

Micro Push and Pull Factors Influence Human Capital Flight in Academia: A Qualitative Study

QUDSIA ARSHAD

PhD Scholar, IQRA University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: qudsiaarshadd@gmail.com

Dr. RASHIDA KHATOON MALIK

Associate Professor, IQRA University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: dr.rkmalik@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to deepen the understanding of the issues of an intellectual brain drain in academia. There is no doubt that higher education is vital to the growth and development of a country. Hence, the universities need to maintain highly qualified human resources to ensure effectiveness and competitiveness. This research study is focused to investigate the experiences of the academicians who are foreign qualified and migrated to advanced countries, they were asked to describe their experiences, using their own stories and interpretations of their personal experiences. The qualitative research approach was adopted to get the gist of the real reason that prompts the academicians to stay or leave their home country after getting education from abroad. The study employed social constructivism as an interpretive framework analysis method and used purposive and snowballing sampling techniques. Semi-structured interviews were recorded and analyzed. Findings suggested that career opportunities, economic, social, education, technological factors, and adjustment issues caused the brain drain of academicians of public sector universities of Islamabad. The knowledge drawn from this research can operate as a piece of useful reference information for current and future recruitment efforts, support services, and helpful in minimizing the brain drain.

Keywords: Academicians, Brain Drain, Human Resource, Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Push Pull Factors.

Introduction

Brain drain is the migration of human resource from less developed regions to developed or regions in order to get better lifestyle and living condition and grasp better opportunities in their field of knowledge. The goal is to attract skilled and talented youth to withstand vibrant economies and lessen barriers to economic development (Cattaneo, 2019; Hillier et al., 2020).

Human resources are among the most valuable assets of a country and contribute to the growth of her economy. Countries all over the world spend large sums of money in development and education of their people in order to boost productivity, knowledge and skills, which promote economic growth (Silvanto & Ryan, 2014; Barnes, Brown & Warhurst, 2016).

One of the most common reason, however, is that the developed foreign countries provide better prospects as compared to the home countries (Delogu, Docquier & Machado, 2018). It is believed that if the home country starts providing the same opportunities and incentives, some of the highly qualified human force can be preserved (Zhou, Guo & Liu, 2018).

In the few recent years, brain drain has been a major concern upsetting industries driven by knowledge workers especially in the southern global region. However, it also influences and covers an excessively large component of international migration. Literature shows that organizational factors may be the main trigger for migration (Wanniarachchi, Kumara, & Jayawardana, 2020).

Pakistan, a developing nation in South Asia, is also facing the issue of the migration of proficient manpower to developed countries (Sajjad, 2018). Brain drain is the exodus of doctors, teachers, engineers, and technicians etc. In short, it is the movement of the qualified and talented labour from one country to another (Yamin & Luna, 2016).

Brain drain reduces the development of a country. There are many reasons as to why people decide to leave their home countries for overseas, but the main ones are scarce resources, deficient facilities, both scientific and technological, inadequate salaries, an underestimation of talented and intellectual people (Chen, 2017). Brain drain, a worldwide issue, is also increasing in Pakistan (Sajjad, 2018).

The problem faced by the developing and underdeveloped countries occurs due to lack of facilities, inadequate resources, less job and education opportunities that match their knowledge or skill set (Arslan et al., 2015). The cases of brain drain are very uncommon in developed countries.

According to World Bank's data set in Fact book 2016 "Migration and Remittances", in the general status, Pakistan was at a third position in South Asia (after Bangladesh and India) and sixth in the World (after China, India, Russia, Mexico and Bangladesh) for human capital mobility.

The exodus of highly qualified human capital has been increasing continuously since independence in 1947. Highly qualified professionals such as doctors, engineers, specialists of technology and educationists moving to the developed countries. If Pakistan continues to lose its brilliant workforce with the same rate, then it generates a major problem especially in the endeavor of its ambition to become a stable industrialized nation by 2020 (Abbas, 2011).

As Pakistan is a developing nation, encountering continuously a great loss of highly qualified workforce to the green pastures and for recompensing that government proposes high incentives in order to preserve a critical number of doctors, scientists, engineers, and educationists (Sajjad, 2011; Yasin & Jauhar, 2018). It is easier to determine from the institutional documents, the number of absconders and those that return. However, without a broader inquiry, one cannot understand the intentions and motives behind their choices.

