
Revisiting return migration: literature insights and a bibliometric perspective on emerging global mobility trends

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Abstract: This paper examines the scientific research on return migration published over the past five decades using Scopus databases. The research aims to uncover the prevailing and emerging themes associated with return migration. A bibliometric framework is utilised to assess how academic attention toward return migration has evolved over time. It analyses the co-occurrence of keywords and bibliographic coupling using a dataset of 375 articles. The results are depicted in strategic diagrams and longitudinal maps, illustrating that over the past two decades, there has been a notable focus on gender studies related to immigrants. Additionally, there has been a significant emphasis on immigration education, higher education, and international students in the basic theme segment. This insight offers academics and professionals a more comprehensive view of the current state of knowledge. It will help them focus their research on the trend of return migration, its causes, benefits, and drawbacks.

Keywords: return migration; student mobility; migration policies; globalisation; human capital; bibliometric analysis.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Yadav, M., Kumar, M., Dagar, M., Tiwari, N.K., Pandey, A. and Amoozegar, A. (2025) 'Revisiting return migration: literature insights and a bibliometric perspective on emerging global mobility trends', *Int. J. Business Excellence*, Vol. 37, No. 7, pp.1–26.

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1 Introduction

The examination of internal and international student mobility in university enrolment holds significant importance for scholarly investigation as it pertains to the human capital of emerging cohorts, which is a critical domain for research and development in advanced economies. According to Reyes and Zhang (2020), a strong interconnection exists between education and migration, making it exceedingly challenging to disentangle the two phenomena. Migration theory has encountered a significant impasse spanning multiple decades (Arango, 2000; de Haas, 2010, 2021; Massey, 2019; Massey et al., 1993). International student migration is a growing phenomenon that requires attention from both policy and research perspectives (Tati, 2010). Student mobility at the higher educational echelon holds considerable academic and institutional significance. This is due to the pivotal role that university students assume in disseminating knowledge-centric mechanisms, which, in turn, are imperative for fostering localised innovation and fostering economic advancement (Abramovsky et al., 2007). Rapid globalisation and changing techno-economical and sociological factors are other significant reasons for increased interest in this topic (Carrington and Detragiache, 1998; Mahroum, 2000). Globalisation has significant ramifications for the movement of individuals across many geographical and cultural borders (Baruch, 1995; Iredale, 2001; Koser and Salt, 1997; Shenkar, 2004). Enhanced mobility is a significant manifestation of the global integration of professions and the labour markets catering to professionals (Ackers and Gill, 2005; Carr et al., 2005; Iredale, 2001). Simultaneously, these fluxes can engender substantial disparities in diverse geographic regions within and among nations (Baryl and Dotterweich, 2001; Mixon, 1992). To clarify, although student mobility is

acknowledged to benefit the locations where students choose to study, it can also exacerbate regional inequalities (Krugman, 1991). In numerous nations, the regions that exhibit higher levels of development tend to allure students, not solely due to their provision of satisfactory services, infrastructure, and enhanced social welfare but also owing to their ability to furnish favourable labour market circumstances.

Consequently, these regions offer a greater likelihood of securing gainful employment post-graduation. Thus, areas characterised by a significant disparity between the education sector and the prevailing conditions of the local labour market tend to exhibit a notable prevalence of individuals who relocate, including students and university graduates (Kumar et al., 2025a, 2025b; Nguyen et al., 2025; Tati, 2010). Therefore, regions experiencing a consistent emigration of high-achieving and affluent students face a significant reduction in human capital, while attractive areas reap the advantages of inward migration. Furthermore, outmigration is a deterrent to advancing and establishing esteemed educational institutions, such as universities, within the regions that individuals choose to depart from (Contini et al., 2020).

Notwithstanding the cognisance that numerous migratory movements are transitory, it remains conspicuous that the preponderance of scholarly discourse pertaining to migration continues to operate under the presumption that such migratory phenomena are enduring in nature. The academic literature has proffered many elucidations on the phenomenon of return migration (Borjas and Bratsberg, 1994; Dustmann and Weiss, 2007). A strong relationship exists between migration and educational choices, with a direct correlation identified between studying and subsequent travel patterns (Dustmann and Weiss, 2007). The provision of substantial incentives for migration can be regarded as a highly effective strategy for investing in education, resulting in increased returns on educational attainment within the host country. In cases where the education obtained in the host nation can be easily transferred and the study options available are superior, a temporary vacation abroad may be considered an appropriate course of action. Student migration is intricately linked to the principles of human capital theory since it is widely recognised as a strategic investment in developing and enhancing human capital (Kumar et al., 2024; Mixon and Hsing, 1994; Pankaj et al., 2023). Suppose the process of accumulating human capital is comparatively more convenient in the host country. In that case, it can serve as a motivating factor for individuals to reside in a foreign country temporarily. Human capital accumulation can manifest in various ways, encompassing formal education and practical work experience.

The accumulation mentioned will enable individuals to re-enter their home nation's wage distribution at a comparatively higher position upon their return (Co et al., 2000). This outcome, despite the possibility of the home country having a lower average salary level, will result in a more advantageous situation for the individuals. The pursuit of education could conceivably serve as the exclusive impetus for an individual's decision to migrate (Dustmann and Glitz, 2011; Kumar et al., 2025c). It appears in the studies of (Oosterbeek and Webbink, 2011; Palifka, 2003; Wiers-Jenssen and Try, 2005) that students from underdeveloped countries who return to their home countries are more economically advantaged than those from developed countries. Engaging in employment in the host country after completing education also contributes to human capital development, hence augmenting prospects in the home country and expediting the repatriation process. There is a significant prevalence of international students returning to the Netherlands (Bijwaard, 2010). The return rate of international students, considered an important issue, was analysed in detail (Chen et al., 2022). Since the 1990s, several

factors have contributed to a reversal of the long-standing trend of skill and talent migration from India to Western countries. The growth of the Indian high-tech sector, driven by offshore outsourcing, the digitisation of business processes, and the globalisation of skilled labour markets and production, has led to a significant phenomenon where many Indian emigrants who left the country during the 1980s and 1990s are now returning to India to pursue employment opportunities or establish their own companies (Chacko, 2007; Saxenian, 2006). In addition to medical practitioners, individuals from diverse disciplines, such as scientific inquiry, financial expertise, and strategic marketing, are also making a resurgence (Jalal et al., 2019). The phenomenon of reverse migration has been experiencing significant growth, presenting numerous prospects for research.

