



Global Policy Impacts On Career Outcomes: An International Student Mobility Case Study

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Abstract

Global economic and political trends are increasingly impacting global student mobility patterns. This study sought to understand how changing economic, political, and social factors impact international students' career and life choices. This comparative case study explored the experiences of 14 international students who studied in the U.S. and entered the global workforce between the years 2010 and 2017. Results include follow-up findings about the immediate career impacts of COVID-19. Although most of the participants were working in the U.S. at the time of the study, findings suggest that the uncertainty brought on by changing visa policies have negatively impacted the career paths of the study's participants. However, prior to COVID-19, improving job markets in students' home countries were resulting in increased willingness to return and work.

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Global Policy Impacts on Career Outcomes

An International Student Mobility Case Study

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Introduction

Uncertainty around global trade relations and immigration policy are disrupting the career choices of international students. Chinese students in the U.S. felt the impact of the trade war between the United States (U.S.) and China in the summer of 2019 when China's Ministry of Education issued a warning to Chinese students about the risk of U.S. visa problems (Redden, 2019a). The warning raised concerns for U.S. higher education institutions where Chinese students make up one third of the international student population (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2019). The warning was followed in 2020 by a U.S. plan to cancel visas of Chinese graduate students and researchers with direct ties to universities affiliated with the People's Liberation Army (Wong & Barnes, 2020). In addition to the trade war, the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus) in 2020 affected thousands of students studying abroad with economic impacts as well as travel restrictions to and from several countries (Martel, 2020). Higher education institutions anticipated decreases in international student enrollment as a result of the virus (Martel, 2020) leading to uncertainty about long-term impacts on student mobility.

Global mobility and knowledge circulation are hallmarks of the global economy as more countries strive to build their economic standing, and recruit and retain the best workers. Highly skilled immigrants are a vital aspect of this globalization, bringing economic potential to the countries they inhabit (Han et al., 2015; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2008). Globally mobile students, or students who have crossed a national border and enrolled in education outside their home country (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.) are an often overlooked and critical part of the global workforce, with over 5.3 million students studying outside their home country in 2017 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020) and an expected eight million students studying outside their home country by 2025 (OECD, 2016). With global mobility more accessible due to economic, technological, and cultural

factors, the growth in student mobility has become an increasingly important aspect of innovation, contributing to the creation and diffusion of knowledge globally (OECD, 2008, 2016). However, current political and economic conditions are impacting student career choice and global mobility patterns.

Choudaha (2017) identified three waves of international student mobility between 1999 and 2020. The first wave (1999–2006) was highlighted by the increased demand for high skilled talent until the September 11 terrorist attacks led to a decrease in international student travel due to heightened visa restrictions. The second wave (2006–2013) during the global financial crisis was a result of higher education institutions relying heavily on the tuition dollars of international students. And the third wave (2013–2020) was shaped by China's economic downturn and increased nationalism in the U.S. and U.K. (Choudaha, 2017).

The economic impact of globalization and the trends and impacts of immigration have been well documented, however research on international students only began to burgeon in the last decade (Macrander, 2017). In spite of the growth in research on international students, individual voices of international students have often been lost in the process of understanding mobility trends on a worldwide level (Favell et al., 2007). For purposes of this study, international students are defined as individuals who attended post-secondary education institutions full-time in the U.S. on temporary student visas. While studies have explored how international students make the decision to study outside their home country (Altbach, 1991; Cantwell et al., 2009; Lee, 2008; Lee & Kim, 2010; Li & Bray, 2007), research is limited regarding international students' decisions to stay or leave the host country after completing their studies (Choudaha, 2011; Szelényi, 2009; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Although the number of students staying in the U.S. and working using Optional Practical Training (OPT) after completing their studies has steadily increased since 2015 (IIE, 2019) there is scant literature on the experiences of these students in the U.S. workforce. In particular, more research is needed to identify and understand the factors impacting career and mobility decisions after students complete their degrees and OPT and enter the global workforce. Understanding of the factors impacting mobility decisions has implications for higher education leaders and business leaders globally.

This comparative case study examines the career paths of 14 international students who earned degrees in the U.S. and entered the global workforce during Choudaha's (2017) second and third wave and provides context to the factors influencing their mobility decisions. It explores the research question: How do international students describe the impact of economic, political, and social factors on their decision to stay in their host country, return home, or move to another country after completion

of their degree? Contextualizing these factors is crucial to understanding how economic, political, and social factors impact the careers of international students and skilled workers in an era of nationalism and economic uncertainty. Although the data for this study were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the results of this study should be considered in the current global context.

