

EDUCATION
INTELLIGENCE

STUDENT INSIGHT

Nepal



Student Insight

Nepal

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Introduction to Student Insight

This is one of a series of country-specific reports that explore the decision-making processes of students from around the world seeking higher education outside of their home country.

Since February 2007, the British Council has been conducting a questionnaire-based survey to collect data from prospective international students and individuals who have expressed an interest in studying abroad. The survey is administered at international education exhibitions and through various international education online portals or emailed invitations. It takes about 15 minutes to complete and participants are given an incentive tailored to their local market.

By the end of 2010, over 122,000 responses had been collected globally, including 618 from Nepal.

Introduction to Higher Education in Nepal

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, only 5.5 percent of Nepal's population of tertiary-education age were enrolled in tertiary education as of 2004, a 35 percent increase from 2000. This represents only a small fraction (about 13 percent) of the national average of secondary school enrolment (42 percent as of 2004).

As of 2008, the Nepalese government was spending 13 percent of its total education budget to finance tertiary education. Nepal's total public education expenditure for that year accounted for almost one-fifth (19 percent) of the government's budget. Well over half (63 percent) of Nepal's public education expenditures funded primary level education. UNESCO figures for education enrolment in Nepal parallel the proportions of public education expenditures, with enrolment over 100 percent (in 2002) for primary school dropping to 42 percent (in 2004) for secondary school and a mere 5.5 percent (in 2004) for tertiary education.

In 2008, almost 18,000 Nepalese students were studying abroad, nearly a five-fold (470 percent) increase since 1999. This 2008 figure suggests that outbound students represent about 6.6 percent of the total Nepalese students enrolled in higher education programs, according to UNESCO.

Most (88 percent) of Nepal's respondents to the British Council survey are seriously considering undertaking a foreign qualification. Only one percent of the student respondents indicated that they had thought very little about pursuing foreign study. Among the 12 percent that did not indicate that they were "seriously considering" undertaking a foreign qualification, more than four fifths (83 percent) indicated that they have given some thought to pursuing such study.

Student Profiles

The survey respondents in Nepal ranged in age from 16 or under (1 percent of respondents) to over 40 (2 percent of respondents), with the greatest concentration of those queried (43 percent) falling between 17 and 22 years old, the typical age range for prospective undergraduate students. Most of the remaining respondents (41 percent) were in their mid-to-late twenties (23-29), representing the typical international age range for graduate students. Of the 32 percent of respondents that indicated interest in pursuing an undergraduate higher education qualification abroad, 68 percent fell within the 17-22 age range.

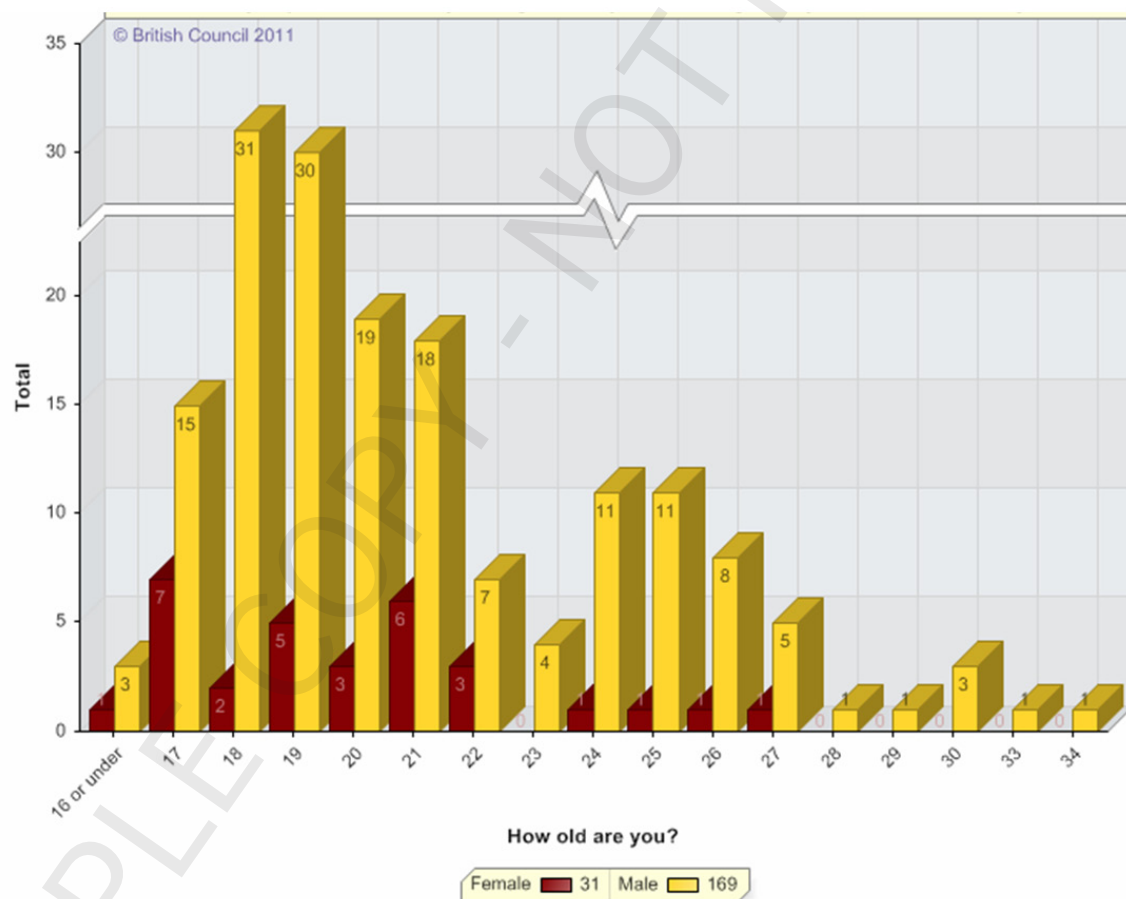


Chart 1: Respondents interested in undergraduate study

A little less than half (41.4 percent) of the students surveyed were interested in pursuing a postgraduate degree, 56 percent of whom were 23-29 years old. (See Chart 2)

The majority of the respondents (82 percent) were male. This is in line with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics figures that record Nepal's tertiary education enrolment as 80 percent male.