Nevertheless, despite the growing frequency of reverse migration, recent research has emphasised the necessity for further comprehensive investigations. This study integrates perspectives on Return Mobility and Immigration Trends over different periods, namely the past, present, and future. The analysis employs bibliometric methods, relying on secondary data retrieved from the Scopus database. The article delineates explicitly several essential domains pertaining to reverse migration, encompassing its present dynamics and prospective avenues for further investigation.

The study research questions are enumerated below.

- RQ1 What are the observable patterns in publication frequency and citation activity within return migration research over time?
- RQ2 Which scholarly journals have most frequently featured publications related to return migration studies?
- RQ3 Who are the most frequently contributing authors in the field of return migration, and what is the extent of their academic output?
- RQ4 Which published works on return migration have had the greatest scholarly impact as measured by citation counts?
- RQ5 What major thematic clusters and emerging areas of focus have characterised return migration research during different periods?
- RQ6 How have international collaborations among researchers evolved in studies on return migration?
- RQ7 What key areas are likely to define future scholarly exploration in the field of return migration?

To address these research questions, this study conducted a thorough review of existing literature combined with bibliometric techniques for analysis.

The primary objective of this paper is to address several constraints identified in previous studies and make a valuable contribution to the wider domain of reverse migration. In this research endeavour, a thorough examination of pertinent scholarly sources was undertaken to acquire knowledge, followed by rigorous scrutiny of the gathered data. This study undertook an in-depth bibliometric analysis to trace the evolution of research on reverse migration between 1972 and 2022. Various metrics were examined, including year-wise publication output, citation dynamics, prolific contributing countries, author productivity, highly cited works, thematic developments,

and patterns of international collaboration. Bibliographic data for this analysis were extracted from the Scopus database. This study exhibits a higher degree of comprehensiveness compared to previous research, reducing the likelihood of overlooking any significant contributions to the topic matter. The time range of prior research has exhibited significant variability, depending on the specific topic under investigation and the study goals being pursued.

2 Review of literature

In the contemporary era of globalisation, global cities serve as prominent symbols of potential and cultural heterogeneity, attracting a continuous influx of individuals from many geographical locations. Global cities are typically defined based on a range of criteria, with one of the most prevalent being the presence of a significant number of corporate headquarters and international financial services (Hoo et al., 2025). Furthermore, these establishments serve as central nodes for various sectors, including legal, accounting, publishing, advanced telecommuting, services to producers, and control and oversight operations (Sassen, 2018). Global cities are characterised by their engagement in knowledge-based activities such as education, research, and artistic creation. The phenomenon under consideration is the attraction of migrants with exceptional skills (Beaverstock and Smith, 1996; Castles and Miller, 1998), who thereafter constitute a multinational and extremely versatile pool of talented individuals. The mentioned capital can manifest itself in the form of individuals who possess a wealth of knowledge and expertise, as expounded upon by Bathelt et al. (2004) and Hospers (2003). Alternatively, it can also be expressed by a group commonly referred to as the 'creative class', whose capacity for innovation serves as a catalyst for stimulating economic expansion, as theorised by Florida (2003). Cities that offer a multicultural atmosphere marked by diversity and openness tend to attract and support the growth of highly qualified people (Yeoh and Chang, 2001; Yusuf and Wu, 2002). The notion has been substantiated by scholarly investigation, which elucidated how smaller urban centres-such as Dublin in Ireland-achieved international prominence through the strategic development of transnational niche functions (Breathnach, 2000). Similarly, same observation holds for Indian urban areas such as Bangalore and Hyderabad, which are gaining prominence as international hubs for the information technology (IT) sector. Despite the evidence provided by recent studies, which have shown that immigrants in the late 19th century USA maintained connections with their countries of origin through financial transfers, return visits, and communication, with a significant number even choosing to permanently return (Bodnar, 1985; Wyman, 1994), conventional theories of immigration predominantly adopted an assimilationist perspective. Since the 1980s, researchers have been interested in the concept that immigrants keep strong ties to their home nations and civilisations despite living in a new country (Patterson, 2006; Schiller et al., 1995). Highly skilled individuals often engage in migration for a multitude of reasons. The potential for their relocation is contingent upon various factors, as elucidated by the scholarly works of Baldwin-Edwards (2006) and Beaverstock (2005). It is plausible that such relocation may be of a transitory nature, serving as a temporary measure. Conversely, it could also be perceived as a deliberate manoeuvre strategically aimed at establishing a permanent settlement (Hazen and Alberts, 2006). There are various reasons why individuals migrate to developed nations in order to pursue higher

education or engage in research activities at prestigious colleges and universities and advanced laboratories that are not readily available in their home country (Hazen and Alberts, 2006). Some are attracted by the prospect of a higher quality of life (Cheshire and Magrini, 2006), while others are driven by their entrepreneurial aspirations (Portes et al., 2002). In various global cities, there exists a distinct transnational migrant group comprising individuals who possess advanced skills, and high mobility, and occupy positions as professionals, leaders, and entrepreneurs. This group enjoys certain privileges due to their socioeconomic status and transnational nature.

