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Dreaming beyond home: Aspirations and perceived support for overseas higher education among Bangladeshi female university students

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Abstract:

Bangladeshi women's aspirations for overseas higher education emerge amid perceived limitations in domestic education and political instability, while varying perceptions of family and university support raise questions about equitable opportunities to study abroad. This study describes the aspirations of female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST), comparing perceived push and pull factors, opportunities for personal development, and family and institutional support. A quantitative cross-sectional survey involved 200 female students, 100 from each university, recruited through convenience sampling. Structured questionnaire data collected in October 2025 were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS 20. Two findings emerged. First, most respondents aspired to study abroad (DU: 75%; PUST: 76%). Perceived push factors included inadequate domestic educational quality, limited research opportunities, and political instability; pull factors included the quality of overseas education, university reputation, program diversity, and career prospects. Second, studying abroad was viewed as an opportunity for personal development and independence by 80% of DU respondents and 86% of PUST respondents. Agreement regarding expected emotional and financial family support was higher at PUST (79%) than at DU (56%), as was agreement across university support indicators. Thus, similar aspiration levels coexisted with different perceptions of support, underscoring the distinction between educational aspirations, expected benefits, and perceived resources. By bringing push–pull and women's empowerment perspectives together as interpretive lenses, this study provides evidence to inform evaluations of information services, scholarship guidance, and institutional support for women.

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INTRODUCTION

International education constitutes an important component of higher education mobility. UNESCO (2024) reported that 6.4 million students studied outside their home countries in 2021. King and Sondhi (2018) examined the motivations of British and Indian students, while Trelfa et al. (2024) explored the relationship between foreign media consumption and aspirations for global mobility among Japanese students. Fakunle (2021) identified educational, experiential, aspirational, and economic dimensions underlying international study motivations. In Bangladesh, Khatun et al. (2024) found that young people perceived foreign degrees as more valuable than domestic qualifications. Alamgir (2023) reported that the number of students studying abroad had tripled over a 15-year period. *Bangladesh Education Statistics 2023* indicated that women accounted for 37.47% of university students (BANBEIS, 2024). Kabir (2021) identified differences in migration motivations between male and female students. However, educational participation statistics and migration studies have not fully explained how Bangladeshi female students perceive international education opportunities in relation to their academic circumstances, family contexts, and university environments.

Previous research on student migration for higher education can be categorized into three main strands. First, studies conducted in Nepal and India have associated international study aspirations with educational quality, academic opportunities, career prospects, employment opportunities, income, and social mobility (Tamang & Shrestha, 2021; Baral et al., 2024; Skariah & Sivarenjini, 2024). Second, several studies have highlighted the role of family and social networks in shaping aspirations to study abroad, as well as the relationship between gender relations, career considerations, personal safety, and educational mobility (Cherian & Rajan, 2024; Kabir, 2021; Rajan et al., 2024; Sondhi & King, 2017). Third, research on Bangladeshi students has linked educational migration aspirations to weak governance, political instability, and limited opportunities in domestic education, as well as to opportunities for education, research, and careers abroad (Zaman et al., 2024; Rashid, 2024; Hossain et al., 2025; Aktar et al., 2025). Despite these developments, limited attention has been paid to how Bangladeshi female university students' aspirations for overseas education coexist with their perceptions of family and institutional support. From a women's empowerment perspective, this distinction is important because educational aspirations do not necessarily reflect access to the resources needed to pursue them. This study addresses this gap by descriptively comparing female students at two universities with respect to their aspirations, academic considerations, anticipated benefits of personal development, and perceived family and institutional support.

This study aims to describe the aspirations of female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) to pursue higher education abroad and to compare their perceptions of academic considerations, opportunities for personal development, and family and university support. Two research questions are proposed: (1) What are the patterns of aspirations to study abroad and perceptions of the associated push and pull factors among the respondents? (2) What are the similarities and differences in the distribution of responses regarding personal development, independence, and family and university support between DU and PUST respondents? Theoretically, this study offers a descriptive interpretation of women's international education aspirations by integrating the push–pull framework and a women's empowerment perspective to understand academic factors and perceived available social resources. Practically, this study provides information for evaluating the reach of

international study services, scholarship guidance, and support available to female students as they plan their education.