Background

International employers are increasing their reliance on highly skilled workers to meet the challenges of the global economy at the same time that immigration tensions and restrictions are growing in the U.S. The challenges of immigration restrictions and global economic factors were underscored by U.S. business and technology employers as they opposed the U.S. presidential administration's 2017 travel ban on seven, mostly Muslim countries (State of Washington et al. v. Donald J. Trump, 2017). The proposed ban had implications for U.S. business and for high-skilled immigrants, impacting thousands of international students (Barry-Jester, 2017). In 2018, rumors of U.S. bans on Chinese student visas fueled concerns about the future of international student enrollment (Anderson & Svrluga, 2019; Zengerle & Spetalnick, 2018). The addition to the ban of four African countries as well as Myanmar and Kyrgyzstan in February 2020 further heightened concerns about trade and student mobility (Paquette, 2020). These major changes in visa and immigration policies and exclusionary rhetoric continue to impact international students (Stebleton et al., 2018) and affect the recruitment and retention of highly skilled international talent, with students citing concerns about visa denials, a hostile climate, reduced mobility, and insecurity (Pottie-Sherman, 2018; Todoran & Peterson, 2019).

The U.S. has long enjoyed the benefits of attracting the best students and most highly skilled workers with many international students staying and working in the U.S. on H-1B visas. The H-1B visa program allows U.S. companies to temporarily employ foreign workers in occupations that require specialized knowledge and a bachelor's degree or higher (US Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2019). High unemployment spurred by the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic has resulted in the U.S. presidential administration's suspension of the H-1B visa program through the end of 2020 (Ordonez, 2020; Redden, 2020). Although there have been H-1B visa challenges with past presidential administrations, highly skilled immigrants have continued to come to the U.S. for education and career opportunities (Fu, 2018). Increased global competition for international students requires higher education institutions and nations to highlight the return on investment of studying abroad, especially with regard to career outcomes (Choudaha, 2020). The opportunity to work

in the U.S. after graduation has attracted international students and has acted as a pull factor to study in the U.S. (Altbach, 2004; Gesing & Glass, 2019; Han et al., 2015; Roh, 2015). With added visa restrictions and strengthening economies in India, China, Taiwan, and other emerging markets, international graduates of U.S. institutions may show more inclination to leave the U.S. In addition, Canada, the United Kingdom (U.K.), and other western countries have implemented post-graduation visa policies aimed at recruiting high-skilled international students (Government of Canada, 2019; Redden, 2019b), leaving the U.S. at risk of losing many of the globally mobile students who contribute \$41 billion to the U.S. economy (NAFSA: Association of International Educators [NAFSA], 2020). Other countries have created professional pathways and opportunities for international students at the same time that the U.S. has become more restrictive. The impact of recent political and economic developments can be seen with new international student enrollment in the U.S. decreasing each year starting with the 2016/2017 academic year (IIE, 2019). This trend is the first steady year-to-year decrease since the post September 11, 2001 decrease. Students from India and China comprise over 50% of all international students studying in the U.S. (IIE, 2019). A decrease in students from these countries can severely impact the vitality and financial viability of U.S. higher education institutions (Macrander, 2017). This decrease will leave the U.S. with fewer skilled workers in STEM and technology fields where there is a dearth of qualified candidates. The growth and innovation that the U.S. has experienced with startup companies, particularly in the technology industry, will be hampered by the inability to hire international talent due to visa challenges (Roach & Skrentny, 2019).

In recent years, international students studying in the U.S. have been increasingly impacted by political factors and immigration challenges. These impacts can lead many potential students to study outside the U.S. or can lead current students to seek employment in their home country or in another country after graduation (Choudaha, 2017). Exclusionary rhetoric around immigration policy has fueled neo-racism or the emphasis of culture or country of origin as a source of discrimination (Lee & Rice, 2007). International students are faced with discrimination on and off campus that includes stereotyping of their countries, criticism of their accents, and disparaging statements about foreigners in general (Redden, 2012). Discrimination and racial attacks against Asians and people of Asian descent have increased amid the COVID-19 pandemic with government leaders in the U.S. and other countries using anti-Chinese rhetoric (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Margolin, 2020). This neo-racist rhetoric coupled with rumors of proposed policies like the Chinese student visa ban in the U.S. can negatively affect the retention of highly skilled international students and immigrants (Zengerle & Spetalnick, 2018).