According to open data report on Pakistan of 2019 has revealed that the number of the highly qualified and trained workforce is rapidly increasing from the last two decades. This creates a major instability in the economy of a country and a rapid drop in GDP of a country. This further makes a major decline in the living standards of people. However, to outweigh the loss, the country needs a real and qualified youth for the country's economy to prosper.

Academics are the nation builders. They are the source of knowledge that generates and makes the societies' (Giousmpasoglou & Konioordos, 2017). Academics are the ones that not only yield capable graduates but also breed new knowledge through research skills. Thus, they play a dynamic role in the growth of a country's economy (Pastor et al., 2018).

Academics or highly qualified individuals encourage other colleagues and coworkers to settle abroad as they find it better facilities and opportunities as compared to the home country. However, it is difficult to replace the growing number of highly qualified faculty as there are a limited number of PhD holders in the developing countries (Liu, Shen & Zu, 2017). It is important to identify the extent and impact of the brain drain on higher education systems of Pakistan. By reaching the true reasons of its cause may help the higher education institutions (HEI) to stop or at least lessen its flow and structure the strategies to minimize

the outflow of its faculty. The loss of highly qualified, talented and brilliant youth become burdensome, when home governments subsidized their training and education without obtaining the infusion of this talent into the local economy (Marsh & Oyelere, 2018).

Another study conducted by Ho et al. (2018) have suggested that there is a need for further research about the re-expatriation of human capital after returning to home country. A need for further research is required to study the factors that might influence their intention to re-expatriate.

However, despite being studied in different perspectives, brain drain not only persists but has been increasing over the years (Yasin & Jauhar, 2018). It implies that the problem is not sufficiently addressed or not fully attended by concerned institutions and even by the Government of Pakistan. Following research questions are addressed in current study:

- 1) What are the factors in public sector universities that prompt their foreign qualified academicians to re-expatriate?
- 2) What factors influence the academicians opt for jobs abroad?
- 3) What factors influence the academicians to leave their home country?
- 4) What factors prompt academicians to move back towards home country?
- 5) What strategies and policies could public sector universities and similar institutions adopt to minimize the brain drain?

Specifically, the question of why the human mobility is repeating again and again. A cycle of expatriation and re-expatriation is going on. This phenomenon is especially interesting in light of the fact that most returnees are in fact, serving, better positions in their native country, by virtue of their foreign experience (Farooq & Ahmad, 2017). The purpose of the current research is to find out the gaps in the research. There is a need to find out the reasons that the returnees' who worked and studied in foreign are repeating this phenomenon of repatriation and re-expatriation.

The aim of this research is to examine the experiences of foreign qualified academicians who came back to Pakistan after receiving higher degrees but re-expatriated. Areas to be examined include re-expatriation of academicians, leaving the home country, perceptions of the relevance or difference of their contextual environment in the home country to the destination countries, concerns in the host country, and their future prospects.

Graduates are looking forward to finding better opportunity towards a financially secure and comfortable lifestyle in other parts of the world. UNESCO discloses the fact that the migration rate of the highly qualified workforce of Pakistan has escalated more than 60 per cent from 1992 to 2000, which is an indicator of the alarming magnitude of the brain drain in the country (Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000).

There is a need to conduct a research on re-expatriation. It is required in South Asian countries in general and particularly in the Pakistani context, which leads to some significant gaps in understanding. As Pakistan is a developing country, however, overseas Pakistanis still repeat this phenomenon of repatriation and re-expatriation. There is a need to find the gaps in these contexts.

Literature Review

In the era of the 1960s, research studies have found that explore the exodus of professionals and high skilled human resource from developing regions to developed regions. With the passage of time, different variables and constructs were evolved with the phenomenon. During this period, scholars of the brain drain began to use the term that refer to the phenomenon of students desiring to stay in the advanced countries where they had studied. Factors that were found the main attraction for students to stay are the economy of

that country (Dulam & Franses, 2015), life standards (Baruch et al., 2009; Cerdin & Pargneux, 2014) and education factors (Sahlgren, 2014). Some other attractive aspects for students to stay are factors like recognition and the infrastructure for research work and scientific and technological infrastructure (Siekierski, Lima & Borini, 2018).

