**SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS DRIVING NEPALI HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES TO PURSUE FOREIGN EMPLOYMENT OVER HIGHER EDUCATION**

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# **ABSTRACT**

The preference among Nepali high school graduates for foreign employment over higher education reflects complex socioeconomic dynamics shaping their career choices in a nation facing economic and educational challenges. This qualitative literature review, supplemented by a survey of a few high school graduates, examines economic, educational, and cultural factors driving this trend. Widespread poverty, limited job opportunities, and inaccessible education systems push graduates toward migration, while cultural expectations of immediate income reinforce this choice. Survey responses highlight financial necessity, lack of local jobs, and family pressures as key motivators. Proposed interventions include vocational training, educational reforms, and job creation to balance economic needs with long-term skill development. The study contributes to understanding youth migration in Nepal, emphasizing strategies to retain talent and enhance educational opportunities.

**Keywords:** foreign employment, socioeconomic factors, high school graduates, Nepal, labor migration, qualitative literature review

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# **CHAPTER 1**

# **INTRODUCTION**

Nepal’s increasing reliance on foreign employment among its youth, particularly high school graduates, underscores a significant trend of labor migration driven by socioeconomic challenges. Many young people choose work abroad over higher education due to systemic barriers limiting their options at home. This study explores these barriers through a qualitative literature review, complemented by a survey of a few high school graduates, to understand the factors influencing their decisions. The analysis draws on interdisciplinary perspectives from migration studies, economics, and sociology to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play. The Introduction is organized into three subtopics: Purpose of Study, Research Questions, and Study Significance, providing a clear framework for the investigation.

## **Purpose of Study**

This study aims to identify and analyze the socioeconomic factors driving Nepali high school graduates to prioritize foreign employment over higher education, exploring the interplay of economic, educational, and cultural influences. By synthesizing existing literature and incorporating firsthand insights from a survey, the research seeks to understand why graduates opt for immediate income through migration rather than pursuing academic opportunities. The study also aims to propose actionable policy interventions, such as vocational training and educational reforms, to address these factors and foster sustainable development in Nepal. Through a qualitative approach, it examines the complex motivations behind graduates’ decisions, contributing to a deeper understanding of youth migration trends and their implications for Nepal’s future.

## **Research Questions**

This study addresses the following five research questions to summarize its focus and scope:

1. How do economic pressures, such as poverty and reliance on remittances, influence Nepali high school graduates’ decisions to pursue foreign employment over higher education?
2. What role do educational barriers, including limited access to quality institutions and vocational training, play in driving graduates toward foreign employment?
3. How does the lack of local job opportunities and job market mismatches affect graduates’ preference for working abroad?
4. In what ways do cultural and social norms, such as family expectations and perceptions of social status, encourage migration over educational pursuits?
5. What policy interventions can address these socioeconomic factors to balance immediate economic needs with long-term educational and developmental goals?

These questions guide the qualitative analysis, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the factors driving graduates’ decisions and their implications for Nepal’s development.

## **Study Significance**

The findings aim to inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders on strategies to address the socioeconomic barriers pushing graduates toward migration. By identifying key drivers and proposing interventions like vocational training and educational reforms, the study seeks to foster sustainable development in Nepal. Understanding these factors can help retain talent, enhance educational opportunities, and balance economic needs with long-term human capital growth, contributing to the nation’s socioeconomic progress.

# **CHAPTER 2**

# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review synthesizes peer-reviewed journal articles from 2015 to 2025, retrieved from Google Scholar, NepJOL, and ResearchGate, focusing on labor migration to align with the research questions. It is organized into four subtopics: economic pressures, educational barriers, unemployment and job market challenges, and cultural influences, each providing insight into the dynamics shaping graduates’ choices.

## **Economic Pressures**

Economic hardship significantly influences Nepali high school graduates to prioritize foreign employment. Widespread poverty forces families to rely on young graduates for immediate financial support, as basic necessities like food and healthcare strain household budgets. Remittances from workers abroad, particularly in Gulf countries and Malaysia, enable families to afford essentials and build assets, such as houses, making migration highly appealing. The high cost of private higher education is unaffordable for most, with annual fees far exceeding typical rural incomes. Public universities, though more affordable, offer limited seats, leaving many graduates without educational options. Migration provides a quicker path to financial stability, as initial costs are offset by earnings within months, unlike the prolonged investment of higher education (Adhikari, 2019).