The push-pull theory of mobility, which explains how certain factors push a student to leave their home country or pull them to a host country, is often used to explain how international students make a decision to study in a particular country (Altbach, 2004). Push-pull factors can include economic, political, and social factors like job opportunities, political stability, or culture in the student's home or host country (Altbach, 2004). Most studies have found that economic factors play the most important role in pulling students to stay in a developed host country upon graduation, with personal and social factors also impacting students' decisions (Altbach, 2004; Gesing & Glass, 2019; Han et al., 2015; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014; Roh, 2015).

The theoretical framework for this study was built around the push-pull theory (Altbach, 2004) of influences that impact international students' decisions to stay or leave upon completion of studies. The push-pull framework allows for exploration of reverse push-pull (Li & Bray, 2007), or the influences that may push a student to leave a host country after completion of studies, including the host country job market and visa policies (Gesing & Glass, 2019). Reverse push-pull also considers influences that pull students home such as family ties, cultural elements, and improvements in home country economics (Shen & Herr, 2004). Economic impacts of the trade war, COVID-19, and anti-immigration rhetoric and policies may push students to leave the U.S. Meanwhile economic growth in home countries, more favorable visa policies in other western countries, and concerns about family health due to the coronavirus may pull students to their home or other countries. The changing global economic and political landscape frames the reverse push and pull influences of visa policies and the global economy on student mobility. The international student voices heard in this study are critical to understanding how political, economic, and social factors are impacting the careers of high-skilled workers in the global workplace.

Methodology

This study was conducted using a comparative case study methodology (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014) to address the central research question: How do international students describe the impact of economic, political, and social factors on their decision to stay in their host country, return home, or move to another country after completion of their degree? Case study methodology was chosen to "investigate the contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evidenced" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). In this case the phenomenon of choosing to stay or leave and the context of economic, political, and social factors in the U.S. and abroad are not clearly evidenced due to ongoing changes in global politics and economics.

Traditionally, a case study is defined as, "...an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). For the purposes of this study the bounded system that comprises the case includes international students who graduated from U.S. universities between the years 2010 and 2017. Time boundaries were defined to identify the beginning and end of the case (Yin, 2014). The start year was chosen because 2010 was a mid-point in the global financial crisis and Choudaha's second wave of international student mobility (Choudaha, 2017). The end year of 2017 was chosen because it marked the mid-point of Choudaha's third wave shaped by global economic and political factors. Additionally, participants were grouped into sub-cases for comparative analysis based on their home country. Comparing sub-cases by students' country of origin was intended to highlight differences based on home country economic, political, and social factors.

Participant Sampling and Recruitment

Participants in this study were non-U.S. citizens who attended post-secondary education institutions in the U.S. on temporary student visas (F or J). The majority of participants who were working in the U.S. at the time of the interviews did so on temporary visas (F-1, H-1B), with one participant having recently gained permanent residency (Green Card) status. Participants were recruited via social media outreach and from recommendations of two university staff members. A diverse sampling of participants from multiple case countries was targeted to gain the perspective of participants coming from countries with differing political, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Researchers intentionally recruited participants to be representative of international students studying in the U.S. where India and China account for over 50% of all international students (IIE, 2019). Participants' country of origin included Argentina, China, India, South Korea, Pakistan, Taiwan, Uganda, and one country on the U.S. travel ban list. The two participants whose home country is included on the travel ban list asked that their home country name not be included in this study.

Recruitment resulted in a final sample consisting of 14 participants who graduated between 2010 and 2017 from two public and two private U.S. universities in the Mid-Atlantic region. Although participants studies were limited to the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S., at the time of the study those who were living in the U.S. were located on the east coast, west coast, and the Midwest. Participant details can be found in Table 6.1. At the time of the interviews, nine participants were living and working in the U.S., three had returned to their home country, and two had moved to other countries to work.

Table 6.1 Participant Details

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Current U.S. Visa</i>	<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>Graduation Year</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Home Country</i>	<i>Location at time of Study</i>
Arjun	H-1B	Master's	2010	Technology	India	West Coast, U.S.
Bahman	OPT	Doctorate	2017	Consulting	Travel ban	East Coast, U.S.
Bao	N/A	Master's	2014	Hospitality	Taiwan	Taiwan
Chetan	N/A	Master's	2013	Technology	India	India
Dembe	N/A	Master's	2015	Finance	Uganda	Kenya
Ester	H-1B	Master's	2014	Finance	Travel ban	Midwest, U.S.
Guillermo	N/A	Bachelors	2015	Finance	Argentina	Argentina
Ishita	H-1B	Master's	2012	Retail	India	West Coast, U.S.
Ji-woo	Green Card	Bachelors	2010	Finance	South Korea	Midwest, U.S.
Kabir	H-1B	Master's	2013	Consulting	India	West Coast, U.S.
Kamila	H-1B	Master's	2015	Higher Education	Pakistan	East Coast, U.S.
Li Min	H-1B	Master's	2016	Pharmaceuticals	China	East Coast, U.S.
Vivek	N/A	Master's	2011	Consulting	India	U.K.
Yu Yan	H-1B	Master's	2014	Finance	China	East Coast, U.S.