As India's intelligent and proficient individuals embarked on the path of emigration, concerns developed regarding the nation's gradual depletion of its learned and skilled labour force to the Western region, a phenomenon commonly referred to as brain drain. The emigration of India's well-educated population has persisted into the 21st century. In 2005, India emerged as the second most significant origin of legal immigration to the US, following Mexico. The large number of individuals from India resulted in a substantial contribution of approximately 86,000 permanent residents to the US (USCIS, 2006). In 2005, it was observed that individuals hailing from India constituted a notable 14% of the visas bestowed in the US, specifically under the classification of 'employment preference'. This category is designated for professionals with rare and highly esteemed skills (DHS, 2006). Nevertheless, there is also a phenomenon of reverse migration occurring. An increasing number of Asian Indians who have received their education and are currently residing in the US express their desire to return to their country of origin. This trend is also being observed in practice, as more individuals are actively making the decision to return (Khan and Arokkiaraj, 2021). Skilled professionals are re-entering the workforce in India to capitalise on emerging economic prospects and employment options, choosing to establish themselves in the country's major urban centres. A portion of individuals who returned to India did so due to the decline in work opportunities within the US' IT business, which occurred as a consequence of a downturn in this sector from 2000 to 2004 (Kabra, 2005). Metropolitan areas such as Bangalore, Hyderabad, and the peripheral regions of Delhi and Mumbai have emerged as attractive destinations for a considerable inflow of repatriating Indian immigrants from the US, primarily consisting of individuals who are the first in their families to migrate (Rayaprol et al., 2021). These cities provide career prospects and work settings resembling those in Western countries, especially in the fields of IT, biotechnology, research, and business. They are equipped with technology, business and industrial parks, research institutions, and international companies, making them attractive options for Indians returning from abroad (Chacko, 2007).

Furthermore, the notion of migration as an investment in human capital offers a further rationale for the favourable correlation between return migration and effective economic integration. If migration is regarded as a mechanism for acquiring additional talent through employment and educational opportunities, it is reasonable to anticipate that migrants will only return to their home country once a sufficient amount of human capital has been amassed outside (Snel et al., 2006). Diverse migration and integration theories provide distinct perspectives on the trend of return migration, thereby yielding partially contradictory conjectures regarding the interplay between integration and the sustenance of transnational connections. While the initial collection of theories postulates that the amalgamation of economic and socio-cultural factors will lead to a reduction in individuals' intentions to return, the subsequent collection of theories posits the opposite

outcome (Constant and Massey, 2002). Both theoretical frameworks postulate a favourable outcome in terms of individuals' intentions to return to their home country, as a result of their involvement in worldwide social and economic networks. Interpretations linked to traditional neoclassical theory claim that migrants, while leaving behind their spouses or children, typically aim to attain greater lifetime incomes by establishing permanent residency in foreign countries. Therefore, migrants willingly agree to go through extended periods of isolation in order to achieve what they see as the ultimate goal: reuniting with their families. Insufficient research investigations and a dearth of comprehensive data persist in order to empirically evaluate these contradictory claims. Existing research primarily examines the dynamics of reverse migration by conducting a comprehensive literature review and bibliometric analysis of return mobility and immigration trends.

Upon doing a comprehensive examination of the existing body of literature pertaining to reverse migration, it is evident that there is a lack of bibliometric analysis that offers a thorough delineation of the keywords involved in this field. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the interconnectedness between migration and reverse migration, exploring the ways in which these two phenomena are intricately related.

3 Research methodology

3.1 *Data collection and analytical framework for bibliometric evaluation*

In pursuit of our research objectives, we have opted to collect data from the Scopus databases, renowned for their widespread utilisation in bibliometric investigations, amidst the multitude of bibliographic databases at our disposal (del Barrio-García and Prados-Peña, 2019; Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2012), to attain a more comprehensive range of analysis. The data was from the Scopus database, covering the period from 1972 to 2022. The search query employed was TITLEABSKEY ('reverse migration' OR 'international migration' OR 'internal migration' OR 'return migration' OR 'population migration'). The focus of our research generally revolved around journal articles as the major unit of analysis. The decision was taken based on the prevailing impression widely acknowledged among the academic community that these publications offer the most up-to-date and comprehensive perspectives in the realm of reverse migration. The temporal span spanning from 1972 to 2022 was divided into five discrete intervals to provide a longitudinal examination of the evolution of the relevant topics. The aforementioned divisions encompass the periods from 1972 to 1981, 1982 to 1991, 1992 to 2001, 2002 to 2011, and 2012 to 2022. The aforementioned elements are linked to an initial phase of research that centres on the investigation of the notion of reverse migration. This stage covers a restricted number of two articles. Following this, a subsequent phase arises, which is distinguished by a significant decline in research endeavours, resulting in a mere solitary article. In the third stage, a slight resurgence in publication is noticed, with a total of seven articles. In the fourth stage, a total of 48 papers were published, while the fifth stage was characterised by a notable increase in research production, leading to the publishing of 375 articles.

3.2 Analytical tools employed

To extract relevant records, the Scopus ‘analyse search results’ feature was used to gather and filter bibliographic data. For visualising keyword relationships and thematic mapping, the co-word analysis was conducted using the Biblioshiny interface integrated with R-Studio. Additionally, bibliographic coupling was performed with the help of the VOSviewer software to assess article interconnectivity based on shared references.

The authors’ keyword analysis facilitated the identification of conceptual links across studies by highlighting term associations within the dataset (Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2015). In this context, density measures the internal coherence within a cluster of keywords, while centrality indicates the extent of interaction between one theme and others.

Quadrants derived from these metrics represent different thematic roles:

- Quadrants with high density and high centrality indicate influential core areas, referred to as motor themes.
- Themes with low density and low centrality are either emerging or losing relevance.
- Areas marked by high density but low centrality represent internally strong yet isolated topics.
- Conversely, low-density but high-centrality themes form the foundational structure connecting various research areas.