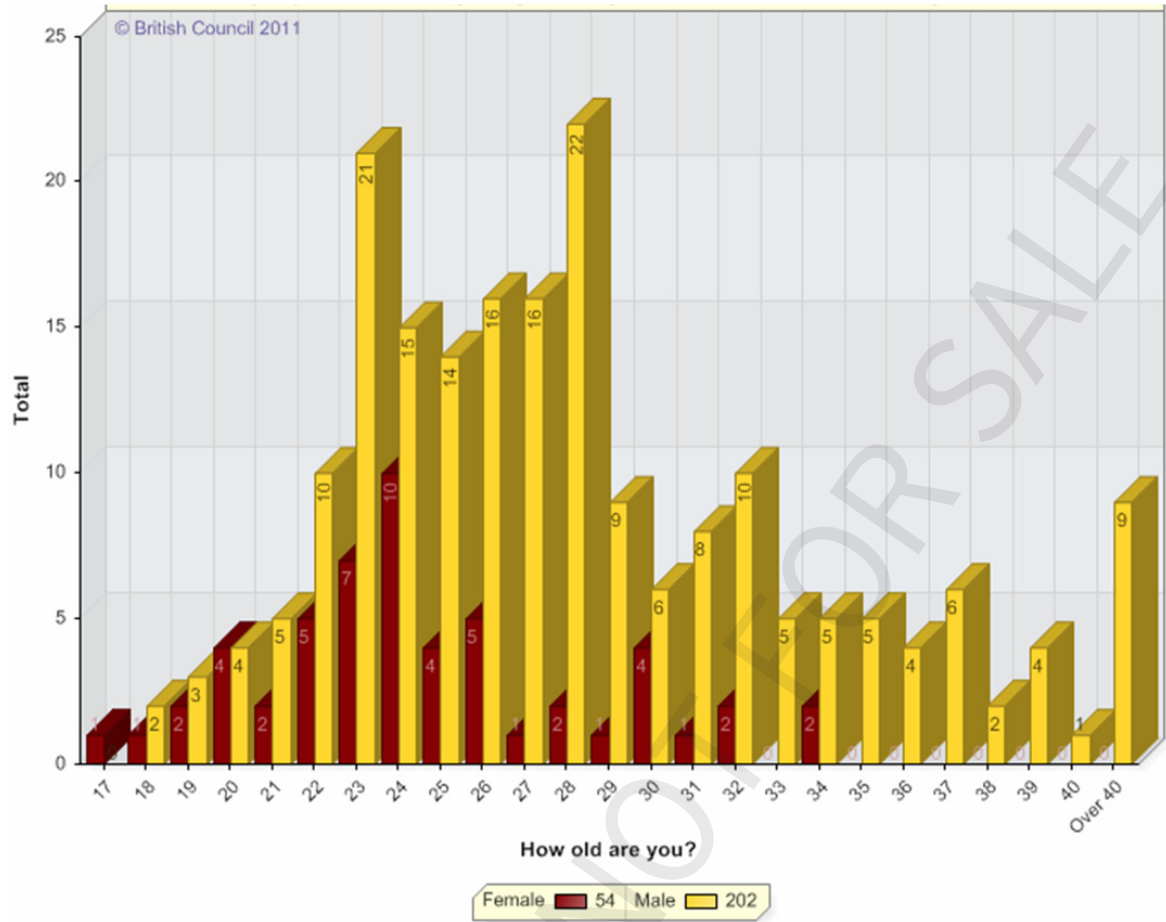


Chart 2: Respondents interested in postgraduate study

Of the respondents who identified their employment or education enrolment status, 32 percent were employed, 27 percent were studying at a college, and 21 percent were studying at a university. The remainder were mostly between studies (10 percent) or unemployed (4 percent).

Music and sports were cited as the two most popular interests among respondents. Music was indicated as a primary interest by about 63 percent of respondents, while sports were marked as a primary interest by 44 percent. Other popular interests were outdoor activities (such as hiking, climbing or surfing) preferred by 26 percent, film (25 percent), the arts (galleries, theatre, dance – 16 percent), entertainment (e.g. restaurants – 14 percent), and fashion (9 percent).

Almost a third of the respondents (29 percent) had previously travelled overseas, with a little less than half of those (14 percent of the total) indicating that they had studied during their time abroad. Among this portion that had previously studied abroad, 21 percent had studied most recently in the United Arab Emirates, while 18 percent had pursued their most recent overseas study in the United Kingdom.

Most (65 percent) of the respondents replied that they had friends or relatives residing in the country that was their first choice for study. Almost a fifth of the respondents indicated that one of their parents had previously studied overseas.

Respondents from Kathmandu account for most (71 percent) of the surveyed sample. The remainder of survey responses were gathered from among seven other Nepalese cities.

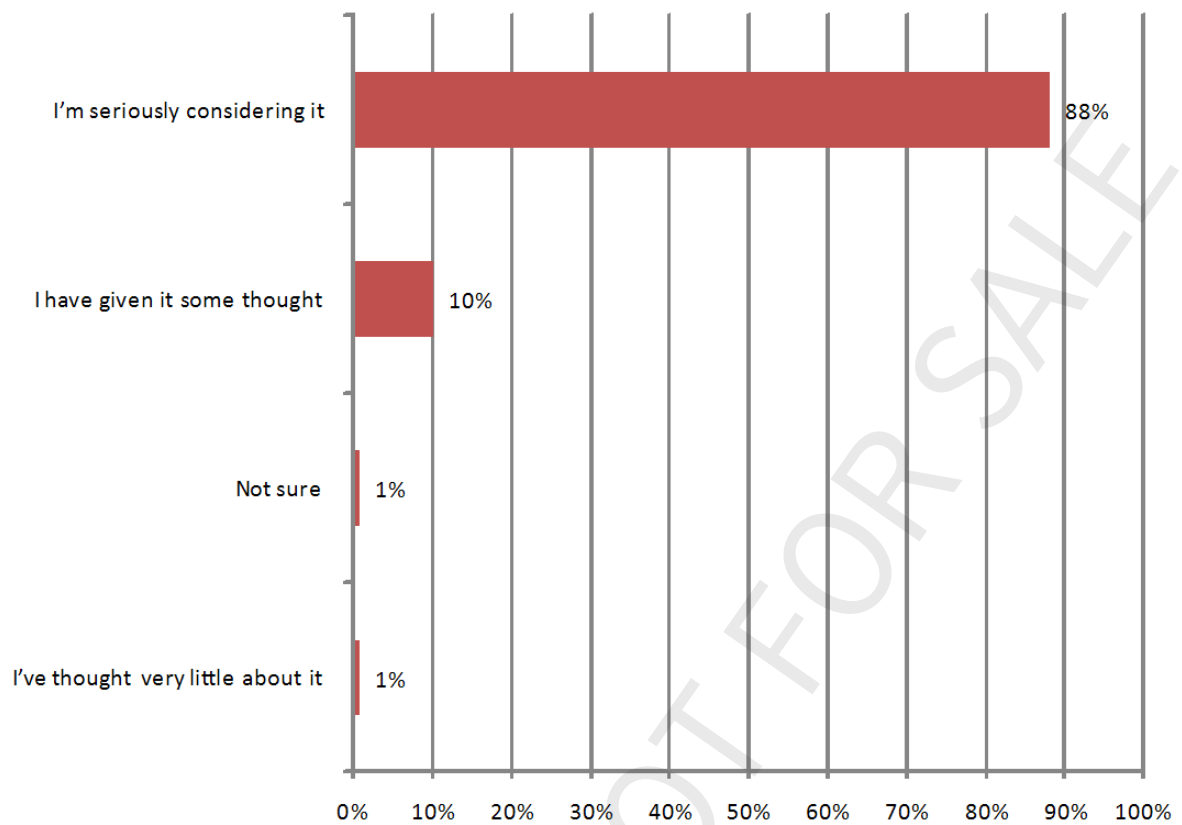


Chart 3: At what stage are you in your decision to study this programme?

Major Subjects in Demand

The most attractive subjects for overseas study among students from Nepal are business and administrative studies, computer science and engineering and technology. Subjects that are not as popular include veterinary science, historical and philosophical studies and agriculture.

By a significant margin, the most popular course of study for outbound Nepalese students is business and administration. Almost a third (32 percent) of all students surveyed responded that they would be most interested in pursuing a business degree abroad. The fields of computer science (22 percent) and engineering and technology (20 percent) also attracted a strong indication of interest from respondents as the second and third most popular choices.

The subsequent fourth to sixth most popular fields were the social sciences (15 percent), biological science (13 percent), and media (including publishing and journalism, cited by 12 percent). Medicine and dentistry (9 percent), creative arts and design (7 percent), and English language (7 percent) also attracted moderate interest.

The survey data shows some interesting dynamics in the variation of subject interests between prospective undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Overall, prospective postgraduate demand is heavily skewed toward business and social studies-related subjects, whereas undergraduate demand is more heavily weighted toward science and engineering (computer science was the most popular choice followed by engineering). However, there is a significant difference between the first and second most popular postgraduate courses, with preference for business and administration programs (36 percent of respondents), almost double the percentage of respondents interested in the second most popular choice, social sciences (19 percent). Social sciences is only the seventh most popular subject for undergraduates (at 10 percent).