In the 1970s, some researchers explored more about the phenomenon. During that period, scholars have examined the relationship between brain drain and economic development. Particularly, in the era of 1980s and 1990s studies determined the long-run effects of the migration and education policies on economic development. researches revealed human capital as significant a productive factor.

Increasing globalization and the competition for highly qualified human resources has placed the spotlight on skills shortages. The lack of human resources in a country is considered as one of the most pressing global issues (Aluttis, Bishaw & Frank, 2014).

However, in contemporary theoretical debates, the concept of brain drain is distinguished with the relatively new concept “brain gain” introduced in the late 1990s. The term brain gain is associated with the intentional efforts of home countries to devise policies to bring back their skilled and talented human resource from the advanced countries. The less developed countries devise policies to ensure their countries become socially, politically and economically more attractive so that their citizens can transform ‘brain drain’ into ‘brain gain’, or at least reduce the mobility of the qualified workforce (Dulam & Franses, 2015; Hussain, 2015; Steinberg, 2017). Another phenomenon of movement is the circular migration which refers the temporary return of highly qualified professionals to their native countries for the purpose of providing professional work. The phenomenon can be repeated at different times which was expressed as brain gain (Le & Bodman, 2011; Cheung & Xu, 2015).

Higher education is considered as a gatekeeper for high status. The status can be related to an individual’s status and remuneration status. Higher education is the vital component for the country’s education system. If the education system performs well, it can also increase the economy of a country. There is a strong relationship between education system and economy of a country. This indicates that it is beneficial to invest in secondary and higher education of the development of a country (Amutuhare, 2020; Kyvliuk & Svyrydenko, 2017; Минаева, 2020).

Some research studies have found that when a large number of the country’s people are highly educated and qualified, the national economies of that country tend to grow much faster as compared to the country with less educated people. Therefore, it is evident that human capital is the important determinant for a national economy to grow faster. It is also revealed that non-economic incentives such as good health and well-being were better in those countries (Nedergaard & Goldman, 2016). Academicians in higher education institutions set the foundation of the higher education institutions. The excellence of the outcomes of universities or higher education institutions is greatly reliant on the competence of quality academicians. High qualified academicians are more likely to generate brilliant human capital from the nation building and development.

The importance of education and high-quality learning is achieved everywhere in the world. Pakistan has allocated 2.7 % of its GNP in the education sector instead of 4 % recommended by UNESCO for developing countries (Tahira, 2014).

Universities are facing challenges due to enrollment uncertainties, lessen financial budgets, economic recession, perplexity about academic goals, pressures for accountability are the challenges and uncertainties confronting universities and other higher education institutions (HEI). This has created the ubiquitous financial issues that higher education institutions face. This shows that academicians’ career and higher education in general, must adapt to new circumstances (Tahira, 2014; Torrisi & Pernagallo, 2020). Education and modern information are mandatory for the survival of the country. No country can negate

the importance of education. Higher education in any nation is influential in the construction of the knowledge economies and democratic societies (Torrissi & Pernagallo, 2020).

Most managers and expatriates assume that adjusting into one's own culture is easy (Andresen et al., 2014; Dickmann et al., 2018; McNulty & Brewster, 2017; Suutari et al., 2018). However, this may not be the case. In fact, for many of them adapting to their home is harder than adjusting to living abroad (Adler, 1981; Dickmann et al., 2018; McNulty & Brewster, 2017). According to (Dickmann et al., 2018), the returnees are more prone to experience a reverse culture shock, and this time it is more difficult to readjust into one's own culture rather after adapting the host country culture.

However, shortly after their arrival towards home, they are in a good mood and everything looks perfect. This persists for a short phase followed by a period of low mood (Andresen et al., 2014; Dickmann et al., 2018; Adler 2007). However, after spending some days in the host country, repatriates experience neither anxiety nor over excitedness, they feel "average" (Adler, 2007; Szkudlarek & Sumpter, 2015).

