regarding online education preference differs based on their region of origin. The study performs the Pearson Chi-Square test of independence, taking the region of origin as the first variable and the decision of international students' regarding online education preference as the second variable. The research considers the decisions of the international students' regarding online education preference in terms of yes, no and maybe. The results of the Pearson Chi-Square test (see table 1) shows that the value of p is less than .05, and less than 20 per cent of the cells have an expected count less than 5, concluding that we can reject the null hypothesis.

Thus, we can conclude a significant relationship between international students' decisions regarding online education and their region of origin. In order to find out how strong is the relationship between these two variables, we calculate the value of Cramer's V, which in this case is .105 (see table 1), showing a weak relation between the two variables. Goodman and Kruskal tau's values were also too low to determine the direction of the relationship between these two variables.

**6. Conclusion**

Government and the HEIs in India understand the importance of the internationalization of Indian universities and the role of full-time international students in internationalization. Through different initiatives, they are trying to maximize the number of international students in India. Among the various studies on international students selecting India as a study destination, hardly any study tries to understand why international students refuse to study in India during their admission process. Understanding these reasons and how they are related to different demographic and psychographic factors will help government and educational institutes make policy decisions that can help attract more international students.

Summarizing the significant findings of the results, we can conclude that lack of financial assistance is the most important reason for international students refusing to study in India. Security concern was the second most critical reason in ROW and SA countries. At the same time, Africa and ROA students considered cultural differences as more important reasons. Lack of safety was the most important concern for female students refusing to study in India. The international students seeking undergraduate and diploma admissions considered cultural differences the second most crucial factor for rejecting to study in India.

On the contrary, international students seeking admission at postgraduate programmes considered lack of job opportunities a more crucial factor, whereas doctoral students refused to study in India, considering poor recognition of Indian degrees. The self-financing student and students taking admission with foreign grants to fund their education contribute to the revenue of educational institutions. The study suggests that self-sponsored students' considered lack of safety, whereas students with foreign grants considered cultural differences as significant reasons for refusing to study in India.

The study's findings show that the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on study abroad decisions for students refusing to study in India was not very high. The effect was almost negligible in the case of students from ROW and Africa, whereas SA and ROA students showed a slight change in their decisions. Studying online was welcomed worldwide; students from SA countries were a bit more interested than other regions. The government and HEIs in India can use the study's findings while designing policies for international students in India and designing promotional campaigns for international students’ recruitment.

The insight from this study may assist similar studies on international students by other developing counties and regional education hubs. The study compares the responses across different regions, gender and financial aspects. The study, however, is not without limitations. There exists a significant disparity among the number of students participating from different world regions. Also, students' choices from different countries may differ within the same region, which can be another area of research. The number of countries represented in the sample was only 61; however, seven countries had only a single student response per country. The data obtained from the study was in the form of nominal variables, which resulted in limitations while applying various statistical techniques to obtain results. The research can be taken forward by focusing on one specific region and countries in that region. Also, future research can look at the segmentation of geographical regions based on the GDP of the countries.

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