

# FACTORS DRIVING ALBANIAN STUDENTS STUDY ABROAD

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## **Abstract:**

*Student migration is a rising phenomenon in Albania in last decades with researchers calling it a “brain drain” of the population. The present study examines the possible driving factors behind the migration of the young generation with the purpose of deepening their academic formation. Exploratory factor analysis has been implemented to data gathered through a survey distributed to students belong to middle-high social strata who are currently studying abroad. Study findings define three main factors of students` brain drain grouped as socio-economic, educational and carrier ones.*

**Keywords:** *Student migration, driving factors, social and economic influences, carrier opportunities, Albania*

**JEL classification:** *F22, H75, I25*

## **Introduction**

The past couple of years has witnessed a noticeable growth of the number of Albanian prospective student make educational selection based on study abroad opportunities. Studying abroad before 1990 in Albania was considered a privilege given by government to only particular individuals with high profiles in society. Today, studying abroad is a personal choice and less hard to be achieved. Globalization and international environment being welcoming to new well-educated and talented migrators, has intensified the youth migration phenomenon. Public and private universities all over the world has opened their doors for Albanian students giving them the opportunity to develop their academic carries further.

This trend of student's migration is present in all divisions of Albanian society, from elites to the one less fortune and is not receiving attention by the right instances. Despite the opportunities offered by public universities located in all major cities of Albania such as Tirana, Durres, Shkodra, Elbasan, Vlora and Gjirokastra) and the wide range of private universities and franchised academic institutions mainly located in the capital, Tirana, Albania still has one the highest numbers of “distributing” students outside its borders (Gëdeshi & King, 2020).

Over 10 agencies, who offer study-abroad consulting are currently operating in Albania, and new ones launch every year. This growing number of new agencies can only mean a rising number of demands of the students who want to continue their studies outside Albanian boarders.

The issue with the rising number of future professionals choosing a foreign country to invest their talents, is the gap that Albanian market will soon undergo, regarding both: qualified new

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individuals and workplaces or positions. The shift of young individuals outside the borders, for a country means a weakened development, considering that the average age per capital will eventually grow. Additionally, these numbers are a direct strike to the quality of education system in Albania.

This study aims to explore the factors that drive Albanian student to choose public/private universities abroad in countries such as Germany, UK, or USA, rather than choosing home country universities. The reasons may vary from educational, social to economical. Furthermore, the topic of students who shift to universities abroad rather than staying in their home country is not isolated, yet in Albania there is a gap in literature regarding research on this issue. Previous studies rely on the migration of labor mainly, without focusing on the rising issue of the youth migration of the country.

## **Study Background**

Student migration implies a long stay perhaps permanent stay of student in their host country using their education as a pathway toward integration into a new society. Unlike refugees, labor migrants and illegal migrants, students are seen as welcomed migrants who migrate for enriching their own intellectual capital. Knowledge is perceived as critical in terms of economic growth as well as the social integration (King & Raghuram, 2013; Kruja, 2013; Raghuram, 2013), hence in the end of their education, they either move back to their country or stay and contribute in high-skilled labor market in the host country (Gëdeshi & King, 2020).

Globalization has played a significant role in internationalization of higher education, and which has become market driven activity (Hysa & Kruja, 2020). This rapid growth is affecting more and more students to seek higher education outside their countries and even consider or aim to establish their further future there permanently (Gribble, 2008).

Moreover, Gouda et al (2017, p. 25), in their study on exploring the push and stay factors of Iris medical students' migration, recognized as pushing factors the "negative perception regarding career opportunities, working conditions and lifestyle, while family was the only identified strong stay factor". Qualitative analysis of free text responses revealed themes that included training, career, personal and financial factors.