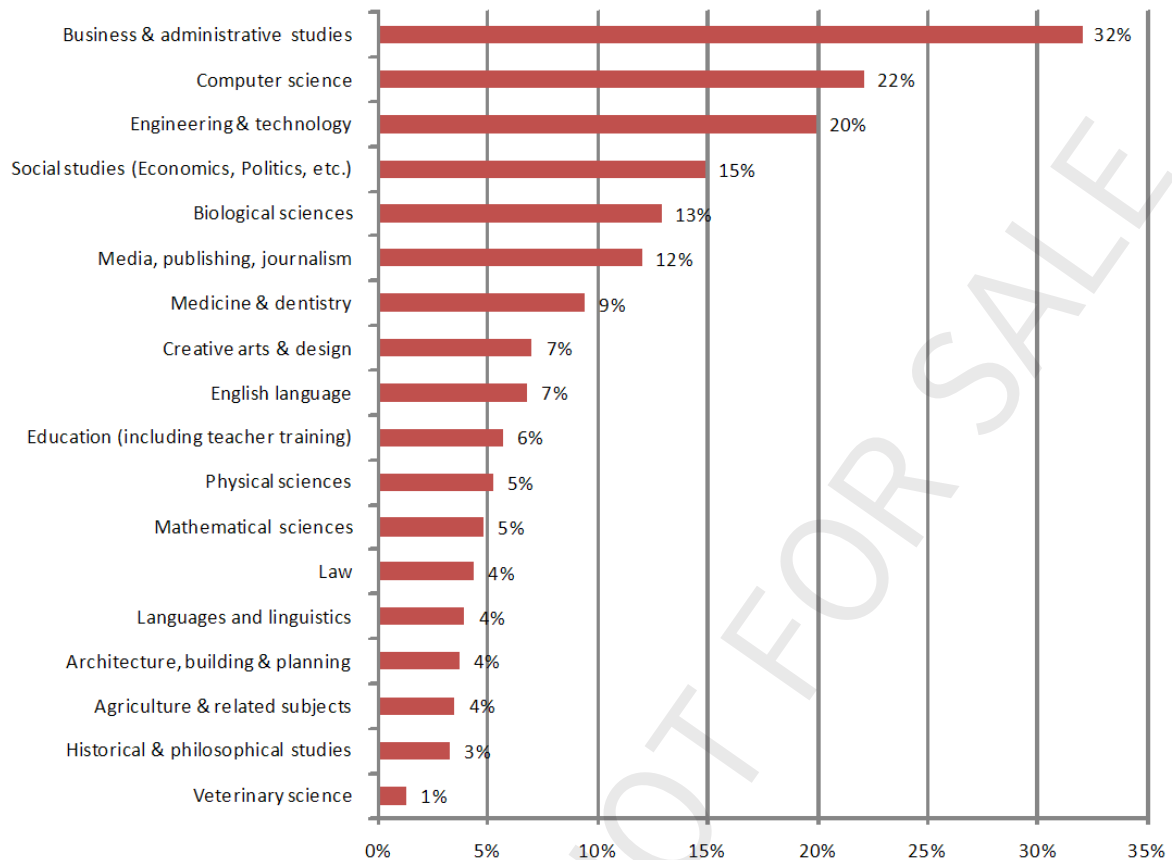


Chart 4: In what area of study are you most interested? (Aggregate subject demand)

Although computer science and engineering and technology courses drew strong interest from both undergraduate and postgraduate students, the proportion of undergraduates interested in those courses was nearly double that of prospective postgraduates (30 percent compared to 16 percent, and 27 percent to 14 percent, respectively). Prospective undergraduate students also show significantly more interest than postgraduate students in creative arts and design (11 percent compared to 4 percent), mathematical sciences (8 percent compared to 3 percent), and physical sciences (10 percent compared to 2 percent). (See Chart 5)

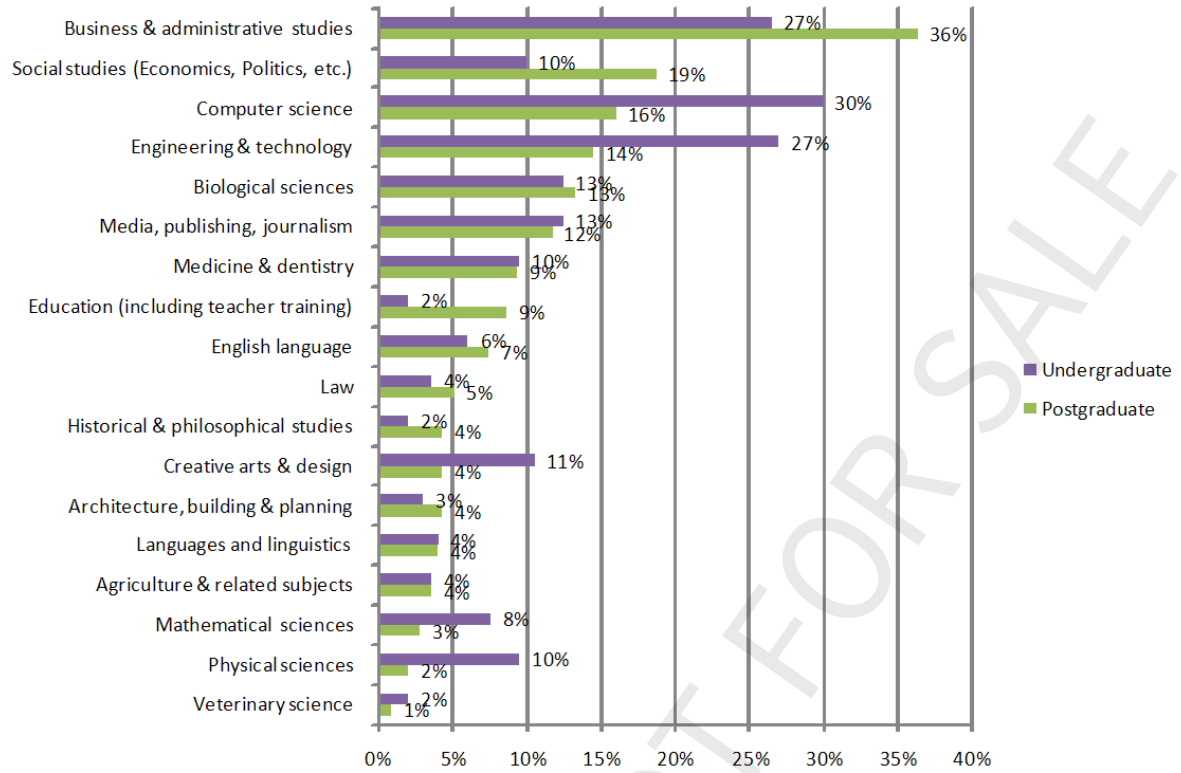


Chart 5: In what area of study are you most interested? (Undergraduate vs. postgraduate studies)

Important Factors in the Decision to Study Overseas

Respondents indicated that the most important factors driving their decision to study overseas were higher quality education (57 percent), and improved career prospects (51 percent). These two factors were the most frequently cited by a wide margin, indicating quite decisively that the Nepalese student respondents are conscious of the practical link between overseas education and career advancement.

The cultural experience of living overseas (27 percent) was the third most frequently cited factor. More moderate proportions of students cited other factors as important, including that the desired course is not offered in Nepal (15 percent), access to a scholarship (12 percent), and the goal of improving English language skills (9 percent).