This study is grounded in the view that women's international education aspirations should be understood alongside their assessments of domestic educational conditions, the attractiveness of overseas education, and family and university support. The push–pull framework developed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) is employed to interpret perceptions of domestic push factors and the pull factors associated with overseas education. Kabeer's (1999) perspective on women's empowerment complements this interpretation through the concepts of resources, agency, and achievements. In this study, expected family support and perceptions of university support are interpreted as indicators of available resources, while opportunities for personal development and independence are understood as expected educational benefits. These measurements do not directly capture achievements in agency or empowerment. Both frameworks are therefore used to interpret women's international education aspirations within academic and social contexts, while limiting the analysis to patterns of respondents' perceptions without drawing conclusions about causal relationships or the direct achievement of empowerment.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive cross-sectional design, in which variables were measured at a single point in time without repeated measurements of the same respondents (Pérez-Guerrero et al., 2024; Setia, 2016). The study describes female students' aspirations to pursue higher education abroad and their perceptions of domestic education, the attractiveness of international education, personal development, and family and university support. Two research questions were addressed: first, what are the patterns of aspirations to study abroad and perceptions of the associated push and pull factors? Second, what are the similarities and differences in responses concerning personal development, independence, and family and university support between female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST)? Comparisons were conducted using frequency and percentage distributions to identify patterns of respondents' answers across each research indicator. The analysis did not test relationships between variables or draw conclusions about causal effects.

Data Collection

This study used primary data and secondary sources concerning women's international education aspirations (Kelly et al., 2024; Cascini et al., 2024). Primary data were collected in October 2025 through structured questionnaires administered to 200 female students, comprising 100 respondents from DU and 100 from PUST. The questionnaire covered university affiliation, age, educational level, and year of study, and aspirations to study abroad, with response options of "yes", "no", or "undecided". Perceptions were assessed regarding domestic education and political instability; educational quality, university reputation, program diversity, and career prospects; personal development, independence, and expected family support; and encouragement from lecturers and from seminars or workshops organized by student organizations or universities. Responses were categorized as "agree", "neutral", or "disagree". Personal development and independence, as well as emotional and financial support, were each

measured using a single statement, without separate analyses of their components. An expert reviewed the alignment of questionnaire items with the research objectives and measurement dimensions to assess content validity (Artino et al., 2014). Journal articles, news reports, and websites provided additional context concerning international education and gender in Bangladesh and supported the interpretation of the findings.

Sampling and Survey Distribution

This study employed non-probability convenience sampling because of limited access to prospective respondents (Ahmed, 2024). The survey was distributed through student groups, email, and social media, yielding a sample of 200 female students, with 100 respondents from each university. Online distribution enabled the study to reach female students with internet access who were connected to the survey distribution channels. However, this mechanism may have introduced coverage and self-selection biases, as participation depended on survey accessibility and respondents' willingness to complete the questionnaire. Online activity was not treated as an indicator of interest in studying abroad. Accordingly, the findings describe the responses of participating students and are not considered statistically representative of all female students at the two universities or across Bangladesh.

Theoretical Framework for Analysis

The findings were interpreted using the push–pull framework developed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), which categorized perceptions of limitations in domestic education and research opportunities, as well as political instability, as push factors. Meanwhile, the quality of overseas education, university reputation, diversity of academic programs, and career prospects were categorized as pull factors. Its application was limited to general perceptions of studying abroad without measuring the selection of specific destination countries or universities. Kabeer's (1999) perspective on women's empowerment complemented this interpretation through the concepts of resources, agency, and achievements. Expected family support and perceptions of university support were interpreted as resources perceived to be available, while assessments of personal development and independence reflected anticipated benefits. Decision-making capacity, negotiation of educational choices, and empowerment achievements following the international study were not directly measured. Therefore, Kabeer's perspective was employed as an interpretive lens rather than as an empowerment model whose dimensions were fully operationalized and tested.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20 through descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to describe respondents' characteristics, study aspirations, and responses to each research indicator (De Pilli et al., 2024). Percentages for demographic and academic characteristics were calculated using the total sample of 200 respondents, whereas percentages for aspirations and perceptions were calculated separately for the 100 female students at each university. The results were presented in frequency and percentage distribution tables. Comparisons between DU and PUST examined the proportions of response categories and percentage-point differences for corresponding indicators. Agreement represented the proportion of respondents who endorsed a particular statement rather than the magnitude of its influence on aspirations. Response patterns were interpreted through the push–pull framework and the women's empowerment perspective by distinguishing educational aspirations, anticipated educational benefits, and perceived support. As the analysis was descriptive,

percentage differences were not interpreted as evidence of statistical significance, relationships between variables, or causality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Demographic and academic characteristics of respondents