Bibliographic coupling rests on the principle that documents citing similar references often share topical relevance (Gazi et al., 2024; Donthu et al., 2021). This technique is especially useful for visualising newer contributions that have not yet accumulated substantial citations but show strong thematic potential (Bretas and Alon, 2021). By evaluating the size and positioning of clusters-depicted as spheres in the visual map-the method illustrates how closely articles are related based on reference overlap (Andersen, 2021).

4 Results

4.1 Annual scientific production

To investigate RQ1, we examine the trajectory of academic literature pertaining to reverse migration. This examination is carried out annually during the specified time period, as depicted in Figure 1. This study encompasses a thorough examination of scholarly articles pertaining to reverse migration that have been published throughout the past five decades. It is evident that the progression of research on this subject was relatively sluggish during the initial three decades (1972 to 1981, 1982 to 1991, and 1992 to 2001). On the contrary, there has been a notable surge in scholarly focus starting from the fourth decade, resulting in a substantial growth of more than 48 publications. Over the course of the past decade, spanning from 2012 to 2022, there has been a notable and substantial increase in the quantity of articles that have been published, an impressive count of 375 articles as clearly shown in Table 1.

4.2 Most prolific journals on reverse migration

Regarding RQ2, it is significant to note that the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* stand out as the leading publication outlet on this topic, having published 15 articles related to return migration. Following closely behind is the journal *Population, Space and Place*, which has published 11 articles, and the journal *International Migration*, which has contributed 10 articles to the discourse on this subject. It is inherently reasonable to assert that the three most esteemed journals in the domain of international migration exhibit a profound inclination towards the subject matter of reverse migration as shown in Table 2. Similarly, the journal titled *Human Resource for Health* has made a significant contribution by providing nine research articles in the field of reverse migration. Additionally, the journals *Demography*, *Economics of Education Review*, and *Journal of International Migration and Integration* have each given eight research articles in this area of study. The esteemed academic journal, *BMC Medical Education*, has contributed to the academic discourse on the topic of reverse migration by publishing a total of seven thoroughly conducted research articles. Similarly, the esteemed journals *Journal of International Migration and Integration* and *Sustainability* (Switzerland) have made significant contributions to the field by publishing six research articles each, focusing on the intricate domain of incorporation.

Table 1 Decade-wise scientific production of research articles on reverse migration

	First decade	Second decade	Third decade	Fourth decade	Fifth decade	Consolidated
Timespan	1972–1981	1982–1991	1992–2001	2002–2011	2012–2022	1972–2022
Sources	1	1	6	41	240	268
Total documents	2	1	7	48	375	433
Authors	2	1	12	118	1,028	1,145
Annual growth rate	0	0%	4.61%	18.67%	16.91%	8.60%
Authors of single-author doc	0.02	1	3	11	84	99
International co-authorship	0%	0%	0%	27.08%	22.13%	22.17%
Author's keywords (DE)	0%	0%	21	132	1143	1235
Average citations per doc	9	13	55.86	44.44%	14.2	18.2

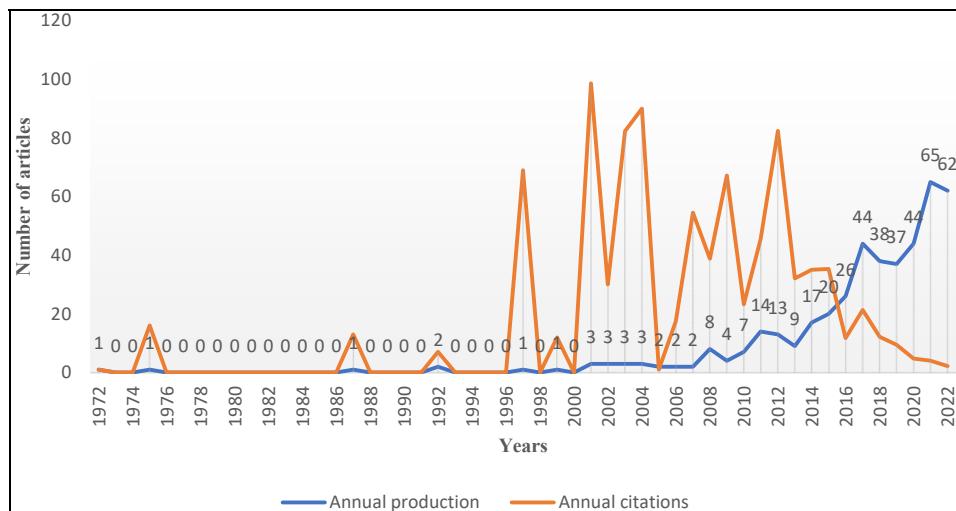
Source: Authors' development

4.3 Most prolific authors of reverse migration

To gain deeper insights into this domain and specifically respond to RQ3, we examined the authors with the highest research output in the field of reverse migration. Across the five-decade span of analysis, a total of 1,145 authors have contributed to scholarly publications on this topic. Table 3 presents a list of the top ten contributors, based on the number of articles they have published, as recorded in the Scopus database. This assessment of author productivity includes not only publication counts but also citation totals, institutional affiliations, and Scopus h-index scores. The analysis reveals that

Lura E. Enriques, with a Scopus h-index of 7, has made the highest contribution in research papers, with 11 articles and 126 citations. With a Scopus h-index of 19, David McCollum has produced four research articles and received 168 citations. Similarly, the individuals 'Ayon Cecilia' with a Scopus h-index of 23, 'Suzanne E. Beech' with a Scopus h-index of 5, 'Theresa A. Catalano' with a Scopus h-index of 11, and 'Karina A. Chavarria' with a Scopus h-index of 5, along with 'Allan M. Findlay' with a Scopus h-index of 30, 'Angel Huguet' with a Scopus h-index of 16, 'Cecilio Lapresta-Rey' with a Scopus h-index of 9, and 'Helen Packwood' with a Scopus h-index of 4, have each made notable contributions by publishing three articles in the field of reverse migration.