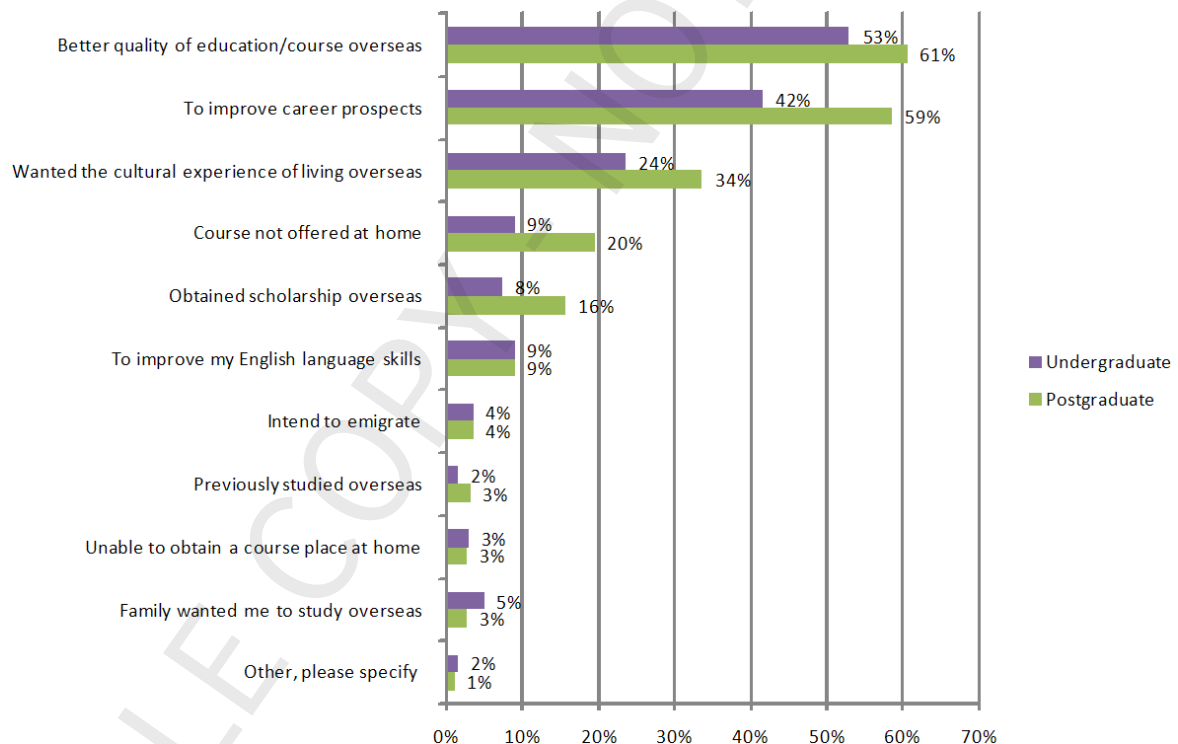


Chart 6: What are the most important factors in your preference for studying overseas rather than undertaking study in your home country?

The data indicate that postgraduate students may weigh more factors together than undergraduate students. Although the relative importance of these factors is consistent between undergraduate and postgraduate students, all five of the most frequently cited factors are indicated by a greater proportion of postgraduate students. For example, more postgraduate than undergraduate students could not find their desired course offered in their home country (20 percent of postgraduates, compared to 9 percent of undergraduates), more

postgraduates want the cultural experience of living overseas (34 percent compared to 24 percent), more look to improve their career prospects (59 percent compared to 42 percent), and seek higher quality education (63 percent compared to 53 percent).

Another issue that Nepalese students face when pursuing overseas study is funding. The two main sources of funding for overseas education cited by prospective students were parents (cited by 57 percent), and university scholarships (56 percent). Other common funding sources were self-funding (30 percent), student loans (29 percent), as well as government (19 percent) and other (24 percent) scholarships.

Important Factors in Country Choice

The factors that Nepalese consider in choosing a country in which to study echo the factors that motivate their desire to study overseas in the first place. Quality of education was cited most frequently overall (44 percent of respondents). A significant proportion of respondents also cited factors such as the opportunity to obtain an internationally recognised qualification (36 percent), the hope of improving career prospects (31 percent), and a specific university's reputation (16 percent). Whether there would be opportunity for employment while studying abroad was also cited as an important factor by a modest proportion of students (15 percent).

Once again, prospective postgraduate students were proportionally more likely than undergraduates to consider almost every factor important. Of the top seven factors by importance, only quality of education was cited by marginally more undergraduates (45 percent) than postgraduates (42 percent). Postgraduates gave more weight than undergraduates to other popularly-cited factors, such as whether a qualification was internationally recognised (43 percent compared to 31 percent), the hope of improving career prospects (34 percent compared to 26 percent) and university reputation (23 percent compared to 12 percent).

Nepalese respondents perceive obtaining a visa for overseas study more difficult for some countries than others. More than a third (37 percent) rated the UK as the most difficult country for which to obtain a visa, while 33 percent rated the US as the most difficult. Canada was a distant third, rated the most difficult by 14 percent.

Almost half of the respondents indicated that the most important issues in obtaining an overseas student visa included the transparency of the application process (cited by 44 percent) and the ease of obtaining a visa (42 percent). The third most important factor was the length of time required for visa processing (cited by 37 percent).

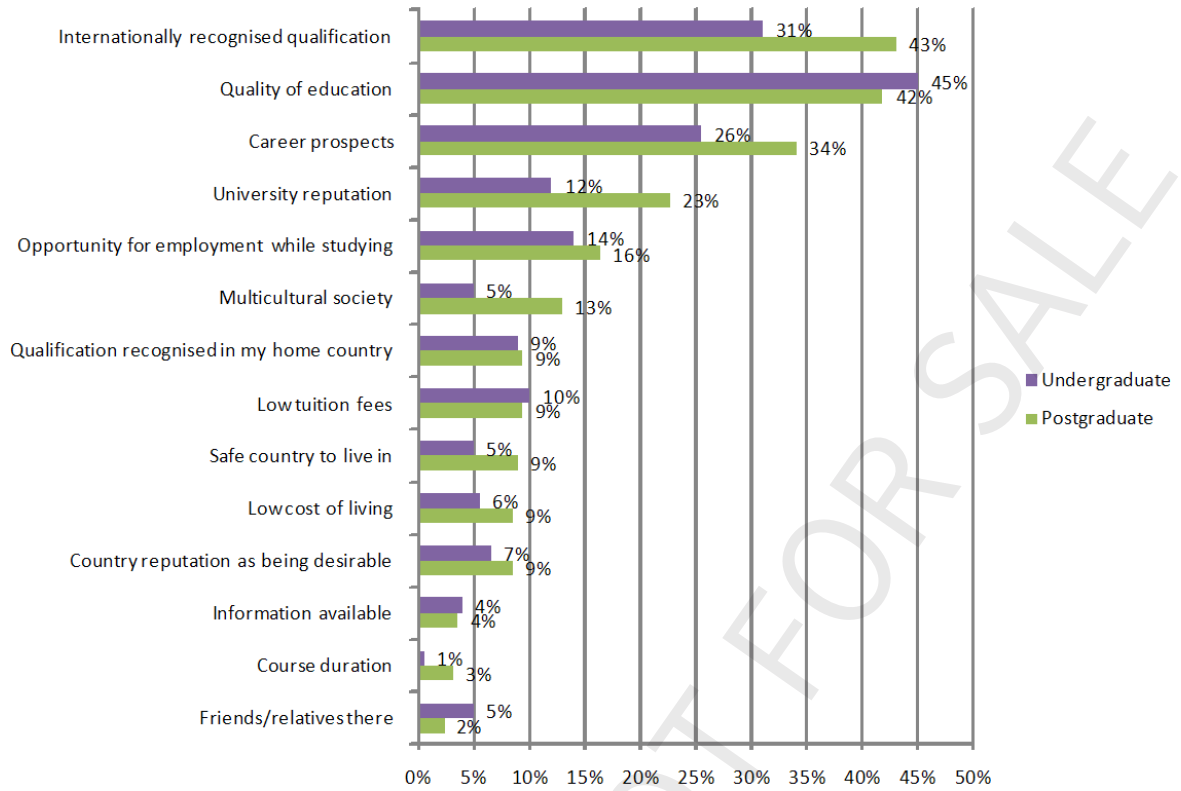


Chart 7: Important factors in country choice – variation by postgraduate and undergraduate

Important Factors in Institution Choice

When asked whether country, city or institution factored first in their decision to study abroad, 48 percent of students said that they chose the institution first, 45 percent said that they chose the country first, while only 3 percent said that they chose the city first.

In identifying important factors in choosing an institution, student respondents continued to give priority to education quality, career benefit and strong reputation. The factor most commonly chosen as important was the quality of the course (39 percent), with the mutually-related factors of career prospects (33 percent) and institution reputation (23 percent) cited second and fourth most frequently. In a similar vein, the institution's ranking (15 percent) was the fifth most indicated factor. Whether the institution offers scholarships (28 percent) was also of high importance to respondents.

Once again, prospective postgraduate students were proportionally more likely to consider almost every factor more important than prospective undergraduates. Of the top six factors of importance overall, only the quality of the course was cited by marginally more undergraduates (42 percent) than postgraduates (40 percent). Other popularly indicated factors of importance such as improving career prospects (34 percent compared to 28 percent), institution reputation (29 percent compared to 22 percent), and whether the institution is a research intensive university (16 percent compared to 9 percent), were all of import to proportionally more postgraduates. The most significant difference was seen on the issue of whether an institution offers scholarships. This was the second most frequently cited factor of importance among intended postgraduates (37 percent), but only the fourth most chosen factor among undergraduates (17 percent).