This study involved 200 female students from two higher education institutions in Bangladesh, namely the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST). Respondents' characteristics were presented according to university affiliation, age, educational level, and year of study. The distribution of these characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
University Affiliation		
University of Dhaka	100	50.0
Pabna University of Science and Technology	100	50.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**
Age		
18–20 years	10	5.0
21–23 years	117	58.5
24–26 years	73	36.5
Total	**200**	**100.0**
Educational Level and Year of Study		
Undergraduate (Honours), First Year	10	5.0
Undergraduate (Honours), Second Year	43	21.5
Undergraduate (Honours), Third Year	45	22.5
Undergraduate (Honours), Fourth Year	59	29.5
Master's Degree	43	21.5
Total	**200**	**100.0**

Source: Field research data (2025).

Table 1 shows that respondents were equally distributed between the two universities, with 100 female students (50.0%) from each institution. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were 21–23 years old, comprising 117 students (58.5%), followed by 73 students (36.5%) aged 24–26 years. Meanwhile, 10 respondents (5.0%) were aged 18–20 years. Overall, 95.0% of respondents were between 21 and 26 years old.

Regarding educational level, 157 female students (78.5%) were enrolled in undergraduate programs, while 43 students (21.5%) were pursuing master's degrees. The undergraduate respondents comprised 10 first-year students, 43 second-year students, 45 third-year students, and 59 fourth-year students, representing 5.0%, 21.5%, 22.5%, and 29.5% of the total sample, respectively. Thus, the sample was predominantly composed of female students aged 21–26 years and those enrolled in undergraduate programs, with fourth-year students representing the largest category by year of study.

Bangladeshi female students' aspirations to pursue higher education abroad

Aspirations to study abroad were measured using the expressed intentions of female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) and the Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST). The distribution of responses from each group is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Aspirations of Female Students to Pursue Higher Education Abroad

Response	DU (n)	DU (%)	PUST (n)	PUST (%)
Yes	75	75.0	76	76.0
No	6	6.0	10	10.0
Undecided	19	19.0	14	14.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**	**100**	**100.0**

Note. DU = University of Dhaka; PUST = Pabna University of Science and Technology; n = number of respondents. Source: Field research data, October 2025.

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents at both universities expressed a desire to pursue higher education abroad, comprising 75 female students from DU (75.0%) and 76 from PUST (76.0%). Meanwhile, 19 DU respondents (19.0%) and 14 PUST respondents (14.0%) were undecided, whereas 6 DU respondents (6.0%) and 10 PUST respondents (10.0%) indicated that they were not interested in studying abroad.

Descriptively, aspirations to study abroad showed nearly identical patterns across the two universities, with a difference of only one percentage point in the proportion of affirmative responses. However, the proportion of undecided respondents was higher at DU, while the proportion expressing no interest was higher at PUST. These findings indicate similar levels of expressed aspirations, accompanied by variations in uncertainty and lack of interest, providing a basis for examining perceptions of push factors, pull factors, and support for international study in the following sections.

Female students' perceptions of push factors for studying abroad

This study examined the perceptions of female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) regarding domestic educational conditions and political circumstances as push factors for studying abroad. Three indicators were examined: assessments of the adequacy of domestic educational quality in supporting career goals, limited research opportunities, and the influence of political instability on decisions to pursue higher education abroad. The distribution of respondents' answers is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Female Students' Perceptions of Push Factors for Studying Abroad

Indicator	University	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)
Educational quality in Bangladesh is inadequate to support career goals	DU	53 (53.0)	30 (30.0)	17 (17.0)
	PUST	65 (65.0)	24 (24.0)	11 (11.0)
Limited research opportunities in Bangladesh	DU	83 (83.0)	8 (8.0)	9 (9.0)
	PUST	87 (87.0)	11 (11.0)	2 (2.0)
Political instability influences decisions to study abroad	DU	85 (85.0)	10 (10.0)	5 (5.0)
	PUST	78 (78.0)	15 (15.0)	7 (7.0)

Note. DU = University of Dhaka; PUST = Pabna University of Science and Technology; n = number of respondents. Source: Field research data, October 2025.