Literature states general expectations of the expatriates. People repatriate with the expectation of organized, easier and safer environment; expect that colleagues will be more courteous and efficient; will be offered better salary packages as previously paid; more promotion chances, financial growth chances; promotion chances and application of the skills learnt from host country (McNulty & Brewster, 2017; Meuer, 2019; Suutari et al., 2018).

Re-entry experiences are feelings of returnees for their home country after returning from the host country (Szkudlarek, 2010; Ward et al., 2001). Negative re-entry experiences create undesirable feelings about work and life in their home country which provokes the returnees to consider re-expatriating (Tharnenou & Seet, 2014). Tharnenou (2015) argued that reverse culture shock and cross-cultural readjustment are the most common responses of the returnees' in their home country.

The reverse culture shock (RCS) describes the state that individuals faced after returning to their native countries. There are emotional and psychological tensions regarding one's culture. After spending a significant time period in host countries, it is difficult for the returnees to adjust easily in their home country culture (Szkudlarek 2010; Ward et al., 2001).

In comparison to the RCS, cross-cultural readjustment is considered an optimistic attitude concept (Akkan et al., 2018). Black and his colleagues (Black, 1994; Black & Gregersen, 1999; Black et al., 1992; Akkan et al., 2018; Ellis, Thorn & Yao, 2020) suggest that cross cultural readjustment includes environment, (work, general, interaction).

The returnees are more prone to experience re adjustment issues. Returnees' face re adjustment issues like work related and culture related after the returning home (Pham, 2017a). They become unable to adjust to the complex systematic administrative practices in their respective home countries (Le, 2014). However, HRM literature and migration studies, generally, management literature, tend to run along parallel pathways without informing each other (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Dorsch, Suutari, & Brewster, 2012).

Despite the significance of movement of the workforce to host countries and organizations, human resource management (HRM) of individuals remains under-researched (Al Ariss, Cascio & Paauwe, 2014). Hence, there is a need for research to do an effort toward identifying a relevant HRM literature and migration of individuals.

Research Methodology

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is recommended often, when the topic of research needs to be studied thoroughly. Qualitative research should be more appropriate when the research study must be examined intensively because it is the need of the study to find variables that would be difficult to measure objectively.

Secondly, there is requirement to listen to unnoticed voices. Moreover, the qualitative research is appropriate when it is needing a multifarious and detailed picture of concerns in question. In depth details can only be recognized by conversations and talking directly with people. In this research work, the researcher found and investigated the experiences of rarely heard voices of academicians' re-expatriate population. Researcher sought to investigate the factors influencing this population through inviting them to share their experiences describing their own stories and their lived experiences. Thus, qualitative methodology is the most appropriate and effective approach for this study.

In this study, the researcher pursues to know about lived experiences of foreign qualified academicians' re-expatriates as expressed in their own words. The nature of the research study called for an interpretive framework that determined on how each participant of the study realizes and perceives his/her experiences. The framework of social constructivism is the most accurate choice to fulfill the need of this study. Fifteen participants include highly qualified academicians who obtained a degree from a foreign university for this study.

The sampling frame in the study used is not very comprehensive. Participants are selected purposefully on the basis of two criteria: (a) an obtained foreign degree from abroad (b) had returned to Pakistan and served a public sector university. Researcher used purposive sampling and snowball sampling for the study.

Researcher designed the questions for conducting participants' interviews. This was developed using information from several pertinent areas discussed and identified in literature search for the study, which included (a) foreign experiences, (b) the most attractive pull and push factors in the form of social and economic factors, reentry experiences, and (d) reverse cultural shock and cross-cultural readjustment.

Hence, an interview guide was constructed as interview protocols. All the questions in the guide were open-ended to invite in-depth information and elaboration from the participants. Follow-up prompts and relevant questions were used to a more detailed discussion of their experiences. Researcher developed questions as interview guide and asked questions, record, the observed data as field notes and make interpretations. The researcher has to empathize the situation to understand the meaning and analyze through their lens of perspective (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

The goal of study is to identify the factors that prompt the academicians and persuade them to leave their home country permanently. The main objective of the study was to examine the experiences of the highly qualified academicians who left Pakistan. Areas to be explored include their transitional periods spent in the host country, the perception of the relevance of the factors of host country with home country to their current lives, their living experiences in host country and adjustment in the public sector university as well as in home country. So, NVivo 12 was used for this purpose.