Data Collection

Data were collected in the years 2017 and 2018 using 30–60-minute semi-structured interviews, the International Graduate Student/Alumni Mobility Survey, and systematic review of participants' LinkedIn profiles. Additional data were collected in June 2020 via a brief electronic survey requesting updates on participant work status and location along with one question asking: "How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your work/career?" Six of the fourteen original participants responded to the June 2020 survey.

Interviews were informed by Patton's perspective/world-based and activity focused unit of analysis, to explore students' perceptions as

they experienced the activity of work after completing a degree in the U.S. through the lens of their world-based culture (Patton, 2002). The perspective/world-based unit of analysis allowed for identification of factors that may differ by country of origin. This was accomplished by identifying influencing individual factors and then mapping them to participants' home countries. The activity focused unit of analysis looks at critical events in participants' lives: choosing a country for study, choosing whether to stay or leave, and choosing an employer. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, online via Adobe Connect, or on the phone using Google Voice. Online and phone interviews allowed for a convenient and confidential location for participants. Participants' permission was obtained for note taking and digital recording of interviews. Digital audio files were transcribed by a third party with transcript verification by researchers. Transcripts were used to clarify the researchers' notes. Two participants asked not to be recorded, so researchers relied on detailed interview notes. Study results and individual quotes were sent to participants for member checking to verify that data were represented as participants had intended.

Additionally, data were collected before the interview using the International Graduate Student/Alumni Mobility Survey. The survey is a modified version of the Graduate Students in Science Survey (GSSS) created by Han et al. (2015). Modifications were made with permission of the GSSS lead author. The survey collected data related to participants' reasons for studying in the U.S. and reasons for intending to stay in or leave the U.S. upon completion of studies. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify participants' responses to survey questions related to reasons for studying-in and staying-in or leaving the U.S. Survey data identified political, economic, and social factors impacting participants' decisions that were similar to the findings of the original GSSS survey data (Han et al., 2015). Findings of Han et al. (2015, 2016) and Gesing and Glass (2019) informed creation of the qualitative interview questions for this study.

Finally, additional data were collected using participant's LinkedIn profiles. LinkedIn is a widely recognized global social network for professionals. Prior to the interview, participants shared access to their public LinkedIn profiles. These profiles provided detailed demographic information about participants' education and work experience prior to and after study in the U.S. Participants' U.S. education and post-U.S. graduation work experience were coded and analyzed in connection with Patton's activity focused unit of analysis (Patton, 2002). Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was attained prior to conducting this study.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software. Two of the researchers independently coded and analyzed themes using pattern identification/correspondence and naturalistic generalization (Melrose, 2009; Stake, 1995), identifying patterns within the case and the country sub-cases. Naturalistic generalization allows for reflection on the details of the study to gain insights. Trustworthiness was established using a framework set by Shenton (2004) that included confirmability, dependability, transferability, and credibility. Data triangulation utilizing multiple forms of data collection allowed for cross-check of multiple sources, identifying areas of case convergence. Analytical triangulation included use of multiple coders and member checks throughout the research process in order to confirm data interpretation and integrity.

Results

Researchers identified three levels of themes within the data with Theme One: Political, economic, and cultural factors acting on Theme Two: Push-pull and reverse push-pull factors, leading to Theme Three: The decision to stay or leave (Figure 6.1). Political, economic, and social factors have been shown to impact students' intentions to study in the U.S. and stay in or leave the U.S. upon completion of studies (Gesing & Glass, 2019; Han & Appelbaum, 2016; Lee & Kim, 2010) acting as a push or pull in the decision making process (Altbach, 2004; Carr et al., 2005; Li & Bray, 2007). In the current study, data analysis indicated that political and economic factors acted as both pushes and pulls in the decision to stay in or leave the host country with the interview data providing context to the phenomenon.