Table 3 shows that statements concerning limited research opportunities and the influence of political instability received higher levels of agreement than the statement regarding domestic educational quality at both universities. A total of 83 DU respondents (83.0%) and 87 PUST respondents (87.0%) agreed that research opportunities in Bangladesh were limited. Meanwhile, 85 DU respondents (85.0%) and 78 PUST respondents (78.0%) agreed that political instability influenced decisions to pursue higher education abroad. Agreement with the statement that domestic educational quality was inadequate to support career goals was recorded at 53.0% among DU respondents and 65.0% among PUST respondents. For this indicator, the proportions of neutral responses reached 30.0% at DU and 24.0% at PUST, higher than those recorded for the other two indicators.

Descriptively, differences in response patterns were observed between respondents from the two universities. At DU, the highest proportion of agreement was recorded for political instability, whereas at PUST, it was recorded for limited research opportunities. The proportion of respondents who agreed that political instability influenced decisions to study abroad was higher at DU than at PUST, by 7 percentage points. Conversely, agreement with the statement that domestic educational quality was inadequate to support career goals was higher at PUST by 12 percentage points. Limited research opportunities received high levels of agreement at both universities, with a difference of four percentage points. These findings illustrate similarities and differences in respondents' assessments of domestic conditions examined as push factors for studying abroad. However, these distributions do not establish statistical associations or causal relationships between the three indicators and respondents' aspirations to study abroad.

Perceptions of pull factors for studying abroad

This study examined the perceptions of female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) and the Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) regarding the attractiveness of overseas higher education, using four indicators: educational quality, university reputation, diversity of academic programs, and career prospects. The distribution of responses from 200 respondents, comprising 100 female students from each university, is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Perceptions of Pull Factors for Studying Abroad

Indicator	University	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)
Educational quality at foreign universities is better than in Bangladesh	DU	86 (86.0)	10 (10.0)	4 (4.0)
	PUST	74 (74.0)	21 (21.0)	5 (5.0)
The reputation of international universities influences decisions to study abroad	DU	81 (81.0)	15 (15.0)	4 (4.0)
	PUST	90 (90.0)	8 (8.0)	2 (2.0)
The diversity of academic programs at foreign universities is an attraction	DU	85 (85.0)	12 (12.0)	3 (3.0)
	PUST	83 (83.0)	15 (15.0)	2 (2.0)
Overseas education can improve career prospects	DU	84 (84.0)	10 (10.0)	6 (6.0)
	PUST	98 (98.0)	2 (2.0)	0 (0.0)

Note. DU = University of Dhaka; PUST = Pabna University of Science and Technology; n = number of respondents. Source: Field research data, October 2025.

Table 4 shows that the majority of respondents at both universities agreed with all four statements concerning the attractiveness of overseas higher education. A total of 86 DU respondents (86.0%) and 74 PUST respondents (74.0%) agreed that the quality of education at

foreign universities was better than that offered by universities in Bangladesh. The statement that university reputation influenced decisions to study abroad received agreement from 81 DU respondents (81.0%) and 90 PUST respondents (90.0%). Meanwhile, the diversity of academic programs was considered an attraction by 85 DU respondents (85.0%) and 83 PUST respondents (83.0%). Regarding career prospects, 84 DU respondents (84.0%) and 98 PUST respondents (98.0%) agreed that overseas higher education could improve career prospects. No PUST respondents expressed disagreement with the latter statement.

Descriptively, educational quality received the highest level of agreement at DU, whereas career prospects received the highest level of agreement at PUST. The proportion of respondents who agreed that overseas education offered superior educational quality was 12 percentage points higher at DU than at PUST. Conversely, agreement with statements regarding the influence of university reputation and the improvement of career prospects was higher at PUST, by 9 and 14 percentage points, respectively. The largest difference between the two groups was observed in the career prospects indicator, while the smallest was in the diversity of academic programs, at 2 percentage points. These response patterns indicate that respondents at both universities perceived overseas higher education as offering academic attractions and anticipated career benefits, although the rankings of indicators by proportion of agreement differed between the two groups.