The themes and subthemes were extracted from interviews (see Table 1). Data Analysis is carried out after identified the major themes and researcher put it into categories of parent nodes and child nodes.

Table 1 : Themes Identified from Participants Data

Parent Nodes (Themes)	Child Nodes (Subthemes)	Decision
Career Opportunities	High academic qualification Perception of quality PhD Scholarship	Push participants to the host country Expatriation
Education Factors	Availability of resources Education standards Learning opportunities Research Facilities Prestige of foreign training Research opportunities Skills	Influences the participants to stay in host country
Economic factors	Employment opportunities Good living standards Salaries	Influences the participants to stay in host country
Social factors	Co-operative attitude of people Living conditions	Influences the participants to stay in host country
Technology Factors	Modern Equipment	Influences the participants to stay in host country
Personal Factors	Family consideration Social responsibility	Pull participants to the home country (Repatriation) (Host to Home)
Adjustment Issues	Administrative delays/ issues Cultural re adjustment Discouragement Insufficient resources Nepotism Non serious attitude at workplace Misuse of authority	Push the participants to the host country (Re-expatriation)

Note. Themes and subthemes extracted from NVivo

Discussion

There are some unfavorable conditions that is related to the home country especially at the working place of public sector universities. The demeanors and the attitudes at the workplace are vulnerable. The issues at the workplace like nepotism, cultural shock and readjustment, discouragement, administrative issues and insufficient resources pulled the academicians abroad. This finding is surprising as it contradicts the literature which generally states that migration is driven by poverty (Flahaux & De Haas, 2016) and economic and political factors (Ayaz & Sher, 2014). Although the majority of the literature also cites the importance of greener pastures and the importance of the network abroad as the main motives for migration (Asiedu & Nyarkoh, 2017; Mbah, 2017).

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study of brain drain research supports and contributes to the enrichment of the theoretical knowledge pool of factors of the brain drain among academicians of public sector universities of Islamabad. It proposes guidance to policy makers and human resource managers, the most appropriate strategies and measures to put in place to stop further loss of this brilliant talent and much-needed professionals to keep the education system of public universities' sector system functional. The literature mostly found on brain drain mostly concentrate on economic and social factors and the importance of remittances. In an over-populated developing country like Pakistan, unexpected brain-drain needs to be re-oriented to take the form of planned brain-export (Farooq & Ahmad, 2017). The majority of issues regarding brain drain ignore the current trends based on empirical enquiry. For instance, there is a theoretically taken for granted opinion that low salary packages or social factors will lead to brain drain in developing countries (Webber, 2019). However, this research shows that there are other underlying and significant contextual factors that are influencing professionals. There are some prominent adjustment issues in universities also along with social, economic and technological factors in addition that contribute to the brain drain of highly foreign qualified academicians. Therefore, this study makes an important and timely theoretical contribution to the literature of the phenomenon of the brain drain of academicians.

The research also made practical contributions apart from the theoretical significance. The study offers guidance in a well-focused, an informed and coordinated manner for policy makers and human resource management of the public sector universities the most appropriate measures and strategies to put in place to lessen the further loss of the brilliant talent and much needed professionals.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion drawn from this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The most imperative role for the development of any nation is played by education. The need for quality education is needed in educational institutions. This may include proper funding, modern instructional resources, adequate facilities, comprehensive curriculums, availability of scholarships, research facilities, affordable tuition fees and proper educational support. All of these factors are reliant to a certain degree of budget. For quality education, a serious financial commitment by the government is mandatory. One of the important steps to be taken at the national level is the reorientation of education system to suppress the migration of qualified intellectuals.
2. The quality of human resource is essential in economic development. This study confirmed higher education institutions lack the resources that they require to play their role in development. The budgetary allocation for higher education commission (HEC) that regulates funding for public sector universities has continued to dwindle over the years. The central government hardly allocated funds for infrastructural development and research. However, universities cannot create knowledge without essential requirements such as laboratories and materials. It is therefore required that the government increases budgetary allocations to HEC (Higher education commissions) as well as for higher education institutions. This will not only ensure the provision of basic infrastructure, but also increase research capacity.
3. Additionally, there is dire need to upgrade the conditions of service at the university by providing better facilities, increasing remuneration and resources required to carry out their responsibilities as well as providing for their years after retirement. The proposed suggestions will increase retention, attract "new blood" to the academy and expectantly attract some of the faculty who left the university to return.
4. The public sector universities used to establish collaborative relationships with universities around the world to foster joint objectives. The tapping of knowledge from the professionals and faculty abroad or in the private sector would be one way to alleviate the effects of the brain drain. Many