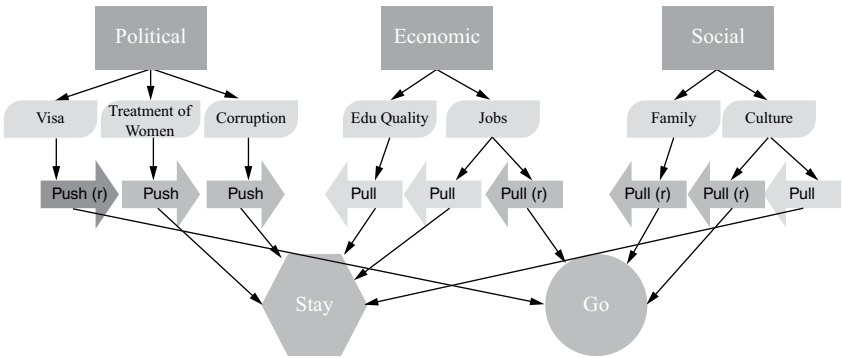


Figure 6.1 Three Theme Levels

Political Factors

Survey data identified several political factors impacting participants' intent to stay in or leave the host country upon graduation including home country politics, host country politics, visa/immigration reasons, and political reasons (Table 6.2). The survey data were supported by the

Table 6.2 Survey Data

Question	Response
What factors influenced your decision to study in the U.S.?	Higher quality of education $n = 13$ Future career opportunities in the U.S. $n = 10$ Wanted to experience living abroad $n = 10$ Wanted to live in the U.S. $n = 5$ Home country politics $n = 5$ Future career opportunities non-U.S. $n = 4$ Host country politics $n = 1$ Lower cost $n = 1$
What factors led you to stay in the U.S. after graduation?	Job $n = 10$, Quality of life $n = 10$ Salary $n = 5$ Professional network $n = 5$ Cultural reasons $n = 5$ Social reasons $n = 5$ Home country politics $n = 4$ Geographic location $n = 3$ Political reasons $n = 2$ Friends $n = 2$ Visa/immigration reasons $n = 1$ Host country politics $n = 1$ Job for my family member $n = 1$
Does your U.S. education give you any advantages in your career?	Definitely $n = 8$ Probably yes $n = 4$ Might or might not $n = 2$
Please select any challenges you may have encountered while adjusting to American educational culture?	Financial $n = 9$ Cultural $n = 8$ Social $n = 7$ Visa $n = 6$ Language $n = 5$ Academic $n = 4$ Racial $n = 3$
Do you plan to return to your home country?	Might or might not $n = 3$ Probably not $n = 3$ Definitely not $n = 2$ No response $n = 6$
What factors led you to leave the U.S.?	Family $n = 2$ Job opportunity $n = 1$ Geographic location $n = 1$ Professional network $n = 1$

interview responses of participants with U.S. visa policy being the most frequently mentioned political factor acting as a reverse push, forcing participants to leave, or consider leaving the country.

Host Country Politics

Under the current U.S. presidential administration, visa and immigration policy is highly politicized and is the subject of ongoing debate. Interview data indicated that U.S. visa and immigration policy was a political factor of concern to 12 of the 14 participants, with U.S. visa and immigration policy acting as a reverse push, forcing some participants to leave the country. It also impacted those who were residing in the U.S. at the time of the study, forcing them to consider leaving. Participants who were working in the U.S. on H-1B visas at the time of the study found it more challenging to renew visas than in the past. Kabir, who was in the U.S. at the time of the study, spoke of the loss of confidence in his ability to remain in the U.S.

We don't know if I'll even be allowed to stay here beyond with all these ever-changing policies, and ever-changing approach from the government and authorities that we've been hearing every now and then in newspapers. They're trying to cut down the visas...That confidence is lost because we just don't know how things are evolving every day in terms of visa...I'm not able to strategically plan anything...I am in a position to buy a house now, but I cannot because I don't want to start buying a home wherein I wouldn't be able to do anything about it.

Vivek, who worked in the U.S. after graduation but had recently moved to the U.K. at the time of the study, stated that the H-1B visa situation was one of the reasons he moved.

The other aspect of it was the H-1B Visa situation was getting nowhere. It was the path to green card for a person like me coming from India is quite arduous, so to speak. It takes forever to get a green card...It's been hard all the way long. I think with the new administration, it got a little worse, because I think the new administration is trying to make the process more time consuming, more checks and controls, which is making it more expensive for firms to consider hiring an H-1B candidate, because it's more cost for them.

In 2017, the U.S. administration enacted a travel ban on seven, mostly Muslim countries. This ban impacted participants who were in the U.S. when the ban was enacted. Participants who were in the U.S. from countries on the administration's travel ban list felt the impact on their ability

to travel outside the U.S. or to return to their home country to visit their families. Ester, a participant from one of the banned countries hoped to attain her green card soon. At the time of the study, she had not returned to her home country since she came to the U.S. to study in 2012.