Figure 1 Evolution of scientific articles dealing with reverse migration (1972–2022) and Scopus citations (see online version for colours)



Source: Authors' development

4.4 Most cited articles on reverse migration

In alignment with RQ4, Table 4 presents the 15 most-cited scholarly works on return migration, as indexed in the Scopus database. Leading the list is the study by Findlay et al. (2012), titled 'World-class? An investigation of globalisation, difference, and international student mobility', published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, which has amassed 369 citations. The second position is occupied by 'Opening the black box of migration: brokers, the organisation of transnational mobility and the changing political economy in Asia' by Lindquist et al. (2010), featured in *Pacific Affairs*, with 243 citations. Following closely is Hirschman's (2001) article, 'The educational enrollment of immigrant youth: a test of the segmented-assimilation hypothesis', published in *Demography*, which has garnered 214 citations. Also noteworthy are the works by Mol and Timmerman (2014) in *Population, Space and Place*, titled 'Should I stay or should I go? An analysis of the determinants of intra-european student mobility', and Brooks and Waters (2009) in *Sociology*, titled 'Success': UK students and global circuits of higher education' – each receiving 111 citations.

Table 2 Leading top-10 journals published articles on reverse migration

S. no.	Name of the journals	Paper published	Country	Quartile	h_index	Coverage from	Publisher
1	<i>Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies</i>	15	UK	Q1	107	1971	Routledge
2	<i>Population, Space and Place</i>	11	UK	Q1	83	2004	John Wiley and Sons Ltd.
3	<i>International Migration</i>	10	UK	Q1	74	1961	Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
4	<i>Human Resources for Health</i>	9	UK	Q1	74	2003	BioMed Central Ltd.
5	<i>Demography</i>	8	USA	Q1	144	1964	Duke University Press
6	<i>Economics of Educational Review</i>	8	UK	Q1	96	1981	Elsevier
7	<i>Journal of International Students</i>	8	USA	Q1	24	2015	School of Education, University of Louisiana at Monroe
8	<i>BMC Medical Education</i>	7	UK	Q1	87	2001	BioMed Central Ltd.
9	<i>Journal of International Migration and Integration</i>	6	Netherlands	Q1	32	2004	Springer Netherlands
10	<i>Sustainability (Switzerland)</i>	6	Switzerland	Q2	136	2009	MDPI AG

Source: Authors' development

Table 3 Most prolific authors of reverse migration domain

Authors	Current affiliation	Scopus h_index	TP	TC
Enriques, L.E.	University of California, Irvine, USA	11	7	126
McCollum, D.	University of St. Andrews, UK	19	4	168
Ayon, C.	University of California, Riverside, USA	23	3	20
Beech, S.E.	Ulster University, Coleraine, UK	5	3	275
Catalano, T.A.	University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA	11	3	31
Chavarria, K.A.	Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Washington, DC, USA	5	3	22
Findlay, A.M.	University of St. Andrews, UK	30	3	120
Huguet, A.	Universitat de Lleida, Spain	16	3	37
Lapresta-Rey, C.	Universitat de Lleida, Spain	9	3	32
Packwood, H.	The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK	4	3	133

Source: Authors' development

Table 4 Most cited articles on reverse migration

Authors	Title	Journal	YOP	Total citations	TC/Y	Normalised TC
Findlay et al. (2012)	World-class? An investigation of globalization, difference, and international student mobility	Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers	2012	369	30.75	4.47
Lindquist et al. (2010)	Opening the black box of migration: brokers, the organization of transnational mobility and the changing political economy in Asia	Pacific Affairs	2012	243	20.25	2.95
Hirschman (2001)	The educational enrollment of immigrant youth: a test of the segmented-assimilation hypothesis	Demography	2001	214	9.30	2.17
Levels et al. (2008)	Immigrant children's educational achievement in western countries: origin, destination, and community effects on mathematical performance	American Sociological Review	2008	183	11.44	4.71
Beine et al. (2014)	Determinants of the international mobility of students	Economics of Education Review	2014	177	17.70	5.05
Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011)	I felt like my heart was staying behind: psychological implications of family separations & reunifications for immigrant youth	Journal of Adolescent Research	2010	152	11.69	3.34
Glick and White (2003)	The academic trajectories of immigrant youths: analysis within and across cohorts	Demography	2003	148	7.05	1.80
Cheung et al. (2011)	Evidence for a sensitive period for acculturation: younger immigrants report acculturating at a faster rate	Psychological Science	2010	146	11.23	3.21
Balá and Williams (2004)	'Been there, done that': international student migration and human capital transfers from the UK to Slovakia	Population, Space and Place	2004	142	7.10	1.58

Source: Authors' development

Table 4 Most cited articles on reverse migration (continued)

Authors	Title	Journal	YOP	Total citations	TC/Y	Normalised TC
Porche and Fortuna (2011)	Childhood trauma and psychiatric disorders as correlates of school dropout in a national sample of young adults	Child Development	2011	133	10.23	2.92
Gould et al. (2009)	Does immigration affect the long-term educational outcomes of natives? Quasi-experimental evidence	The Economic Journal	2009	132	8.80	1.96
Gleeson and Gonzales (2012)	When do papers matter? An institutional analysis of undocumented life in the United States	International Migration	2012	129	10.75	1.56
Beech (2015)	International student mobility: the role of social networks	Social & Cultural Geography	2014	112	12.44	3.17
Mol and Timmerman (2014)	Should I stay or should I go? An analysis of the determinants of intra-European student mobility	Population, Space and Place	2013	111	11.10	3.17
Brooks and Waters (2009)	A second chance at 'success': UK students and global circuits of higher education	Sociology	2009	111	7.40	1.65