- professionals willing to work collaboratively with home country universities to build for the future. Universities should find ways of tapping their knowledge. Some suggestions of doing this would be: Joint programs, joint research, external examiners and visiting professors.
5. To tap knowledge successfully from professionals abroad, there is need for investment in information communication technology (ICT). Better ICT will help to make it possible for academic units to connect, in real time, with their collaborators abroad. It is the duty of the government to supply the initial capital needed to increase bandwidth at public universities. The internet can provide enhanced distance learning services by enabling online courses.
 6. Training and educational opportunities decrease the pressure for studies abroad. Bilateral foreign aid fellowship programmes by international organizations should be utilized fully for such training.
 7. The quality enhancement cells in the public sector university should be strengthened. The scientific method of data collection and analysis be adopted in universities. This data should be utilized to get the feedback of the stakeholders.
 8. There is need for quality environment at the workplace of the public sector universities to ensure for quality education. It works for better and developed infrastructure and best human and material resources. In our public sector universities, lack of facilities is the prime factor related to quality learning environment. It is advocated that budget for education and especially for higher education must be increased in order to ensure the need assessment of the education sector.
 9. There should some policy level intervention role of the government. There is need to allocate a reasonable budget allocation for education sector. There is need to Initiate programmes and projects for encouraging talented youth. The intergovernmental committee for migration should be in the loop to find possibilities, pursues its activities for the return of talent.
 10. Pakistan has been among the lowest in the region in spending on education. It has been reported that Pakistan has allocated just 2.2% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in 2017 as compare to 2.3% of GDP in 2016 which somehow shows the lack of seriousness of government stakeholders as well. These are the challenges that can possibly be neutralized by prioritizing the needs of the country. By giving credit to education specifically higher education for producing the resources equipped with full of knowledge and skills. This can be helpful in escalating the economy rather than being a mere burden on the state.
 11. It is the onus of every Pakistani to do something for the socio-economic development of his homeland. The present attitude of everyone is trying to benefit without making any effort. To contribute to the GNP (Gross National Product) and accelerate the rate of growth in the basic needs of life can never help to attain the goal. If everyone wants to eat fresh fruit, but don't want to plant trees, the net result is obvious. If new orchards of development grow in every sector of our life, the dream of a welfare state can become a reality. If the habit of hard work, honesty with the homeland, compulsory saving, greater production and quality improvement become our ideals as well as practice, the picture can change for the better earlier.

These recommendations are suggested in the hope that critical issues of the re-expatriated academicians will be better understood. The main intent of the current research is to contribute some insight into the under-researched phenomenon of re-expatriated population behavior from public sector universities. The inferences drawn from the research study underlines critical concerns and major issues reported by the participants. Each participant's narrative as well as the group's commonality is reviewed to present the complexity of their lives as a whole and their reentry experiences in particular. The researcher hopes that the findings, discussions, and recommendations will inform scholars, educators and administrators and human resource managers of universities in their efforts to better understand and more effectively support brilliant foreign qualified professionals. Although this research has attempted to answer some key research questions related to the most influential factors that caused the brain drain. However, it has also uncovered questions and related research areas that could usefully be identified further in our never ending quest to expand human knowledge. One of the limitations in this study was approaching the experts who had re-expatriated from homeland and were living in other countries which made face-to-face interviews

impossible. The budget of this study was limited, interviews with people residing outside were done on WhatsApp, Face Time and FaceBook Messenger. The current study has done in-depth analysis of the public sector universities' brain drain. The future research may be done on private sector universities and compare both sectors to find the solutions.

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