## **Educational Barriers**

Nepal’s education system presents significant obstacles for graduates seeking higher education. In rural areas, where most Nepalis reside, schools lack adequate infrastructure and qualified teachers, limiting preparation for advanced studies. Only a small fraction of graduates secure university admission due to intense competition and limited capacity. Private colleges, while offering better quality, are financially inaccessible, with costs prohibitive for low-income families. The absence of vocational training programs restricts opportunities for skill development, leaving graduates unprepared for local job markets. Political disruptions, such as strikes, further destabilize public institutions, discouraging enrollment and making foreign employment a more viable option (Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023).

## **Unemployment and Job Market Challenges**

The scarcity of local job opportunities drives graduates toward foreign employment. Nepal’s economy relies heavily on low-wage agriculture, with the industrial sector employing only a small workforce. High unemployment, particularly among youth, reflects the limited availability of stable jobs. Graduates with secondary education often lack skills for Nepal’s constrained industrial or service sectors. In contrast, foreign markets offer high demand for unskilled labor in sectors like construction, attracting graduates with minimal qualifications. The mismatch between educational curricula and job market needs further limits local prospects, making migration a practical choice (Sharma, 2011).

## **Cultural Influences**

Cultural norms in Nepal often prioritize immediate economic contributions over education. Migration is viewed as a path to social mobility, particularly for young men expected to support their families. Returning migrants gain social status, with visible signs like consumer goods reinforcing migration’s appeal. Family and peer pressures frequently override educational aspirations, especially in rural communities where immediate income is valued. Gender norms amplify this trend, with male graduates facing expectations to earn abroad, while women are less likely to migrate due to safety concerns. These cultural dynamics entrench the preference for foreign employment (Thakuri, 2022).

The literature highlights gaps in understanding high school graduates’ specific experiences, as many studies cover broader youth demographics. Psychological impacts, such as stress or lost aspirations, and long-term effects on human capital remain underexplored.

# **CHAPTER 3**

# **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative literature review methodology, supplemented by a survey of a few high school graduates, to address the research questions. The methodology is organized into three subtopics: literature review design, survey design, and data analysis, ensuring a systematic approach.

## **Literature Review Design**

The literature review synthesizes peer-reviewed articles from 2015 to 2025, retrieved from Google Scholar, NepJOL, and ResearchGate. Search terms, such as “socioeconomic factors foreign employment Nepal,” ensured relevance, excluding studies on international higher education. A total of 20 articles, including ethnographic studies and narrative inquiries, were selected for their rigor and alignment with Nepal’s migration context, providing a robust foundation for thematic analysis.

## **Survey Design**

A survey of a few high school graduates who chose foreign employment over higher education between 2023 and 2025 was conducted to gain firsthand insights. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance. The survey, administered via Google Forms on July 1, 2025, used open-ended questions, such as “What factors influenced your decision to pursue foreign employment?” Participation was voluntary, with informed consent collected electronically, and responses were anonymized for confidentiality. The questionnaire was peer-reviewed for clarity and revised for accessibility.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis framework for the literature review, involving reading articles, generating codes (e.g., poverty, cultural norms), grouping codes into themes, and synthesizing findings narratively. Survey responses were analyzed using thematic coding to identify patterns like financial necessity, without statistical analysis due to the qualitative focus. This approach ensured a comprehensive exploration of socioeconomic factors.

# **CHAPTER 4**

# **FINDINGS**

The literature review and survey identified four themes driving Nepali high school graduates to choose foreign employment: economic pressures, educational barriers, unemployment and job market challenges, and cultural influences. These are organized into subtopics, supported by survey insights.

## **Economic Pressures**

Financial hardship is a primary driver, with poverty compelling graduates to seek immediate income abroad. Remittances improve household security, enabling families to afford essentials or assets. All survey respondents cited financial necessity, with one stating, “My family struggled with basic expenses; working abroad was the only solution.” Another noted supporting siblings’ education as a motivator, reflecting the economic barriers to higher education.