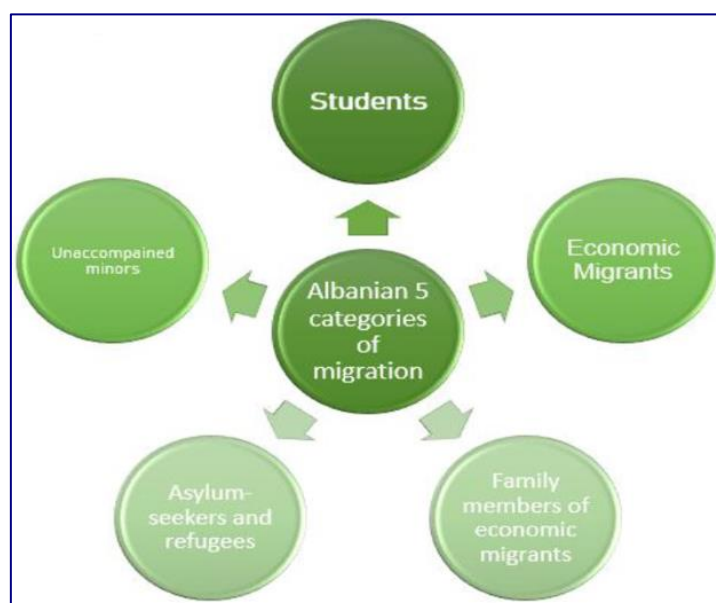
Nevertheless, Baláž et al. (2018), study results show connectivity factors (language, nearness, trade, knowledge) as crucial in students migration decision, meanwhile the traditional factors such as higher opportunities for income, employment or education quality showed to be less significant.

Furthermore, Mihi-Ramirez & Kumpikaite (2014) in their study found internationalization as a predictable and aim of most of students meanwhile their main motivations are economic ones. However, there are other specific factors impacting student migration determination which are dependent on the country under analysis (Mihi-Ramirez & Kumpikaite, 2014).

Based on the study of King (2005) for Southern Europe and Balkans migration, Albania is considerate as an ideal laboratory for the study of student migration as a country with a very high tendency regarding this trend. Every year in Albania is seen a rising trend of young generation aiming to study abroad rather than there, trend affecting all society classes from the elites who can afford a good living in the country to those with much less incomes (Kruja

& Kadiasi, 2020). Experts highlight the fact that this phenomenon, which is taking a concerning point, and are naming it “brain drain” (Kruja & Berisha, 2021), as the main factor is determined the quality of education in Albania and the lack of employment options (Picari, 2019; Kruja & Kalluci, 2021).

The Albanian migration is categorized as students, family members of emigrant, economic emigrants, asylum-seekers, and unaccompanied minors. Based on a report published by Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2017 for Migration of population in Albania, the students are ranked third out five main categories of migration in Albania as shown in the figure below.



**Figure 1: Albanian 5 categories of migration**

*Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs (2017)*

After three decades, the migration issue in Albania is still rising strong but the profile of this phenomenon has changed (Kruja, 2020). Back in the 1990s the poverty was the main driving force of individuals that chose to migrate from Albania; nowadays the migration is displayed more amongst the youth and highly educated sections of the population (King, 2008).

This trend of moving has affected even experienced individuals who see a second university as an opportunity to stay in the country they study. The opinions on this issue stand between two parties; government officials that see this phenomenon as a good indicator of country development and integration in other cultures mainly European, while social experts judge it as the leaving of future minds and energies of a developing country.

Protagonists of the academic society in Albania are underlining that the phenomenon of students choosing to study abroad, is taking on disturbing proportions, categorizing it as brain drain. The researchers see this increasing trend because of the diminishing quality of higher education in Albania and the limitation of job position structures in labor market. While critics judge this trend as an outpouring of youth energy and knowledge, the government welcome the effort of students for better qualifications.

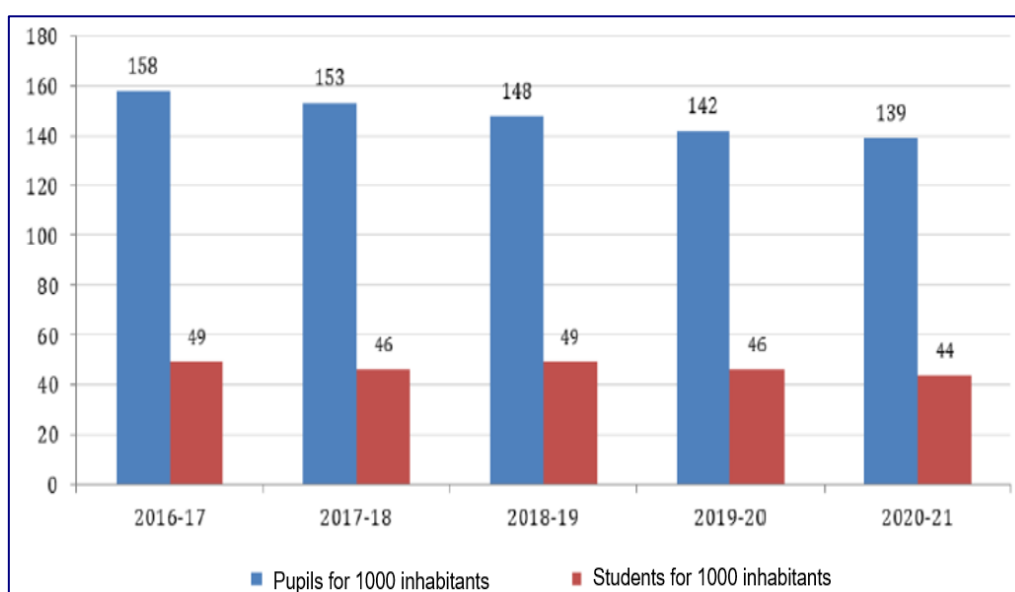
Education in Albania is seen as the first step toward a bright future and is guaranteed by the Constitution. In the recent academic year 2020-2021, a decrease in the numbers of students registering in Albanian universities has been noticed (table 1) resulting in 12.5% less students registered compared to 2016-2017 (INSTAT, 2020).