Because H-1B is a one entry visa. And every time you go out, you need to go to embassy and get another visa just based on my nationality... You have to go through security clearance. Which takes few months and my company couldn't wait for me being outside the U.S. for like 5-9 months getting my clearance so I couldn't travel out until I have some kind of a green card... With the travel ban my parents, on the initial ban, my parents couldn't come in. Even if they had their, like daughter here.

Participants' experiences illustrate how international students are impacted by the uncertainty of the immigration process. Host country political factors related to visa and immigration policy are impacting higher education at the student level as well as the institutional level, with prospective students considering opportunities outside the U.S. Participants' experiences also illustrate how immigration policies are impacting U.S. employers who may not be willing to spend the additional time and money required to hire and retain international students.

Home Country Politics

Results of the survey indicated that participants were pushed to study abroad and to stay abroad to work because of home country politics. Bahman, a participant from a travel ban country, was working in the U.S. as a consultant at the time of the study. Although his parents were still in his home country, he did not see a time in the near future when he would return.

So, I graduated from the number one university in [home country]. So, I should have the job if I want to, and I should have a job with a good payment. But say you want to go to a governmental institution, part of the process of hiring is they ask you religious questions. Well, I'm not religious. So, I'm not comfortable answering them. But if I want it there, I have to be able to answer that.

Some of the female participants stated that they were less likely to return to their home countries where attitudes about women were more restrictive. These countries included Pakistan, South Korea, China, and one of the travel ban countries. Ji-woo, a participant from South Korea, who was working in the Midwest at the time of the study, stated that she would not return to South Korea because it is "behind on social issues like

women's rights, mental health." Ester also talked about the cultural fit in the west compared to her home country. "I feel more comfortable living here ... For example, back home I need to wear scarf. I have little things like me deciding what kind of clothes I want to wear." Two male participants who stated that they would consider returning to India because of improved economic conditions, said that they hesitated to return because of lack of safety for women including their wives and daughters.

Economic Factors

Survey data indicated that economic factors in both home and host country impacted participants' decisions to study in the U.S. as well as their decision to stay or leave after completing their studies. Higher quality of education, career and job opportunities, and overall quality of life were factors identified in the survey data. Interview data identified differences based on participants' country of origin regarding consideration of returning to their home country for work.

Host Country Economic Factors

Results of the survey indicated that 13 of 14 participants chose to study in the U.S. because of the higher quality of education, and 10 of the participants also chose to study and stay in the U.S. for career opportunities. Quality of education equates to an economic factor, as many of the participants indicated that they made the decision to study in the U.S. because of the quality of U.S. higher education and the impact a U.S. education could have on job opportunities in the host country and home country. Dembe, a participant from Uganda was working for a U.S. multinational enterprise (MNE) in Kenya at the time of the study. "I wanted to do the MBA, but I was sure that I did not want to do the MBA at home because I wanted better quality education." Six other participants also stated that they chose to study in the U.S. because of the quality of education. Vivek added, "Your skills are more valued outside the country, and there's also—there's a prestige that comes with it."

Home Country Economic Factors

Home country economic factors impacted participants' decisions to return home after graduation, with improving economies in some countries impacting the decision to return home after working in the U.S. Bao, from Taiwan, was willing to return home after graduation because of opportunities to work with MNEs. Many participants from India stated that they were more likely to consider returning home at the time of the study, than they were when they came to the U.S. to study abroad. Some stated that the growth of start-up culture and increase in MNEs in India provided new opportunities and higher salaries than in the past, acting

as a reverse pull home. This is a change from the past, when there were few opportunities in India that would allow repayment of student loans. Vivek is interested in the growth of the startup culture in India, as well as the expansion of MNEs.

Now India has a very good opportunity too—a lot of startups in Bangalore, which is where I'm from. If I get a good opportunity, then certainly, I would like to go back. With a lot of startups coming up in India, there are new opportunities that are opening up... Because of these multinational companies being present, I think it forces the Indian companies to be more competent.

Although India's economy is growing, participants from other countries were less willing to return to countries where the economy was stagnant. In Uganda politics and economics have particularly impacted the economy. Dembe mentioned the interplay of politics and economics as a factor for her decision to study in the U.S. and work in Kenya rather than return to Uganda.

The uncertainty in global partnerships, U.S. visa policy, and ongoing trade wars are just beginning to impact student mobility. Developing countries like India, Taiwan, and China may pull students to return and work for MNEs and start-ups, while visa policies and trade wars may push students to locations outside the U.S. for study and work. This can lead to greater economic growth for developing countries and a loss of talent for the U.S.