## **Educational Barriers**

Systemic educational issues limit access to higher education. Few graduates secure university admission due to limited seats and competitive entry. Rural schools lack quality infrastructure, hindering preparation for advanced studies. Survey respondents highlighted inaccessibility, with one noting, “Colleges were too expensive and far from my home.” Limited vocational training further restricts alternatives, making migration a default choice.

## **Unemployment and Job Market Challenges**

High unemployment and scarce local jobs push graduates toward migration. Nepal’s economy offers limited opportunities outside agriculture, with youth facing significant job scarcity. Survey respondents emphasized the lack of local employment, with one stating, “There were no jobs for someone with my education.” Foreign demand for unskilled labor provides a viable alternative for graduates.

## **Cultural Influences**

Cultural norms valuing immediate income shape graduates’ decisions. Migration is seen as a path to social status, particularly for men expected to support families. Survey respondents noted family pressure, with one saying, “My parents wanted me to work abroad for community respect.” These expectations reinforce migration’s appeal, especially in rural areas.

# **CHAPTER 5**

# **DISCUSSION**

The findings highlight economic pressures, educational barriers, unemployment, and cultural influences as drivers of foreign employment among Nepali high school graduates. These are explored through subtopics, with implications for policy and research.

## **Economic Pressures and Financial Necessity**

Poverty and the promise of remittances drive graduates to prioritize immediate income. Higher education costs are unaffordable, and public universities are inaccessible, making migration a quicker path to financial stability. Survey responses underscore the urgency of supporting family needs, aligning with the economic realities shaping graduates’ choices (Adhikari, 2019).

## **Educational Barriers and Systemic Challenges**

Limited university access and poor rural school infrastructure deter graduates from higher education. The lack of vocational training leaves them unprepared for local jobs. Survey insights about unaffordable and inaccessible colleges highlight these systemic issues, pushing graduates toward migration (Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023).

## **Unemployment and Job Market Mismatches**

High unemployment and reliance on agriculture limit local opportunities. Graduates lack skills for Nepal’s industrial or service sectors, making foreign employment in unskilled roles attractive. Survey responses about job scarcity reflect this mismatch, driving migration as a practical solution (Sharma, 2011).

## **Cultural Influences and Social Expectations**

Cultural norms valuing migration as a path to status influence graduates’ decisions. Family expectations, particularly for men, prioritize income over education. Survey insights about community respect highlight these dynamics, entrenched in rural areas (Thakuri, 2022).

## **Policy Implications**

Expanding vocational training programs could equip graduates with skills for local jobs, reducing migration dependency. Educational reforms, such as increasing university capacity and improving rural schools, would enhance access to higher education. Job creation in industrial and service sectors could address unemployment, providing local alternatives. Cultural campaigns promoting education’s long-term value could shift societal perceptions, encouraging academic pursuits.

## **Research Gaps and Future Directions**

The study’s reliance on secondary sources and a small survey limits its scope. Few studies focus specifically on high school graduates, and psychological impacts, such as stress or lost aspirations, are underexplored. Future research should incorporate larger surveys and longitudinal studies to examine long-term effects and validate findings across diverse contexts.\

# **CHAPTER 6**

# **CONCLUSION**

The decision of Nepali high school graduates to pursue foreign employment over higher education stems from a complex interplay of economic pressures, educational barriers, unemployment, and cultural influences. Widespread poverty and the immediate financial benefits of migration compel graduates to prioritize family support over academic pursuits, which are often unaffordable and inaccessible. Systemic issues in Nepal’s education system, including limited university seats and inadequate rural schools, restrict opportunities for further studies, leaving foreign employment as a default choice. High unemployment and a lack of local jobs further drive graduates toward foreign markets, where unskilled labor offers quick returns. Cultural norms celebrating migration as a path to social status, particularly for young men, reinforce this trend, overriding educational aspirations. Survey insights from a few graduates highlight personal experiences of financial hardship, inaccessible education, job scarcity, and family pressures, underscoring the human impact of these factors. To address this trend, Nepal must expand vocational training to enhance employability, reform education systems to improve access, create local jobs in diverse sectors, and promote the value of education through cultural campaigns. These strategies can help retain talent and foster sustainable development, balancing immediate economic needs with long-term human capital growth. Future research should explore the psychological and long-term socioeconomic impacts of migration to ensure equitable opportunities for Nepal’s youth.

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