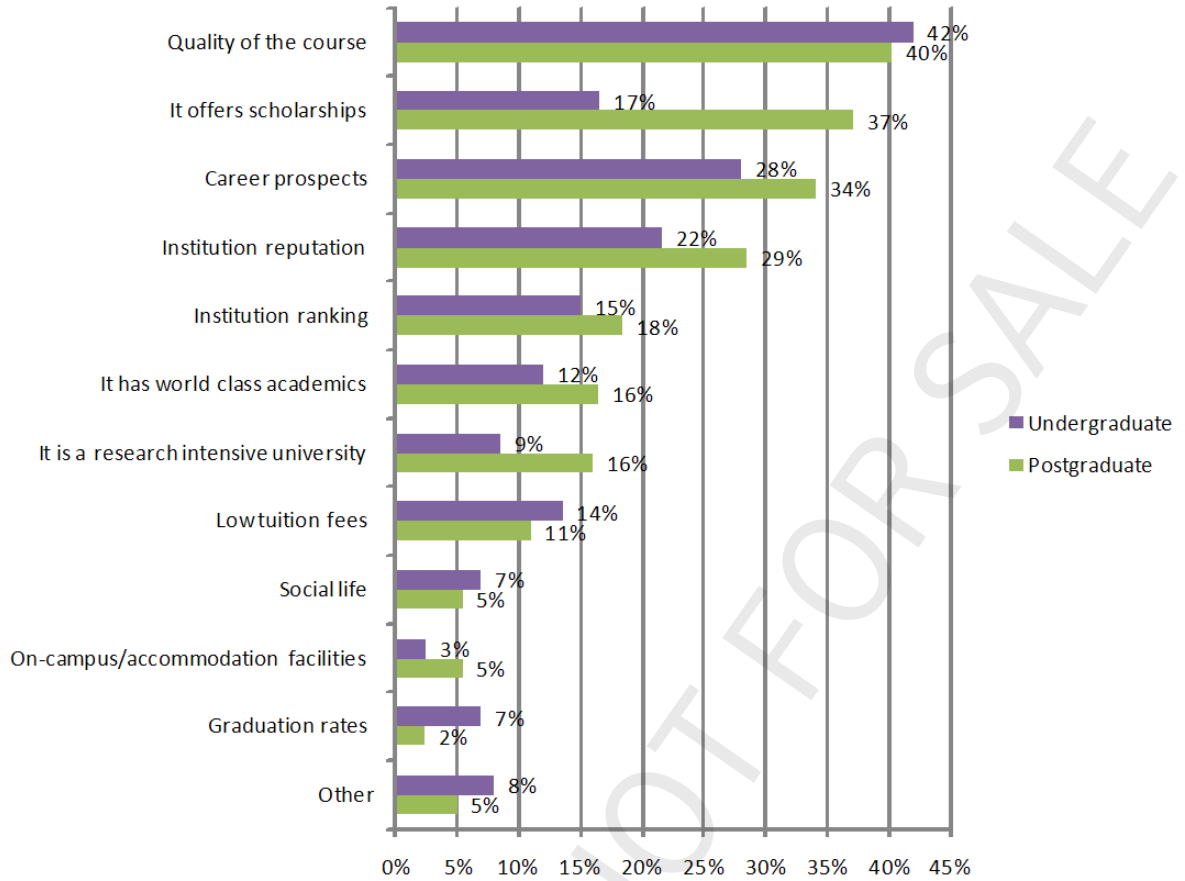


Chart 8: The most important factors when choosing an institution for overseas study

Major Influencing Factors

More than half (54 percent) of the surveyed students indicated that they alone made the decision to study overseas. The second and third most frequently indicated influencing factors were parents (26 percent), and friends or classmates (21 percent), while other family members (10 percent) was the fourth most cited influence.

Between prospective undergraduates and postgraduate students, all factors of influence were indicated within a proportionally similar hierarchy. However, significantly more postgraduates (64 percent compared to 46 percent) said that the decision to study abroad was their own decision. While more postgraduates (26 percent) than undergraduates (21 percent) cited friends, classmates or peers as an important influencing factor, more undergraduates (29 percent) than postgraduates (24 percent) cited their parents as an important influence. (See Chart 9)

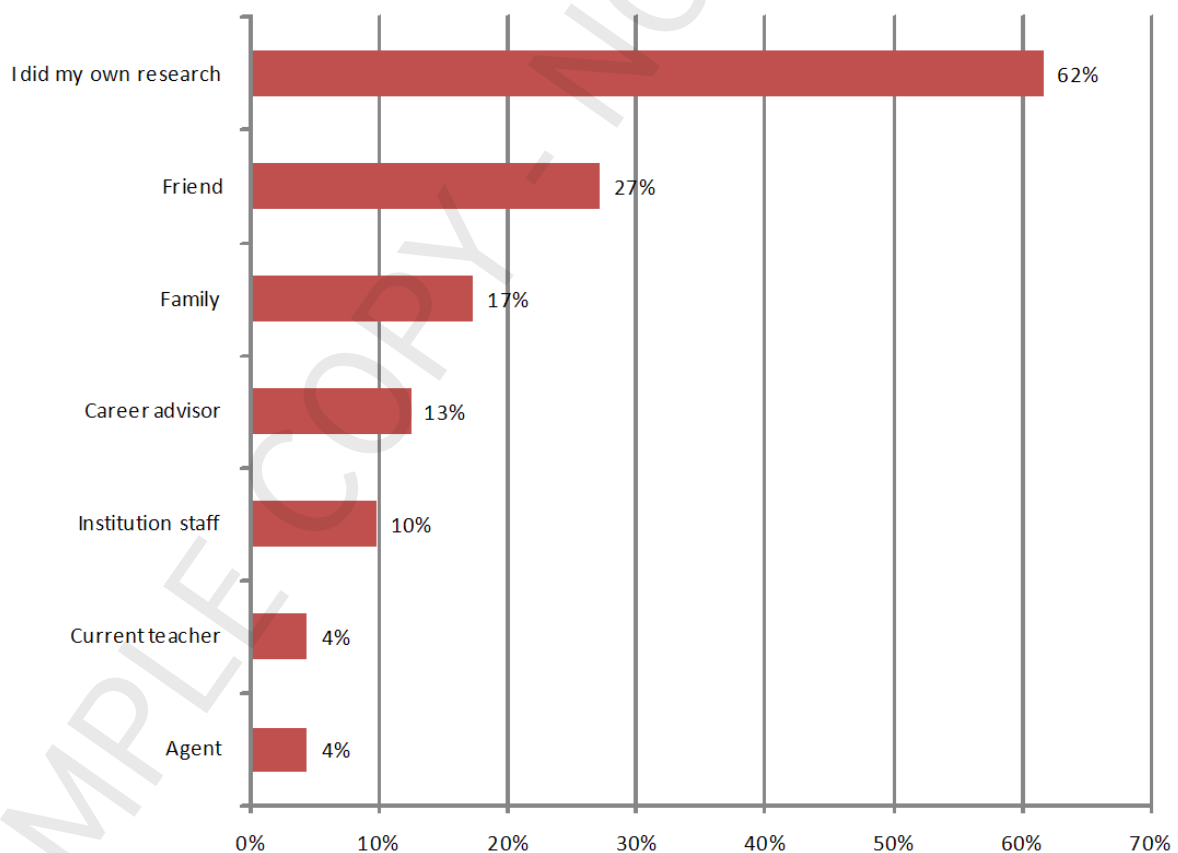


Chart 9: Who had the greatest influence on your decision to study overseas?

When students were asked who suggested the institution at which they were interested in studying, most students (62 percent) responded that they had done their own research.

Other suggestions were said to have come from friends or classmates (27 percent), family (17 percent), a career advisor (13 percent) or institution staff (10 percent). Only 4 percent of respondents indicated that an agent had suggested the institution that they were interested in studying at.