**Table 1: Number of students registered for university**

Academic Level	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Under/post Graduate students	141.410	131.833	139.043	130.264	123.797

Source: INSTAT, 2020

Albania is facing both, the growing trend of young people who aim to be educated abroad and the increasing number of those who, after being educated in Albanian academic institutions, seek a specialization or job in Europe or Overseas. Critics say that in the long run the pillar of society and the economy will be missing from the country and that this leak will sooner or later have its consequences on Albanian further development (Picari, 2019). An important indicator in education it is the number of students per 1000 inhabitants. These reports show numbers declining (figure 2) because of several reasons, and their decision to study abroad is the main one.



**Figure 2: Number of pupils and students for 1000 inhabitants**

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs (2017)

The desire to study abroad commonly appears in the freshman years and is a perception and reflection of young people on the conditions of education and their perspective in Albania. Seeing that the universities in Albania do not meet a lot of requirements, students start their applications to continue the rest of their education abroad. In other cases, this desire is driven by educated parents who aim for the good education of their children and often see their perspective abroad. Several authors have also argued that investing in their children's education abroad is a confirmation of the parent's social status as well to enhance their family intellectual background (Waters, 2006).

A lot of young people who aim to study abroad have parental incentives. The research conducted by Gëdeshi and King (2020), shows that almost 2/3 of the parents who want to take their children to study abroad are professionals (doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc.), government officials, businessmen, managers, directors, or business partners. This confirms that in the decision of students to apply abroad for their studies, is driven by the perception of their parents that the quality of life abroad is better than in Albania. The parents desire to send their kids abroad is supported even by political factors such as instability in Albanian case. In the 90s the political stability was at its lowest, now even if it is presented in better levels of measurements, the influence it has in the decision of students to study abroad is still recognizable. For instance, the political stability index varies from -2.5 which is the lowest to 2.5 the strongest. Albania's minimum point were reached in 1998 with -0.54 and the maximum in 2014 with 0.49 points (The Global Economy.com, 2020).

## Methodology

To discover the factors that push Albanian students to leave the country during their academic years, a quantitative research design is followed. The approach toward this study and its purpose are mainly exploratory so the tendency of the students to move abroad is under study with the intention to distinguish the educational, economic, and social factors driving it. Under this purpose, this study researches and reveals the main features from these fields that has the most impact on students' decision. The survey is designed to test the items in each factor, allowing for a reflection of what is truly influencing the migration of the student toward foreign countries with the purpose of staying there. Participants were asked to rate:

- (1) the educational factors according to their influence on decision to study abroad
- (2) social factors according to their influence on decision to study abroad
- (3) economic factors according to their impact on decision to study abroad

Used study survey items and respective statements are given in table 2 below.

**Table 2.**

<b>Study Survey Items</b>	
<b>Items</b>	<b>Statements</b>
Education	The low quality of teaching methods of the university in Albania
	The old modules applied by the majority of universities operating in Albania
	The lack of campus facilities such as laboratories and updated technologies
	The absence of some specific degree in the field you require
	The unviability of internship/ work placement in demotivating
Social	The host country offers better life quality and safer compared to Albania
	Education abroad is a confirmation of my social status
	The student life in Albania is less active than abroad and it does not offer a full experience such as student clubs, sport teams or hubs, etc.
	There is a perception that international education is better than in Albania
	Albania doesn't offer a cultural diversity and narrow mentality

Economic	Job opportunities are limited
	Salaries are not satisfying compared to a particular middle to high range living standard
	Carrier growth often requires connections than given on merit basis
	Investing in education abroad seems as more valuable option rather investing in education Albania
	Albania lacks a political stability

The sampling technique utilized on this study is Purposive Sampling, in which the group is decided based on the best knowledge and judgment of the researcher. The group is set to be the students studying abroad in academic programs not language short courses due to their lack of language ability to understand the survey.