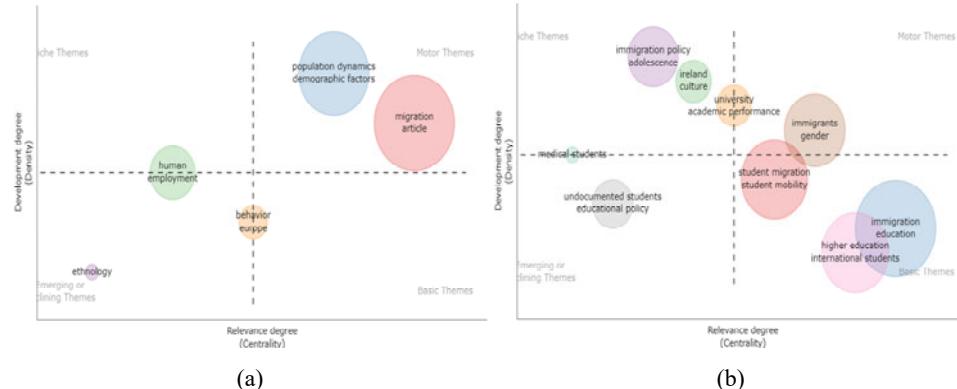
Source: Authors' development

4.5 Thematic analysis: subthemes on reverse migration

To address RQ5, Biblioshiny was employed to examine the progression of these subject matters during the two designated timeframes, i.e., 1972–2002 and 2003–2022 of investigation. To interpret the data effectively, it is important to recognise that the size of each thematic area is proportionate to the number of articles associated with it. Moreover, distinguishing among the different types of lines linking the themes is essential, as each type signifies a unique form of relationship (Murgado-Armenteros et al., 2015). In the early decades of research on reverse migration (1972–2002), the associated terminology and conceptual understanding were notably fragmented, indicating that the field was still in a formative and exploratory stage. The available literature indicates that a total of ten scholarly publications were published on the topic of reverse migration throughout the period spanning from 1972 to 2002. Within the realm of motor themes, it is evident that two prominent clusters may be identified. The first cluster consists of terms provided by the authors, namely migration and article as shown in Figure 2. The subsequent cluster is comprised of population dynamics and demographic factors. A smaller cluster, formed by the authors' keywords 'human' and 'employment', exhibited a comparable proportion in

both the niche theme and emerging theme. Similarly, the cluster formed by the authors' keywords 'behaviour' and 'Europe' exhibited a limited size, as it encompassed a comparable proportion of emerging theme and basic theme.

Figure 2 Emergent and motor themes in return migration research domain, (a) time-span from 1972–2002 (b) time-span from 2003–2022 (see online version for colours)

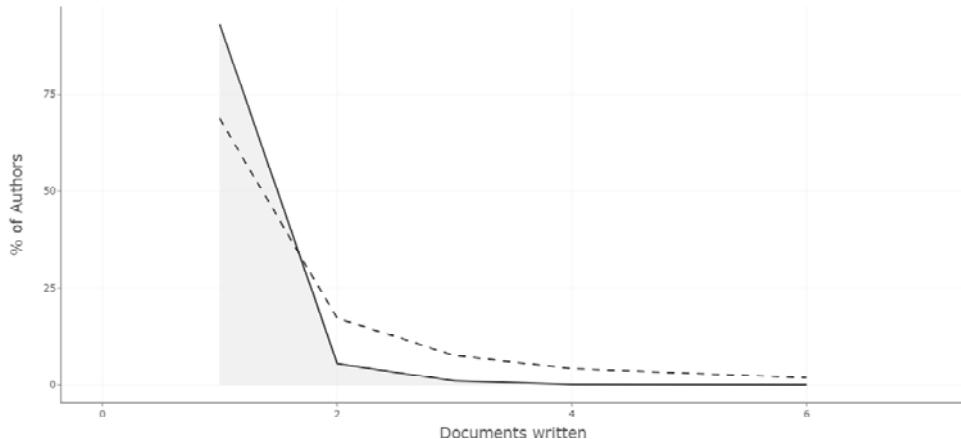


Source: Authors' development

During the period from 2003 to 2022, the bibliometric analysis reveals a wider array of themes, with notable prominence given to 'immigration' (115 occurrences). This is followed by 'education' (41 occurrences), 'higher education' (38 occurrences), 'international students' (31 occurrences), 'immigrants' (17 occurrences), 'student migration' (14 occurrences), and 'student mobility' (14 occurrences). These themes form the largest clusters within the basic theme. Similarly, the authors' keywords 'immigrants' (occurring 17 times) and 'gender' (occurring ten times) are situated under the motor topic. The largest cluster in the niche theme consisted of the term 'immigration policy', which appeared eight times. Following this, the term 'adolescence' appeared five times, forming another significant cluster. Additionally, the terms 'Ireland' and 'culture' created a smaller cluster within the niche theme, with 5 and 3 occurrences respectively. The term 'undocumented students' was found to occur nine times, whereas the phrase 'educational policy' appeared four times, forming a notable cluster within the emerging or declining subject.

4.6 Authors' production on reverse migration using Lotka law

In the incorporated domain of reverse migration, 1,044 authors from different countries have contributed a single article as a total of 0.931 proportion. In the domain under consideration, a total of 62 authors have made contributions to two papers each, while 12 authors have made contributions to three articles each. It has been observed that there are two authors who have each contributed four publications, whereas there is only one author who has produced a total of six research pieces in the integrated area.

