



A comparative analysis of countries that reversed brain drain

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According to a report published in 2023, the number of Bangladeshi students leaving the country every year tripled from 16,609 in 2008 to about 49,151 in 2022. This astounding increase is a testament to the glaring issue of rising brain drain in our country, a problem that needs immediate attention if we hope to curb its devastating impacts to any degree. Students are the lifeblood of a nation; without talented youth, there is no scope for a country to progress or prosper. If the number of students leaving the country continues to rise at this alarming rate, there will soon be a vacuum of qualified individuals willing to take up the professions that form the backbone of our nation.

Brain drain is not a new issue. Countries like India and China have been victims of its malicious consequences for ages now. However, there has been a recent global trend of many countries successfully implementing incentive-based policies and introducing key infrastructural changes that have led to the number of talented youth leaving those countries to be reduced.

India, for example, has attacked the problem from a few different angles. By creating Research Parks at Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), they are strengthening the academic and research environment in the country, creating avenues for students who wish to enter these fields post-graduation. The National Education Policy 2020, additionally, stated that it would allow top foreign institutions to set up branches in India, so students can receive a quality, international education without having to leave the country.

Through initiatives like the Ramalingaswami Re-entry Fellowship and Ramanujan Fellowship, India is encouraging scientists and engineers who left the country to repatriate, attracting them with laudable salaries, opportunities to pursue research in Indian institutions,

and grants from internal and external sources. Moreover, the Government of India launched a programme called Startup India in 2016 to persuade entrepreneurial youth to stay back. By introducing several tax benefits, funding support, collaboration opportunities between industry and academia, as well as guidance programmes, this initiative has made the business atmosphere in India conducive to the creation of start-ups.

These steps have been successful in reversing brain drain to at least a certain degree. Driven by India's strong tech ecosystem as well as the score of opportunities being created, more and more students, and IIT graduates in particular, are choosing to stay in the country.



China, similarly, has launched a multi-pronged strategy in the form of talent recruitment programmes. With initiatives like the Thousand Talents Plan, the Young Thousand Talents Plan, and the National Science Fund for Distinguished Young Scholars, it has been trying to attract Chinese scientists living overseas back with grant opportunities, distinguished titles, significant reimbursement, and housing benefits. Thus, not only are they trying to reverse the brain drain that has already taken place, but China

is also attempting to benefit from the research skills these professionals picked up during their time as tenured faculty in renowned global institutions.

In addition, the Ten Thousand Talent Plan aims to support individuals whom the Chinese Government recognises for their potential to catalyse innovation and development. Domestically as well, China's investments into scientific fields in educational institutions, its rapid economic prosperity, the generation of academic and research opportunities, and the push for technological growth through the creation of innovation parks have made it a desirable location for talented youth and professionals.

Singapore's efforts towards fostering high-quality education and research opportunities through institutions like the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University as well as collaboration with world-renowned, foreign universities have largely contributed to the retention of high-achieving students. By providing educational funding for both domestic and international degrees through the Public Service Commission Scholarships to individuals willing to work in Singapore's public service, the country is strengthening its public sphere while enticing students to stay back. Similarly to India and China, Singapore has also put forth incentives and programmes for the repatriation of citizens back into the country.

A major reason behind the brain drain in Singapore is the exorbitantly high cost of living in the country compared to the pay many professionals receive. To address this, Singapore's architecture body recently launched an initiative to ensure fair, comparable pay, which has created a push in other job fields for the same.

For Ireland, mass emigration and the loss of talented individuals occurred due to the Irish economy's deplorable conditions in the past. Through numerous economic mechanisms, it has managed

to turn around its financial situation and transform itself into an attractive location for multinational companies, thus creating job opportunities for graduates. Moreover, in 1995, Ireland introduced a Free Fees Initiative, which allows all Irish citizens to pursue undergraduate degrees free of cost. This has not only been instrumental in encouraging students to stay in the country, it has also caused college enrollment in the country to increase exponentially.

South Korea, too, faced a brain drain as result of its economic struggles in the 1960s. However, the development of the science and technological sectors and significant investment into research and development led to an economic boom. This, in turn, led to the opening up of job markets, particularly in high-paying, technological fields, which incentivised people to stay. The creation of political stability and appeal to expatriates' love for their country has also been conducive to this goal.

A comparison of these countries reveals some common elements that have contributed to their successful reversal of brain drain. The build-up of research and development sectors, financial investments into developing the educational landscape, offering incentives to highly qualified expatriates to return to the country, economic enhancement, and an increase in the availability of career opportunities and advancements have been crucial in their fight against the loss of talented youth. If Bangladesh hopes to follow in the footsteps of these countries, it has to not only employ its policy-makers to create similar, cohesive strategies, it also has to ensure that its public servants are capable of bringing about the infrastructural changes that are necessary for those strategies to be implemented.

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