Global Economic Factors

COVID-19 has had immediate and profound impacts on the global economy with record high unemployment and economic recession. Responses to the follow-up survey sent to participants in June 2020 provided a broad range of responses to the question "How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your work/career?": from "Don't have much impact, beside working from home" to "Salary got slashed" and "People are less inclined to consider a person on visa for the job." In addition, participants stated that projects and job start dates were put on hold. These survey responses indicate that short- and long-term impacts are already being felt by the globally mobile student population.

Social Factors

Survey data indicated that social, cultural, language, and racial challenges were experienced by participants, however interview data indicated that these factors did not directly impact participants' decision to stay or

leave. Instead participants identified ways to address cultural differences while working in the U.S.

Host Country Culture

Participants from Uganda, Argentina, China, and Taiwan expressed an interest in being immersed in a different culture. Bao, a participant who returned to her home country, wanted to broaden her vision and improve her skills in order to do business with western countries. Other participants from China and Taiwan pointed to cultural reasons for returning to their home countries including career achievement, family, and access to a metropolitan environment.

Host Country Neo-Racism

Results of the survey indicated that participants experienced cultural challenges and racial challenges while adjusting to American educational culture. Several participants discussed adapting to U.S. culture and experiencing racism and cultural ignorance. Participants talked about adapting and adjusting to ignorance about their culture. Dembe commented:

People are ignorant about your background or where you come from. Because all they see or all they know is what they probably see on TV, so they have very limited knowledge. Sometimes their questions used to annoy me. But eventually you realize that they are being ignorant about things. It's not that they are racist, but they just don't know.

Participants' responses to questions about host country neo-racism indicated that they made an effort to live in areas of the country that were more open to diversity, and to acculturate to their surroundings rather than expecting domestic students and coworkers to learn about their culture. Participants did not state that these factors directly impacted their decision to stay or leave, but they did discuss how cultural factors and neo-racism altered their adaptation to U.S. culture.

Discussion

The results of this study show a complex mix of push and pull factors impacting participants' decisions throughout their time in the U.S. with differences found based on students' country of origin. In spite of visa challenges over one million international students studied in the U.S. in the 2018/2019 academic year (IIE, 2019). Economic, political, and social push-pull factors initially influenced students to study outside their home

country, however results of this study indicate that political and economic factors have the greatest influence on students' decision to stay or leave.

The participants in this study illustrate the complexity of the reverse push-pull factors impacting their decision to stay or leave upon completion of studies. For those who wish to stay, visa policy was most frequently referenced as a reverse push factor whether it was directly due to loss of visa status or indirectly due to uncertainty about maintaining long-term status. Home country politics were also a push factor for students from Pakistan, South Korea, Uganda, and the travel ban country. Home country politics impacting personal freedom and women's rights were most frequently mentioned.

Economic factors acted as a pull to the U.S. because of the quality of education and the impact that a U.S. education was perceived to have in the U.S. and international job market. This is consistent with other studies that have found economic factors play a role in international students coming to the U.S. to study (Altbach, 2004; Gesing & Glass, 2019; Han et al., 2015; Roh, 2015). Economic factors continued to act as a pull to remain as participants found jobs in the U.S. Participants who returned to their home country or left for another country either did so for family or because of job opportunities closer to their home country. Overall upon completing their U.S. studies and entering the job market, participants confirmed their earlier assumption that the quality of U.S. education has a positive impact on their career outcomes.

Participants from India indicated that changing economic factors in their home country could act as a reverse pull factor, expressing optimism for the economy and job market that they had not felt when they came to the U.S. to study. Participants from China and Taiwan were also willing to return home due to economic growth and career opportunities with MNEs. This is in line with research results showing that some international students value international education as a key to employment with MNEs in their home country (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). Although these growing economies have not resulted in adequate higher education opportunities for their growing populations, U.S. higher education institutions and employers should continue to monitor the changes in the economy, as economic changes could impact the numbers of students who wish to stay in the U.S. after completion of studies.

Several participants discussed cultural challenges, and experiences of neo-racism while in the U.S., however these challenges were not identified as factors impacting the decision to stay or leave. Regardless, it is important that higher education institutions provide resources for international students and implicit bias and cultural humility training for faculty, staff, and domestic students. In addition, international student advisors need to be aware of the neo-racism international students experience in order to provide resources to help international students navigate these challenges.

It is too early to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on student mobility and the job market; however, U.S. higher education institutions have predicted a decrease in international student enrollments in the 2020–2021 academic year (Martel, 2020). The findings of the follow-up survey of participants in this study indicate that graduating students who studied outside their home countries may face additional challenges in the job market in the next year including increased unemployment and U.S. employer unwillingness to hire applicants on temporary visas.