The students' names and personal details will not be revealed due to privacy restricts required by them or their families in cases where the student is underage. In total, 100 students participated and were surveyed through an online questionnaire formed on Google Forms. The survey collects data from the respondents through a structured questionnaire, which is composed of 22 closed-ended questions.

The intention of these questions is to collect quantitative information through a two-section survey. The first section collects demographic information to better understand the characteristics of the students being surveyed. This section of questions is linked to multiple choice answers. The questions consist of gender, age, the education level, and field. Also, a question regarding the tuition fee is asked to understand the amount of money is being invested outside Albania for education. The second section is formulated with scaled questions formed based on a 5-Point Likert Scale with answers vary from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This survey was crucial for the research, collecting data from the student who are currently studying abroad since 2020 and belong to families with a fair well-being. The questionnaire was distributed through e-mails to 100 students and was completed within 5 days. In total there were 22 questions created in Google Forms, designed to be accurate, understandable, and easy to be filled within 3-4 minutes.

Factor analysis is statistical technique used for identification of moderately small number of factors, which represent the relationship between interrelated variables. Decreasing the number of variables and detecting the structure in the relationships between variables, are the two primary applications of factor analysis (Child, 1990).

## **Study Results**

### **Sample Characteristics**

The questionnaire was fulfilled by 100 students in Google Form provided from the database of "StudyCare" agency in Albania. The findings of the survey are revealed for each demographic characteristic of the students in terms of gender, age, program following, country of their



studies, field of studies and program's tuition fee, descriptive statistics are given for motivation factor and students migration and a final question regarding their future plans.

The majority of the students were female, accounting for 59% of the respondents while 41% were male. Most of them belonged to the age group 19-22 taking over 47% of the population questioned. Second group occupying 33% in aged between 23-28. The minority, 20% belongs to age between 15-18. 42 % of the population are currently following bachelor, 34% are in their pre/master studies, meanwhile the other percentages were divided among college and foundation/A levels, 10% and 14 % respectively. 40% are studying in United Kingdom, following 21% in United States of America and the rest are focused on Europe.

34% of the respondents are focused on studying Business/Finance, however the second most preferred degree is Law with 17% and third Engineering with 15%. Social sciences, health sciences, and arts are less preferred, respectively by 13% 12% and 9% of students.

The costs spend by Albanian parents in foreign education though tuition fees of their children is mostly (57%) more than 15.001 EUR per year. 38% spend between 10.001-15.000 EUR and only 5% spend less than 10.000 EUR.

### **Factors that Drive Albanian Students Study Abroad**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, and Measures of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) tests were conducted to know if we can proceed with the factor analysis. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was tested to verify the sampling suitability for the factor analysis, so to understand if the gathered data are sufficient for factor analysis. KMO results was 0.871, higher than 0.5 the minimum acceptable value, so the factorial analysis will provide distinct and reliable factors. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity compares the strength of the relations of the items in the study. The result must be less than 0.05. Based on the results of the test, it is less than 0.05 which means that the items provide the standard to proceed with Factor Analysis. Eventually, the Bartlett Test of Sphericity resulted significant as well. Measures of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) resulted inappropriate (lower than 0.5) for three items which were excluded from the analysis.

Cronbach's Alpha analysis for social factor influence over student's decision to study abroad, is resulting .27, approximately .23 below 0.5 of the limits which makes valid a factor. This mean that the influence of this factors is only 23% and it is not considered crucial nor has a strong impact on driving student to leave Albania to study abroad. The item with the lowest mean and less selected by the students is Cultural diversity and Social Status.

#### **FACTOR 1: Education**

The Cronbach's Alpha analysis result of the statements used to measure education factor (table 3) is above 0.5, meaning Education factor is valued as acceptable and it has an impact on student's decision to study abroad. The items with the highest mean are estimated Low Teaching Quality and Old Modules.