Figure 3 Authors' production using Lotka law

Source: Authors' development

Table 5 Authors' collaboration using Lotka law

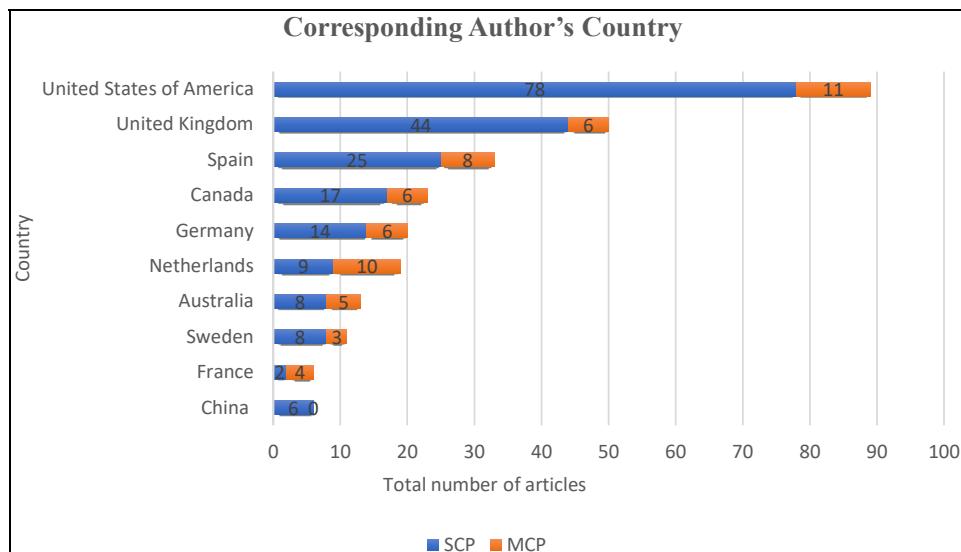
Documents written	Number of authors	Proportion of authors
1	1,044	0.931
2	62	0.055
3	12	0.011
4	2	0.002
6	1	0.001

Source: Authors' development

4.7 Author country analysis: domestic vs. international research output (SCP vs. MCP)

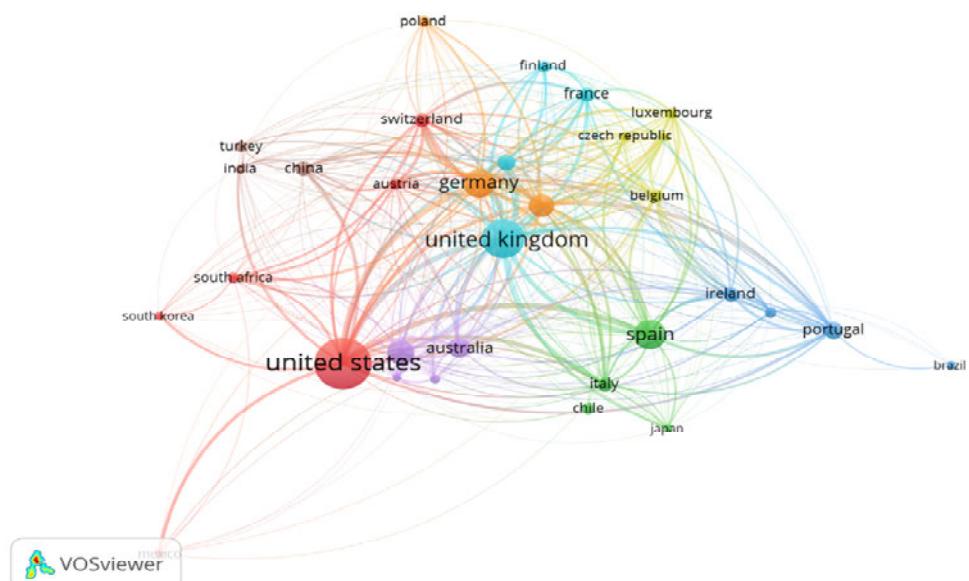
Figure 4 highlights that the US has produced 89 publications related to reverse migration. Despite this volume, its multiple country publication (MCP) ratio remains relatively low at 0.124, suggesting limited international co-authorship. France has contributed a total of 6 research articles in the reverse migration domain, of which four articles were published with the collaboration of foreign countries, reflecting a moderate degree of MCP ratio (0.667). In the same way, the Netherlands has published a total of 19 research articles, of which 10 are published with the collaboration of foreign countries' authors, which ultimately reflects a very good MCP ratio (0.526), followed by Australia, which has published a total of 13 research articles in which five research articles are published in collaboration with foreign countries authors with maintaining (0.385) MCP ratio. Germany maintains their MCP ratio at (0.300), Sweden (0.273), Canada (0.261), and Spain (0.242). The UK has published research articles in a significant number (50), but only six articles are published in collaboration with foreign authors countries, indicating a very poor MCP ratio (0.120). In reverse migration, China has the poorest MCP ratio (0.00), as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Corresponding authors' country for the publication of articles of reverse migration (see online version for colours)



Source: Authors' development using Biblioshiny (R-Studio)

Figure 5 Countries coupling for publication in the domain of reverse migration (see online version for colours)



Source: Authors' development using Biblioshiny (R-Studio)

4.8 Countries coupling for the publication in the domain of reverse migration

Figure 5 presents a detailed representation of the bibliographic connections between countries, showing the formation of six separate clusters that include both small and major entities. The initial cluster comprises six nations: Austria, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea, Switzerland, and the US. It is important to highlight that the total number of articles originating from this cluster is significantly high. Within this framework, the size of the circle represents the level of publication intensity in relation to other countries. The USA (cluster 1), the UK (cluster 6), Germany (cluster 3), Spain (cluster 2), Portugal (cluster 4), and Australia (cluster 5) are the countries that publish the highest number of scholarly works.