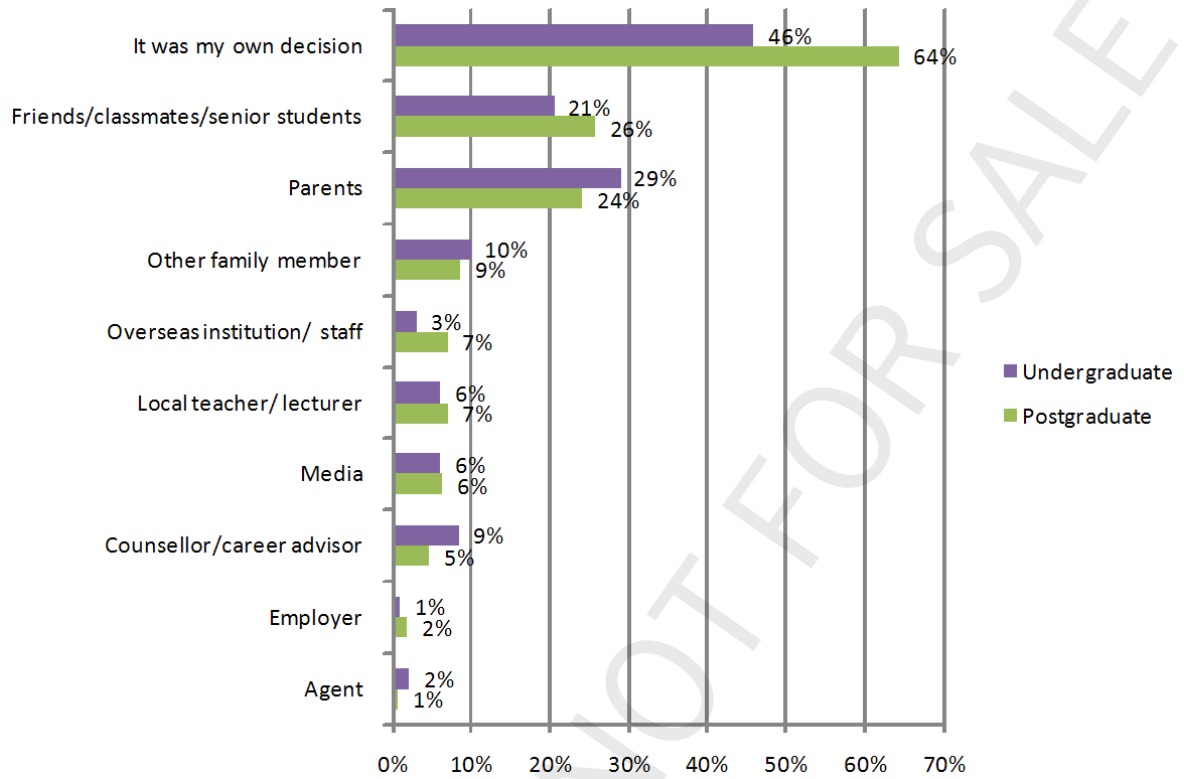


Chart 10: Who had greatest influence over the choice of institution?

Major Sources of Information

Respondents cited a wide range of major sources of information for overseas study, including multiple online and on-campus resources. Websites or prospectuses of awarding institutions (55 percent) and the British Council (53 percent) were the top two sources of information. Students also cited search engines (37 percent), education exhibitions (37 percent), the Internet (30 percent), and family or friends (29 percent) among their most consulted sources of information on overseas study. Other popular sources for information included faculty or lecturers at college or university (18 percent), magazines (18 percent), career centres (15 percent), presentations by institutions (14 percent) and agents (10 percent).

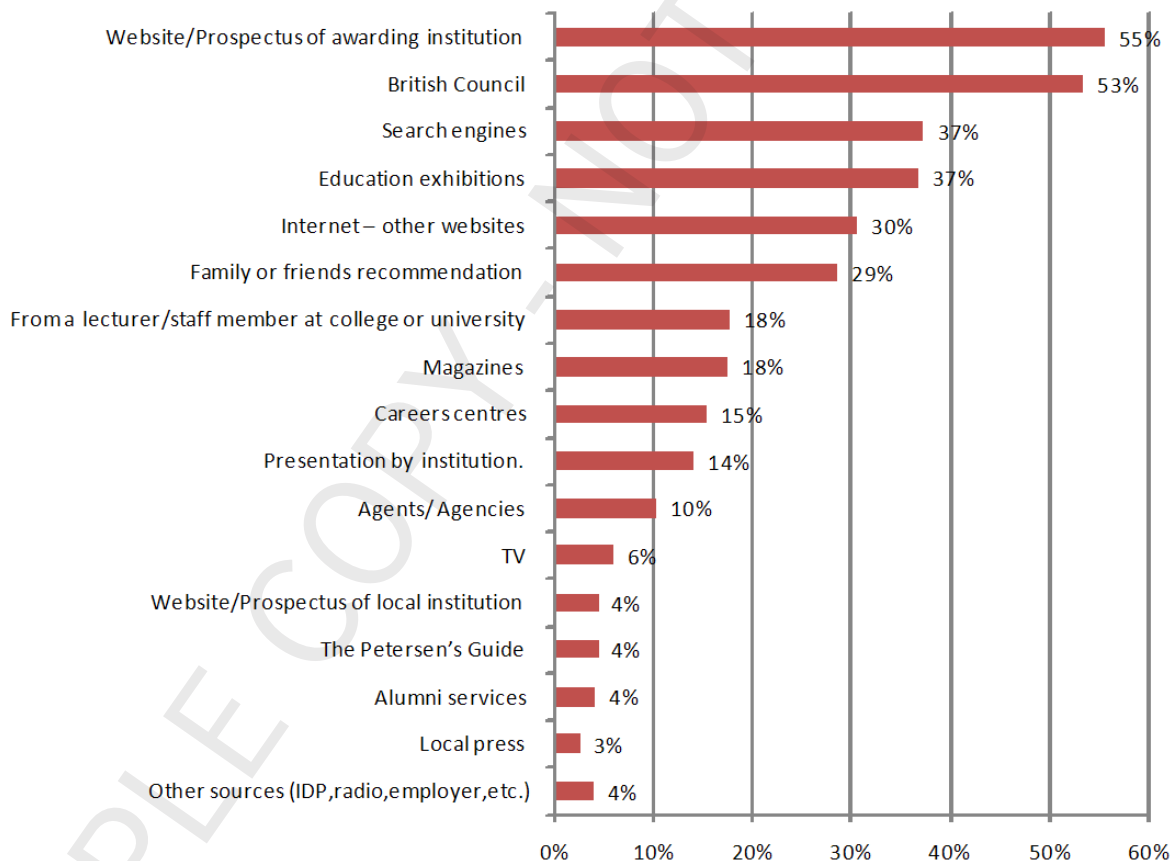


Chart 11: Where have you looked or will you look for information pertaining to overseas qualifications?

How Students Use the Media

Survey results indicate that in 2010, nearly all students used social networking websites, especially Facebook, which was regularly used by 91 percent of all respondents. These results reflect a dramatic increase in online social networking among Nepalese students since the survey was first administered.

Over the survey's four years, Nepalese student respondents were split very evenly between users (51 percent) and non-users (49 percent) of social networking websites. Facebook was the most popular social networking website by a wide margin, regularly used by 60 percent of respondents that used social networking sites. Other popular sites included hi5 (32 percent), MSN (29 percent), YouTube (27.5 percent), and Myspace (21 percent).

However, these rates of regular use aggregated from 2007 to 2010 are not necessarily indicative of the prevailing popularity and use of these sites. The data shows a strong shift among popular sites over the life of the survey thus far, and in the popularity of social networking websites overall. Whereas in 2007 only 33 percent of respondents indicated that they used social networking sites, by 2010 that figure had risen to 98 percent. This increase came on gradually, with the most dramatic spike apparent in 2010 (from only 60 percent in 2009).

The survey results also showed a shift in the relative rates of popularity among social network websites. In 2007 the dominant social networking site among users was Myspace, used regularly by 39 percent, while the second and third most popular sites were YouTube (25 percent) and Friendster (20 percent). Facebook, dominant in 2010 with 93 percent regular users, was only the fourth most popular in 2007, when it was used by just 19 percent of online social networkers.

Over the full term of the survey thus far, a slightly greater proportion of prospective postgraduate students (36 percent) than undergraduates (34 percent) who use social networking sites regularly use Facebook. Conversely, a greater proportion of undergraduate students regularly use hi5 (22 percent compared to 17 percent) and YouTube (17 percent compared to 13 percent).