Perceptions of personal development and family support

This study examined the perceptions of female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) regarding opportunities for personal development and independence through overseas higher education, as well as their expectations of family support for such studies. Two indicators were examined: opportunities for personal development and independence, and the emotional and financial support expected from family members. The distribution of respondents' answers is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Perceptions of Personal Development and Family Support

Indicator	University	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)
Overseas education provides opportunities for personal development and independence	DU	80 (80.0)	17 (17.0)	3 (3.0)
	PUST	86 (86.0)	9 (9.0)	5 (5.0)
Families will provide emotional and financial support for studying abroad	DU	56 (56.0)	21 (21.0)	23 (23.0)
	PUST	79 (79.0)	16 (16.0)	5 (5.0)

Note. DU = University of Dhaka; PUST = Pabna University of Science and Technology; n = number of respondents. Source: Field research data, October 2025.

Table 5 shows that the majority of respondents at both universities agreed that overseas higher education provides opportunities for personal development and independence, comprising 80 DU respondents (80.0%) and 86 PUST respondents (86.0%). Meanwhile, agreement with the statement that families would provide emotional and financial support was recorded at 56.0% among DU respondents and 79.0% among PUST respondents. The proportion of respondents disagreeing with the statement regarding expected family support was higher at DU (23.0%) than at PUST (5.0%). Neutral responses to this indicator accounted for 21.0% and 16.0%, respectively.

Descriptively, the difference between the two groups was greater for expected family support, with a 23-percentage-point difference in agreement, compared with a six-percentage-point difference for opportunities for personal development and independence. At both universities, agreement on opportunities for personal development and independence was higher than on expected family support, with differences of 24 percentage points at DU and 7 percentage points at PUST. This pattern indicates that positive perceptions of the personal development benefits of studying abroad were more common than expectations of receiving family support, particularly among DU respondents. However, these comparisons apply at the group level and do not establish whether respondents who perceived opportunities for personal development and independence were the same individuals who did not expect to receive family support.

Perceptions of support within the university environment

This study examined the perceptions of female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) regarding three forms of support within the university environment for pursuing higher education abroad. These forms of support included encouragement from lecturers, seminars or workshops organized by student organizations, and similar activities organized by universities. The distribution of responses from 200 respondents, comprising 100 female students from each university, is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Perceptions of Support within the University Environment

Indicator	University	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)
Lecturers encourage students to pursue higher education abroad	DU	54 (54.0)	39 (39.0)	7 (7.0)
	PUST	77 (77.0)	11 (11.0)	12 (12.0)
Student organizations organize seminars or workshops that encourage studying abroad	DU	44 (44.0)	40 (40.0)	16 (16.0)
	PUST	53 (53.0)	27 (27.0)	20 (20.0)
Universities organize seminars or workshops to encourage studying abroad	DU	40 (40.0)	38 (38.0)	22 (22.0)
	PUST	61 (61.0)	18 (18.0)	21 (21.0)

Note. DU = University of Dhaka; PUST = Pabna University of Science and Technology; n = number of respondents. Source: Field research data, October 2025.

Table 6 shows that the proportion of respondents expressing agreement was higher at PUST than at DU across all three indicators. The statement regarding encouragement from lecturers received agreement from 54 DU respondents (54.0%) and 77 PUST respondents (77.0%). The statement concerning seminars or workshops organized by student organizations was endorsed by 44 DU respondents (44.0%) and 53 PUST respondents (53.0%). Meanwhile, the statement regarding university-organized activities received agreement from 40 DU respondents (40.0%) and 61 PUST respondents (61.0%).

Encouragement from lecturers received the highest proportion of agreement at both universities. Conversely, the lowest proportion of agreement at DU was for university-organized activities, whereas at PUST it was for student-organized activities. The largest difference in agreement between the two groups was observed for encouragement from lecturers, at 23 percentage points, followed by university-organized activities at 21 percentage points and student organization activities at nine percentage points.