This study provides insights from a small sample of the U.S. international student population and is not meant to be representative of all international students studying in the U.S. Instead this study should be considered along with studies utilizing larger samples. Additional limitations of the study include the fact that 13 of the 14 participants were known to the first author through previous work as a career advisor. Although participants' location of study was limited to the mid-Atlantic region, participants post-study geographic range was broader and included the east and west coast of the U.S., the U.S. Midwest, and Argentina, Taiwan, India, England, and Kenya. Since completing the initial survey and interview several participants have changed jobs and/or countries. One participant moved back to the U.S. after briefly working abroad; one participant who left the U.S. for a job after graduation has since moved to Slovakia. Additionally, three participants changed employers within the U.S.

Implications

This study amplifies the voices of international students who studied in the U.S. and provides insight into their decision-making process about where to pursue a career. In particular, this study highlights the concerns about the uncertainty of U.S. immigration and visa policy, and how the political and economic climate in the U.S. has a tangible impact on graduates' career trajectories.

Research has shown that economic, political, and cultural factors impact international students' intentions to stay or leave (Gesing & Glass, 2019; Han & Appelbaum, 2016; Shen & Herr, 2004), however, this study indicates that in the current political and economic climate, participants are most impacted by U.S. visa policy and the ability to continue their career in the U.S. COVID-19 has had a swift impact on the global economy, creating job uncertainty especially for participants who are on temporary visas in the U.S. If the U.S. is to maintain a leadership role in business, technology, and innovation, policymakers and business leaders need to understand international students' perspectives and advocate for immigration policy changes that provide more certainty for high-skilled workers. As immigration policy continues to

change in the U.S. and abroad, future research should explore international students' reasons for studying and working outside their home country.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the changing global economy was leading to economic growth in many students' home countries, resulting in a greater willingness of international students to return to their home countries for work. Higher education institutions should be aware of the challenges international students face in obtaining jobs in the U.S., as well as the career opportunities found in their home country economies where MNEs and start-up culture are providing new career opportunities. While these changes provide positive outcomes for developing countries, it is important that U.S. higher education institutions and employers prepare for a change in the availability of globally mobile talent. Higher education institutions should partner with industry to provide global work opportunities while advocating for policy changes that allow for greater ease of hiring in the U.S. workforce.

Although the COVID-19 crisis will likely decrease student mobility in the near future, international students will choose to study in the U.S. for the economic benefits that a U.S. education brings to their career. As economic and political factors create fluctuations in the number of international students going into the U.S. workforce, higher education institutions should closely monitor the barriers and opportunities impacting international students' career outcomes. The push for nationalism in many countries has already impacted the flow of globally mobile talent, changing the patterns of economic growth and innovation. China's warning about the risks of U.S. visas for Chinese students studying abroad is only one indication of the impact that student mobility has on the global economy (Redden, 2019a). The results of visa uncertainty and instability in U.S. trade could threaten the U.S.'s position in the global economy, as developing economies in India and China begin to provide more opportunities for career growth. China, South Korea, and Singapore have all invested considerably in higher education, threatening the place of western institutions as higher education leaders (de Wit & Altbach, 2018). With India, China, and South Korea accounting for over 56% of students studying outside their home country (IIE, 2019), international students from these countries are a critical part of global mobility. Impacts of this instability could have long-term and lasting effects on the standings of the global economy.

Author Biographies

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Natalie Cruz is a Ph.D. candidate studying higher education at Old Dominion University, where she also holds a graduate research assistantship in the Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership. Prior to the Ph.D. program, she was a faculty advisor at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates and the Director of International Student Life at Emory University. Her research is focused on changing modes of global student mobility, the holistic experiences of international students worldwide, and entrepreneurship in international education.

Dr. R. Jason Lynch is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education at Appalachian State University, US. He is a passionate educator and innovative scholar-practitioner. He is a native North Carolinian and first-generation college student, growing up in a small rural town in the southeastern region of the state. His scholarship and teaching is informed by his practical experience in a diverse array of higher education functional areas. Through his research and service centering the impact of traumatic stress in education contexts, he is committed to equipping educators and educational leaders with the tools to provide transformational learning opportunities for students while also fostering the growth and well-being of staff, faculty, and leadership. His work has been featured in publication outlets including *The Review of Higher Education* and *The Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, as well as at numerous regional and national conferences. Dr. Lynch holds bachelor's degrees in biology and psychology from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, a master's of higher education administration from North Carolina State University, and a doctorate in higher education from Old Dominion University.

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