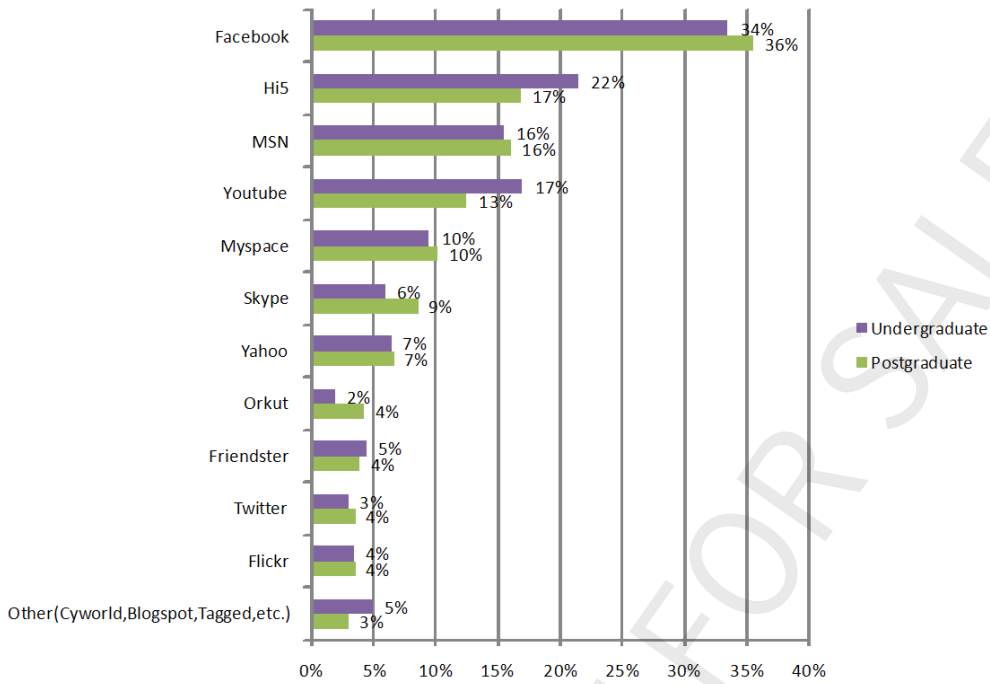


Chart 12: Which of the following networking sites do you use regularly?

According to the data, the most popular search engines among Nepalese respondents were Google (regularly used by 92 percent), Yahoo! (36 percent), and MSN (21 percent). The data in this area also shows shifts over time. Although Google and Yahoo! sustained similar proportions of popularity from 2007 through 2010, MSN's share of regular users jumped from 21 percent to 26 percent in that time span.

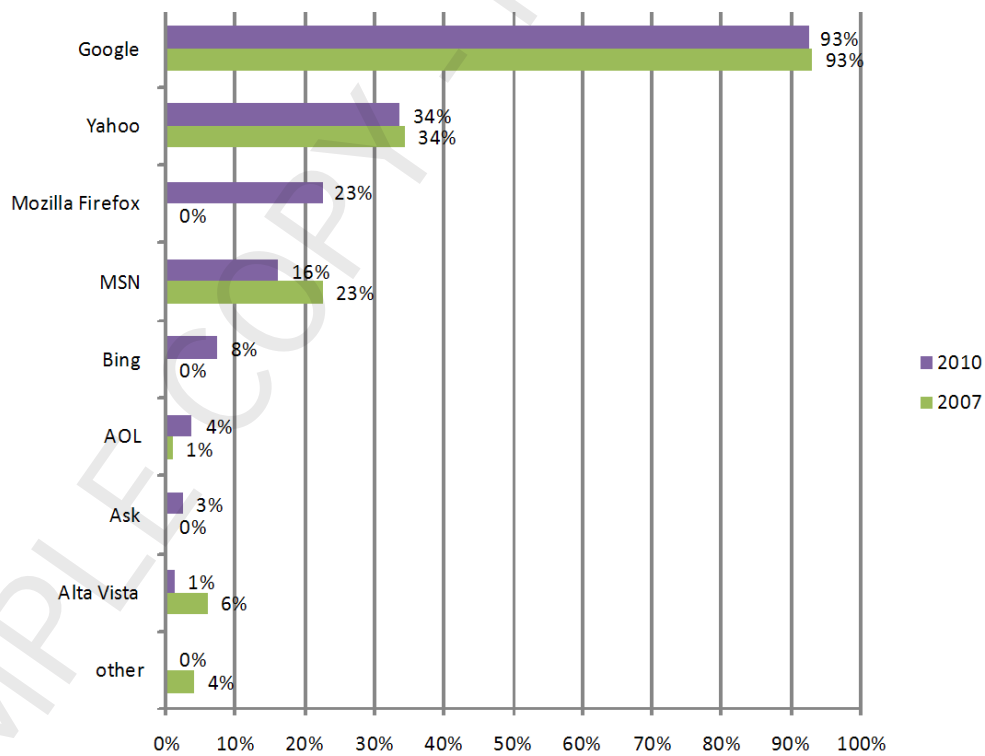


Chart 13: Which search engines do you use regularly? (time series)

Use of Agents

More than a third (39 percent) of student respondents said that they had already contacted or planned to contact an education agent. Another fifth (20 percent) of respondents did not know whether they would contact an agent. As mentioned above, 10 percent of respondents saw agents as major sources of information regarding overseas study.

Among the student respondents that had sought or would seek the advice of an education agent, 59 percent expected to receive advice on obtaining a visa, 52 percent expected the agent to provide information and brochures relating to institutions, 51 percent expected advice from the agent on which institutions to apply to, and 50 percent expected to receive advice on which country to study in. Almost two-fifths (39 percent) of these respondents also expected to receive an institution's offer via their agent and to be provided with information on accommodations.

More than a third (35 percent) of the students who had contacted or planned to contact an education agent to assist with their pursuit of overseas study expected the agent to submit the student's application on their behalf.

Interestingly, prospective postgraduate students were more likely than undergraduates to expect most of these services from an agent. A significantly higher proportion of prospective postgraduates than undergraduates expected or had obtained from agents information on obtaining a visa (28 percent compared to 21 percent), information relating to institutions (24 percent compared to 18 percent), accommodation information (20 percent compared to 12 percent), and an offer from an institution (18 percent compared to 13 percent). Prospective undergraduates were slightly more likely than postgraduates to expect or to have obtained from agents advice on choosing a country (22 percent compared to 21 percent) or institutions (23 percent compared to 20 percent) for study.

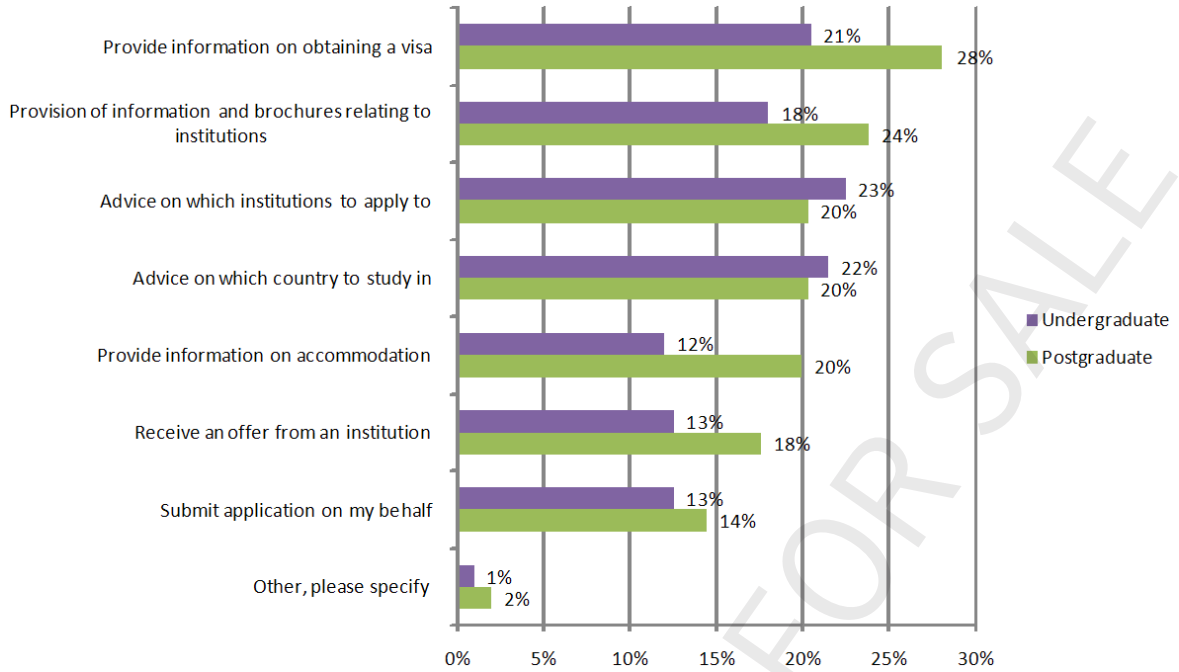


Chart 14: What services do you expect to obtain from the agent / have you obtained from the agent?