4.9 Future research trends within the field of return migration

Future research on return migration will investigate key aspects such as economic factors, particularly the influence of economic possibilities and global economic movements, and how they affect the growth of the home nation. The study will analyse the impact of political and social issues, including governmental stability, social policies, and integration programs, on individuals' decisions to return. Also, it will explore the importance of social networks and familial ties in these decisions. The study will focus on cultural elements such as identification and belonging, particularly among second-generation migrants, and the difficulties they face in adapting to cultural norms. Health and well-being, environmental factors, and educational consequences will be significant focus areas. The study will examine the effects on mental and physical health, environmental sustainability, and the transfer of knowledge and skills. Conducting comparative studies would enable the identification of patterns and distinct influences in other regions, so offering a worldwide viewpoint on reverse migration. This holistic approach will improve comprehension of the intricate interaction between economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects in return migration.

5 Additional discussion

5.1 Policy implications of the study

Governments must develop policies and strategies to successfully manage inter-country return migration. Efforts should be made to not only assist in the repatriation of migrants but also to prioritise the improvement of reintegration programs, comprehend the specific traits and requirements of returnees, and provide support for well-executed initiatives that assist in their transition. During periods of migrant shifts, governments have implemented diverse measures. It is important to customise certain institutional adjustments based on the particular circumstances and stages of development in each country instead of disregarding the distinct factors related to return migration. In cases of large-scale return migration, such as those witnessed during the COVID-19 epidemic, it is advisable for governments to implement strategies that encourage local business development and provide assistance for the reintegration of returnees. This would help alleviate the adverse effects on the lives of individuals returning. Moreover, alterations in institutional frameworks have a significant impact on company operations in countries that are

impacted by extensive migration. Hence, it is imperative for governments to prioritise enhancing institutional frameworks to ensure that return migration can effectively contribute to economic recovery. Several European countries have improved the availability of financial resources for entrepreneurs who return to their home countries, acknowledging the importance of small and medium-sized businesses in stimulating economic recovery. Policymakers should prioritise the resolution of underlying deficiencies, implement novel social and economic measures, and enhance adaptability to effectively respond to the enduring consequences of return migration. During the COVID-19 epidemic, the Chinese government promptly disseminated accurate and easily accessible information regarding the problem, engaged in discussions to enhance preventive and control measures, and offered vital assistance to facilitate the repatriation of its residents. Traditional offline methods have been replaced by online methods to facilitate study and work. A multitude of students and organisations have embraced techniques for online education and remote labour. The Chinese government's prompt and resolute actions in handling return migration serve as a model for countries globally, highlighting the significance of proactive and adaptable approaches in tackling migration issues.

5.2 Future research direction

Amidst times of unpredictability in times of unforeseen circumstances, it is imperative for people, governments, and nations to implement a range of preventive measures. Based on the current body of research on return migration, we continue to confront numerous forthcoming obstacles and decisions. The subsequent areas represent critical opportunities for further academic inquiry:

- 1 Exploring the *economic impact and development contributions* of returning migrants is of utmost importance. Research can examine the impact of return migration on economic growth in home countries by analysing factors such as entrepreneurship, job creation, and the utilisation of skills and information gained elsewhere.
- 2 The process of *social and cultural integration* presents both notable hurdles and potential advantages for those who have returned to their home country after living abroad. Research can explore the social interactions and cultural adaptations that individuals experience, such as the process of reintegrating into society and the impact of social networks. An important topic of research is the examination of how return migration affects identity, belonging, and cultural preservation, especially among individuals who are second-generation migrants.
- 3 It is important to analyse the *impact of technological, environmental, and policy factors* on return migration. Research can examine the ways in which digital platforms and technology enable the process of return migration and reintegration. Additionally, it can explore the influence of environmental sustainability and climate change on individuals' choices regarding migration.
- 4 The return migration experience is significantly influenced by the *importance of health and well-being*. Subsequent research should examine the psychological and physiological well-being consequences experienced by individuals who have

returned to their home countries, specifically focusing on their ability to get and the standard of healthcare services available.

6 Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive overview of academic research on return migration conducted between 1972 and 2022. We analysed the attributes of published publications on this topic from different viewpoints using visualisation tools like R-Studio and Vos Viewer.

- 1 In the earlier years, bibliometric trends indicate a steady rise in both the volume of publications and total citation counts. Despite this upward trajectory, the average citations per article began to decline post-2015. Notably, there has been a significant surge in research output within the return migration domain starting from 2010 onward. The quality level of the sources used in the articles is quite high, as the top nine sources are classified in the first quartile out of the top ten sources. In the field of return migration research, the most prominent area of study is business management, characterised by the publication of a highly significant document that has received the maximum number of citations (369). The *Journal of Ethics and Migration Studies* has reported that increasing research papers have concentrated on various types of migration and their outcomes. These studies also address themes such as interethnic tensions, social exclusion, racial dynamics, national identity, civic status, and policies related to migrant integration.
- 2 In the pertinent studies on return migration, it has been seen that countries have developed intimate interactions and collaboration. Most scholars who have published numerous articles hail from the USA, the UK, Spain, and Canada. Enriques, L.E. affiliated with the University of California, Irvine, US, is the most prolific author in the integrated field.
- 3 To identify topics of interest that evolve over time, we undertook a thorough review of emerging and recurring themes in the field of return migration research. The analysis of emerging and motor themes from 1972 to 2002 revealed that papers focused on population dynamics, demographic issues, and migration within the motor theme area. These keywords were the main focus throughout this period. During the period from 2003 to 2022, the term 'immigrants' gender' is present in the motor theme and immigration policy, while adolescence and culture are present in niche topic areas. Undocumented students and educational policy are recognised as developing themes.

Crises can arise unexpectedly and anywhere, prompting individuals and nations to pursue successful tactics or policies to manage adverse circumstances actively. We must be equipped to handle diverse emergencies. There are still lots of space and promise for more research on return migration.

Declarations

No external sources of funding were involved in the execution of this study.

The authors declare that there are no financial conflicts or personal relationships that could have influenced the outcomes or interpretation of this research.

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