**Table 3: Reliability Statistics for Education Factor**  
**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.680	.748	5

**Item Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Low Teaching Quality	4.484900000000000	.783203077500377	100
Old Modules	4.474800000000000	.769933068060418	100
Lack of Campus Facilities	4.343434343434343	.818493518379107	100
Absence of Specific Degrees	3.080700000000000	1.2117007456338 79	100
Unviability of Internship/Work placement	4.232300000000000	.850766564619664	100

**FACTOR 2: Social**

Cronbach's Alpha for social factor influence over student's decision to study abroad (table 4) is .27, below 0.5 the limit which makes valid a factor.

This means that the influence of this factor is only 23% and it is not considered crucial nor has a strong impact on driving student to leave Albania to study abroad.

The items with the lowest mean and less selected by the students are Cultural diversity and Social Status. These two items are removed, and Cronbach's Alpha value has increased to 0.783 (table 5), so at this stage the remaining three item are a relevant measurement of the factor Social.

**Table 4: Reliability Statistics for Social Factor**  
**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.271	5

**Item Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Better Life quality	4.5100	.80616	101
Social Status	3.5700	1.15978	101
More attractive Student Life	4.3600	.81878	101
Better education	4.5500	.72629	101
Cultural Diversity	3.3500	1.22780	101



**Table 5: Reliability Statistics for Social Factor after Deleting Items**  
**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.783	.786	3

**Item Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Better Life quality	4.5100	.80616	100
More attractive Student Life	4.3600	.81878	100
Better education	4.5500	.72629	100

**FACTOR 3: Economy**

The third factor analysis is regarding the Economy factor. Measurement of Cronbach's Alpha shows a 77% reliability of this factor toward the trend under study.

**Table 6: Reliability Statistics for Economy Factor**  
**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.777	.800	5

**Item Statistics**

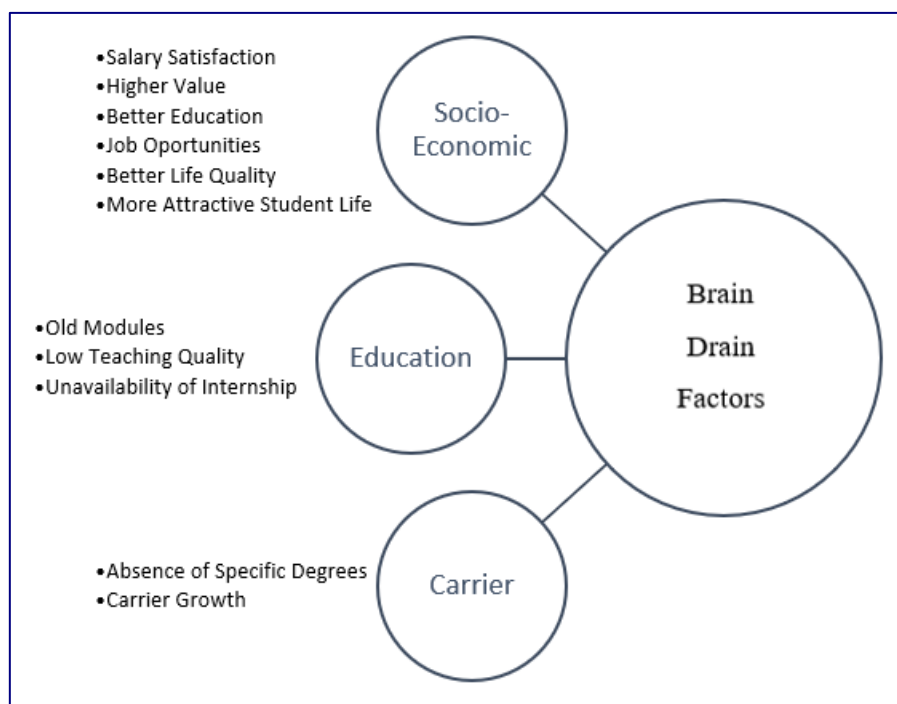
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Job opportunities	4.4800	.67390	100
Salary satisfaction	4.4500	.70173	100
Carrier growth	3.9000	.90453	100
Higher Value	4.4900	.78490	100
Political stability	4.0900	1.10184	100

**Exploratory Factor Analysis**

As mentioned above, KMO results was 0.871, higher than 0.5 the minimum acceptable value. Moreover, Communalities show the proportion of each variable's variance that can be explained by the factors. Variables with high values are well represented in the common factor space, while variables with low values are not well represented. From the measurements, the item of "Political Stability" results with value below 0.5, meaning that it is an item not reliable.