How Influences and Important Factors Vary Across Nepal

The majority of respondents to our survey came from Kathmandu. However, in the regions and cities outside of the capital there does appear to be some variation (although the numbers involved are such that we must exercise some caution).

For example, compared to respondents in Kathmandu, a higher proportion of respondents in Bhaktapur, Pokhara and Lalitpur cite their parents as being major influencers in the decision to study in another country.

Similarly, in Kathmandu, a higher quality education/course is the most important factor in the decision to study overseas followed by an opportunity to improve career prospects. But outside of the capital, career prospects are sometimes the most important factor in this decision.

How These Factors Have Varied Over Time

Many of the trends identified by these analyses were consistent over the term of data collection, showing year-by-year fluctuation, but with few progressive shifts. Areas of inquiry such as sources of information, and important decision-making influences all fall into this category. However, there are a number of significant shifts over time apparent over the four years of data collected.

Areas of academic interest

The data shows a dramatic increase over time in interest in business administration and computer science courses. Whereas in 2007 the three most popular academic programmes – business administration (29 percent), engineering (23 percent) and computer science (20 percent) – attracted similar levels of interest, by 2010 respondents had shifted to a heavy preference for business administration (48 percent) and computer science (18 percent). In the 2010 sample, even engineering (9 percent) is far behind, tied with media studies for a distant third just above the rest of the pack.

Important decision-making factors

Students responded consistently over the period of the survey that the most important factors in their decision to study abroad included higher quality education, improved career prospects, wanting the experience of living overseas, and the course of choice not being offered in Nepal. However, there was a sharp increase for all four of these choices from 2007 to 2010. All four top areas of preference increased during this time, indicating that student respondents are weighing more factors simultaneously. As all of these most frequently cited factors gained popularity, the less cited factors became even less so. Proportionately fewer respondents in 2010 than in 2007 cited wanting to improve their English (falling from 11 percent to 8 percent) or that their family wanted them to emigrate overseas (falling from 6 percent to 3 percent) as important factors in their decision to study abroad.

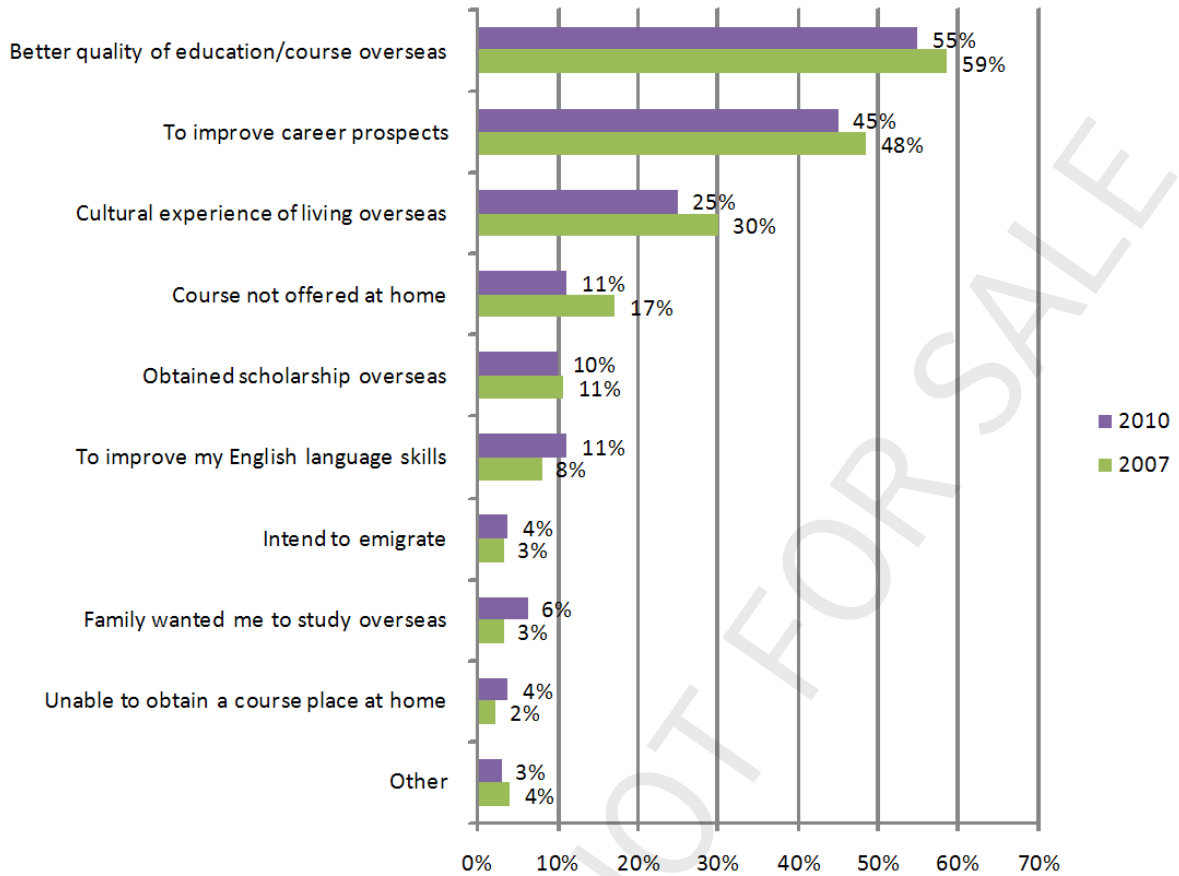


Chart 15: Important Decision Making Factors over time

A significant upward shift was also noticeable in the percentage of prospective students who cited improved career prospects as an important factor in their choice of school. While the top factor weighed by student respondents – the quality of the course – was consistently cited throughout, the consideration of career prospects increased significantly after 2007. Over the four years, the proportion of respondents who cited hope of improving career prospects rose from 27 percent in 2007 (the third most important factor) to 36 percent in 2010 (the second most important factor). Conversely, concern for scholarships fell over the same period from being cited by 29 percent of respondents in 2007 (the second highest factor) to being cited by only 18 percent in 2010 (the fourth highest factor).

Looking to the Future

Over the survey period thus far, Nepalese student respondents showed themselves more likely to use online social networking sites, more focused on the career impact of overseas education, and more drawn toward business and administration programmes. As Nepal continues to address practical issues such as alleviating poverty and developing the economy, the trend of approaching overseas education as a powerful career-building opportunity is likely to continue.

Conclusions

The analyses presented in this report offer considerable insight into Nepalese students' perspectives toward higher education overseas and their decision making process on the issue. These figures allow us to derive some clear ideas about specific likelihoods among Nepalese students interested in studying overseas. Since 2009, most of them use social networking sites. Educational agents are approached by some students, but even more respondents say that they would not be interested in an agent.

Most of these prospective students' educations would be funded by their parents, yet most of them rely primarily on their own research and consider their own opinions the most crucial element in determining whether or where (country or institution) they pursue a foreign degree.

What is clear is that enrolling in higher education programmes overseas is overwhelmingly desirable to these Nepalese students. More of these students are interested in business and administration qualifications than any other field, but large numbers of them are drawn by a diverse range of fields. Many of these prospective students are strongly drawn toward overseas study by the quality of education available abroad as well as the practical payoff that such scholarship may have on their career prospects.