The proportion of neutral responses was higher at DU across all indicators, reaching 39.0% for encouragement from lecturers, 40.0% for activities organized by student organizations, and 38.0% for university-organized activities. At PUST, the corresponding proportions were 11.0%, 27.0%, and 18.0%, respectively. Although agreement was higher at PUST, disagreement with statements concerning encouragement from lecturers and activities organized by student organizations was also higher than at DU. These distributions reveal differences in response patterns regarding support within the university environment but do not explain the reasons for these differences or establish actual differences in the availability, reach, and effectiveness of such support.

Discussion

The study involving 200 female students from the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) revealed two main findings. First, the majority of respondents expressed aspirations to pursue higher education abroad (DU: 75%; PUST: 76%). They agreed with statements about limited research opportunities, the influence of political instability, and the inadequacy of domestic education in supporting career goals, as well as with statements about the attractiveness of international universities' quality and reputation, the diversity of academic programs, and career prospects. Second, overseas education was perceived as an opportunity for personal development and independence by 80% of DU respondents and 86% of PUST respondents. Agreement regarding expected emotional and financial family support differed between the two groups, reaching 56% at DU and 79% at PUST. PUST respondents also reported higher levels of agreement with statements about encouragement from lecturers and university activities that support international study. Overall, aspiration levels were relatively similar, while perceptions of support and academic considerations varied between the two groups of respondents.

These findings situate aspirations to study abroad within broader concerns about equality of educational opportunity and the transition to employment in Bangladesh. Similar levels of aspiration at DU and PUST, despite differences in perceived family support, highlight the importance of examining whether opportunities to pursue international education are equally accessible to female students. Hossain et al. (2025) linked intentions to study abroad with research opportunities and sociopolitical conditions, while Iliasov et al. (2024) highlighted employment concerns and discriminatory gender norms. In this context, interest in pursuing international education should be considered alongside the social expectations and pressures women face. Chan et al. (2023) demonstrated the importance of family relationships in educational continuation after marriage, while Anderson et al. (2022) described families as sources of both support and obligations. However, the differences in perceived support observed in the present study do not indicate family opposition or barriers to studying abroad. The social relevance of these findings lies in the need to ensure equitable access to information, funding, and guidance so that high levels of aspiration are not assumed to reflect equal opportunities for all groups of female students.

The push–pull framework developed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) helps categorize perceptions of domestic limitations and the attractiveness of overseas education, consistent with Hossain et al. (2025). However, this categorization does not explain why aspirations at DU and PUST were nearly identical despite differences in expected support. Kabeer's (1999) perspective clarifies the distinction between resources, agency, and achievements: family and university

support represent perceived resources, whereas agreement regarding opportunities for independence reflects anticipated benefits rather than evidence of agency or empowerment. Anderson et al. (2022) situated women's educational choices within family relationships involving both support and obligations. Entrich et al. (2024) also distinguished the relevance of institutional contexts to intentions and participation in international study. Conceptually, these findings underscore the importance of distinguishing the formation of international education aspirations from the perceived availability of resources that may support their realization. Nevertheless, this explanation remains a proposition for future research because relationships between variables were not tested, while agency and empowerment achievements were not measured through respondents' concrete decisions or educational experiences.

This study highlights the importance of distinguishing aspirations, preparedness, and opportunities when examining women's international education aspirations. De Haas (2021) explained that mobility aspirations should be distinguished from the capabilities required to realize them, while Kulka et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of differentiating between students' migration aspirations and migration plans. In the Bangladeshi context, Deb et al. (2025) demonstrated the importance of family financial support in funding overseas education. Sharma et al. (2025) also showed that young people's educational mobility aspirations and parental expectations in Nepal do not always align. These studies highlight the importance of considering resources and social support when interpreting aspirations for international education. In the present study, similar aspiration levels among female students at DU and PUST do not necessarily indicate equal preparedness or opportunities to pursue overseas education. Therefore, future research should trace the progression from aspirations to scholarship applications, university admission, and actual departure, while considering women's experiences and distinguishing expected support from support actually received.