A second factor analysis is conduct after removing the third item "Political Stability" detected as not adequate with the study and with no valuable weight on students' decision to study abroad. The influences of the items left are considered distinct and reliable. As a result of exploratory factor analysis, by using the Principal Component Analysis, there were extracted

3 factors, which explained 70% of the variance in the affected student's decision as shown in the figure 3 below.



**Figure 3: Brain Drain Factors**

## Discussion and Conclusions

Several educational-social-economic factors trigger the intention or plan of student to emigrate. The actual trend of most educated segment of Albanian society aim to migrate for education purposes and develop their future there are symptoms of weakened educational or economic structures of the Albania's political-social system.

The results of the surveys fulfilled by 100 students, showed a tendency of some items representing three factors taken under study. The scale used to measure their effect was Likert ranged up to 5. The items with the highest impact on student's decision are respectively, the low quality of teaching and the unsatisfied salaries offered in Albania.

By the measurements taken through the factor analysis (conducted by SPSS), it is noticed that the factor with the highest impact is the economical factor while the social factor does not play a significant role in the student's decision to study abroad.

Two out of three factors stood out as the most influencing, the education and economy. Based on previous studies mentioned in study background, the more developed the country the less is suffers from brain drain phenomenon.

Students migrating from Albania leave the country in a cycle status, students leaving because of the lack of better education, life and work condition, and the country lacking the high skilled new individuals which eventually keeps it in one place. From the two factors mentioned above, the one that can be improved faster in a near future is a formation of education system like more training toward the academic staff for refining the quality of teaching methods,

implementation of updated modules and practices in several degrees such as Business/Finance or Law which from the survey were noticed as the most preferred by the students.

The international student migration is widely spreading in a lot of countries and is being treated as normal tendency by some of them due to contemporary globalized society. The real issue with Albanian case of migration is that students' going out is not balanced compared with students coming back in, representing a loss of developing human capital.

As part of the finding, the lack of internships and limited job opportunities belonged to one of the items with the higher mean score. As a percentage part of Albanian's GDP, what is spend on education needs to be risen to EU levels at least. New and innovative investments are needed in university education and not only. The scientist research area needs further attention as well, increasing the profile of Albanian students

The identification of the factors that drive Albanian students' migrations are beneficial to government educational instances such as The Ministry of Education and Universities Administrations and admissions, and authors behind curriculums behind each degree. This study was focused on the youth part of the population, the new brain, skills, and energy of a country, so the trend of student migration is a disturbing matter that needs attention from the right educational instances. The results showed a perception that the quality of education here is not good enough to invest money in the country, so students are choosing universities abroad not only for their education but also for their future carrier development.

The main limitation of this study stands in terms of the sample size of the participants, students to be more specifically. The students chosen for the survey belong to the latest intake, which may have been unknowingly affected even by pandemic situation.

Further studies from relevant authority structures are necessary with a different approach more extended in time horizon as well a wider range of students is suggested to be taken under study. This approach of studying the phenomenon in long term and larger group, helps in better understanding the tendency of student's migration and if other factors of influence surface. As well open questions would provide a deeper perspective of the phenomenon and reasons driving it.

Firstly, actual measures may be taken to improve the quality of education in Albania to make it a more welcoming environment for motivated students, create and implement strategies to increase the employment and internship opportunities for newly graduated students. A solidier alliance is needed between higher education providers and Albanian government for further development and improvements.

Based on the most preferred fields chosen by students in the survey, resulted to be Business/Finance and Law, two degrees that are available in Albania too, yet the students chose to study them abroad. Further studies from higher education providers and curriculum creators are needed, to inspect the modules and programs currently being applied by universities offering these degrees to see where students are facing difficulties or are not satisfying.

On a wider perspective, the main recommendations are addressed to government. The phenomenon of student's migration must be a "wake up call". The young generation is shifting their energies outside Albania. Government should assist in expanding the employment

structures and creating adequate working environment for all professions. Eventually, a better health and education system, as well better social protection structures will enrich social and cultural life making it preferable from the students.

Lastly, the migration of Albanian students is more concentrated in several countries such as UK, USA or within Europe Italy or Germany, compared to others. This is a chance for the Albanian embassies or consulates in these countries to strengthen their communication. By locating Albanian students in their host countries, the state can keep them updated with economic developments or job vacancies in public administration or any academic scientific institutions.

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