Chapter 2
International Student Mobility: Theoretical Context and Empirical Evidence From Literature

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ABSTRACT

International student mobility is the core element of the internationalization of higher education. In recent years, a significant change has been observed in the outlook of individuals which is giving a boost to this phenomenon. Within this context, the present chapter analyzed the phenomenon of international student mobility through different approaches by providing critical outlook. An attempt has been made to list the important determinants which influence the decision-making process of international students.

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization has become a buzz word in the institutions of higher education. The most noticeable indicators of internationalization include flows of students across borders, the establishment of international branches and off-shore campuses now dotting the landscape, especially in developing and middle-income countries. Introduction of academic programs provides an international perspective and cross-cultural skills in the universities of both receiving and exporting countries (Ogachi, 2008). Of all the pathways to the internationalization of higher education, the mobility of students is the most visible, established and significant pathway and is occurring since from centuries (Rajkowa, 2017; Wadhwa 2016a). Over the past three decades, the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship has risen dramatically, from 0.8 million worldwide in 1975 to 5 million in 2016—a more than fivefold increase. Moreover, there is speculation that this number will grow to 7.2 million by 2025 (Böhm, Davis, Meares, & Peace, 2002). This staggering statistic indicates that student mobility will continue to expand and thus new pathways of internationalization are emerging to meet this demand.

Ample volume of literature highlighted the importance of international student mobility all across the globe (Altbach &Knight, 2006; Agarwal et al., 2007; Wadhwa, 2016a, Wadhwa 2016b, Wadhwa, 2010; Altbach &Knight, 2006; Agarwal et al., 2007; Williams, 1981). Some of the most important rationales

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for student mobility highlighted by higher education institutions as well as policymakers are knowledge exchange, academic cooperation and quality enhancement. Increasing language skills, cultural skills, and developing mutual understanding are other vital rationales for encouraging mobility (Wadhwa, 2010). The latter types of aims are important motivations seen from the perspective of individuals. Students want to have an academically successful and personally rewarding sojourn abroad, and at the same time maintain or enhance their career opportunities (Yeravdekar, 2016; Rajkowa, 2017; Wadhwa, 2016a). In this way, student mobility is the contextual aspiration of the individual to acquire educational needs from academically acclaimed institutions (Wadhwa, 2010, Wadhwa, 2016a).

The most accepted and perhaps the valid source of international student mobility is the incapacity of a domestic education system to accommodate the global external change. Larsen and Vincent-Lancrin (2002) reported that in most developing countries, higher education institutions have, to date, only been able to accommodate less than 5% of those who demand post secondary education. This is one of the reasons why developed countries have been leading destination for the international students. Anonymity still remains valid since the number of international student moving to developed countries are consistently increasing. The existing facts and figures in the arena of international student mobility revealed that although the major destination countries have remained the same for several years, their dominance is steadily declining, with complex changes as other players come onto the field. Reflection is somehow mitigating the need to ponder over a pragmatic understanding of the narratives of international student mobility.

Now a day, the changing role of higher education institutions via external changes is the major determinant of international student mobility. International students are the major source of tapping revenue from the perspective of the developed countries. The existing facts and figures highlight that higher education institutions in developed countries are making a considerable profit by charging differential fees to international students, and thus student mobility has resulted in the emergence of the global higher education market (Wadhwa, 2016a). Moreover, in some cases, intention to build workforce has led to intense competition among countries and institutions (Choudaha, Orosz, & Chang, 2012; Tremblay, 2005). A paradigm shift from cooperative model to competitive model in international academic relations has been noted in the new phase of internationalization of higher education (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Knight, 2006; Wadhwa, 2016b). This trend is an outcome of the mutual response to the internationalization of higher education by both developed and developing countries.

In this context, chapter deals with the conceptual underpinnings of international student mobility through different approaches and decision-making process. It also makes an attempt to identify the determinants of international student mobility and a shift has been traced in typology of student mobility. In the concluding section, some of the issues regarding changing the statute of institutions have been highlighted, which are driving international student mobility by emphasizing revenue generation and skilled migration approach in current times.

CONCEPTUALIZING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

The student mobility includes a set of identity (students) representing different aspiration (mobility) ranging from academic interest to employment interest (Wadhwa, 2010). There is much variation at the supranational level, making it difficult to settle on one set of criteria with respect to international
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