The findings on academic attractiveness and career prospects are consistent with those of Baral et al. (2024) in Nepal and Javed et al. (2019) in Pakistan. Hussain et al. (2020) also examined intentions to study abroad through push and pull factors. Regarding social dimensions, Cherian and Rajan (2024) highlighted family resources and networks, while Sondhi and King (2017) demonstrated gender negotiations in the educational mobility of Indian students. Tu (2025) examined gender inequalities through the mobility experiences of Pakistani students studying in China. In the Bangladeshi context, Del Franco (2010) examined aspirations and the construction of selfhood among female students through their experiences of higher secondary education in rural areas. The empirical contribution of the present study lies in comparing two groups of Bangladeshi female university students who exhibited nearly identical levels of international education aspirations but different distributions of perceived family and university support. The coexistence of similar aspirations and differing expectations of support represents a notable empirical pattern. However, differences in populations, contexts, and measurements limit direct comparisons. The scholarly contribution of this study is to provide a descriptive mapping of women's educational aspirations and their support contexts, offering a foundation for future investigations into the relationships between resources, planning, and the realization of international study without claiming the existence of unique gender mechanisms that have not been directly examined.

The recommendations of this study focus on assessing support needs and expanding access to educational support. First, DU and PUST should evaluate the reach of information services, scholarship guidance, and application workshops. Lower levels of agreement at DU warrant

investigating students' experiences rather than immediately concluding that institutional programs are inadequate. Second, universities could provide financial guidance and voluntary family information sessions while ensuring that female students' decisions remain central to the support process. Emotional and financial support needs should be assessed separately, as they were combined into a single indicator in this study. Third, policymakers should assess the need for domestic research facilities and expand educational assistance using transparent, needs-based criteria. Fourth, program evaluations should document service reach, female student participation, scholarship applications, and university admissions, while examining the reasons why students do not proceed with their applications. These recommendations aim to expand educational choices based on identified needs. However, the effectiveness of each intervention should be evaluated through monitoring its implementation and outcomes, while considering differences in the experiences and needs of female students at the two universities.

CONCLUSION

This study involving 200 female students from the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) revealed a pattern of nearly identical aspirations to study abroad, accompanied by differences in perceptions of family and university support. 75% of DU respondents and 76% of PUST respondents expressed aspirations to pursue higher education abroad. Both groups expressed positive assessments of several domestic push factors and the attractiveness of international education, particularly academic opportunities and career prospects. Overseas education was also perceived as providing opportunities for personal development and independence. However, the proportions of respondents who agreed with statements about expected family support and all indicators of support within the university environment were higher at PUST. The synthesis of these findings indicates that similar proportions of educational aspirations were not accompanied by uniform perceptions of support. Thus, aspirations, anticipated educational benefits, and perceived support should be distinguished when understanding respondents' plans for international education.

Theoretically, this study highlights the importance of interpreting push and pull factors in international education alongside perceptions of family and institutional resources. The women's empowerment perspective helps distinguish anticipated benefits of independence from agency and achievements that were not measured. The study provides an empirical mapping that serves as a basis for formulating research questions about the relationships among aspirations, support, and the realization of international study, without proposing a new theory or establishing causal relationships. Practically, the findings provide a basis for evaluating the reach of information services, application guidance, and scholarship support at universities. Family involvement should remain voluntary while respecting female students' decisions. Policymakers may also consider evaluating domestic research facilities and providing needs-based educational assistance, with implementation and outcomes subject to monitoring.

This study was limited to 200 female students from two universities; therefore, generalization beyond the sample requires caution. The descriptive comparisons did not test relationships between variables or explain the reasons underlying differences in responses. The data captured expected family support and perceived university support rather than verified resources received or successful participation in international education. Emotional and financial support were also measured through a single indicator, preventing separate examination of these two forms of support. Future research should include universities, regions, and socioeconomic

backgrounds with greater diversity, measure different forms of support separately, and combine interviews with analyses of relationships between variables. Longitudinal research is needed to examine changes in aspirations, scholarship applications, actual departure for overseas study, and experiences of independence during international education.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

The authors affirm that the research, data analysis, and development of the manuscript's scientific content were conducted independently, in accordance with the principles of academic integrity. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies was limited to language assistance and manuscript editing, and the authors retain full responsibility for the manuscript's content and scientific accuracy.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Nishat Tabassum: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Software; Visualization; Writing Original Draft; Validation; Writing Review & Editing. **Faria Mubashira**: Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Software; Visualization; Writing Original Draft; Validation.

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