



## The Study Abroad Decision: A Qualitative Case Study of Pakistani Doctoral Students

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### Abstract

*Deciding to pursue doctoral studies abroad is informed by several factors reflected by students' perspectives and experiences. The present study purports to examine Pakistani doctoral students' study abroad decisions and their preference to study in Austria. The study drew on a qualitative case study approach to grasp a broader perspective of the participants who were comprised of twenty doctoral students selected purposefully from the public universities of Austria. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. The researcher performed a thematic analysis of the interview data, field notes and reflective writing after all the participants described their personal experiences and perspectives. As a result of the analysis, the themes emerged include; country of previous studies, Austria versus other countries, placement and working environment, and language and country choice. The study has implications for doctoral students, their home country funding agencies and the host university support system.*

**Key Words:** Doctoral Studies, Study Abroad Decision, Austria, International Students, Pakistan, English-Speaking Country, German Language.

### Introduction

The substantial increase of international students in higher education institutions of many countries is noteworthy (Kücking, 2011), especially in the universities of developed countries. This ascending number of international students is observed to be threefold from 1.3 million in 1990 to 4.5 million in 2012 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2015). The quality education, broader range of specializations offered in a particular field of study and having experience of advanced opportunities with exposure to international horizon are considered as the significant advantages and motives of studying abroad (Boado, Hu, & Soysal, 2017; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Waters, Brooks & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011).

Much research is conducted to study how host universities attract international students. Hercog and Van de Laar (2016) investigated factors influencing the decision of Indian students to study abroad and found that “the four most important factors mentioned by our interviewees to move abroad were better possibilities for career advancement, better working and research conditions abroad, international exposure and financial benefits” (p. 20). Senger and Vollmer (2010) surveyed international doctoral students studying in Germany for identifying the reasons for choosing Germany and categorized their priorities in terms of regions of origin, financial and personal reasons. The PhD students from the Middle East, Africa and East Asia highlighted professionally-oriented reasons like the good reputation of the scientific community and academic quality of the subject area in Germany. They mentioned that there existed no good opportunities for doctorate studies in their home country. Therefore, they preferred to graduate from Germany to develop professional expertise in order to carry out professional work and ensures better career opportunities in their home country. There are also financial benefits of doing a doctorate from Germany in terms of low or no tuition fees and lower living costs, as reported by the East Asian PhD students. Personal, as well as cultural factors, were indicated as the priority reasons by doctoral students from Eastern European countries, especially by female students who decided to do their doctorate from Germany than the male peers.

There is a wide range of academic disciplines being offered at various levels of degrees at general, technical and medical universities across Austria that can address the diversified needs of students interested in specializations under the theoretical or applied dimensions of knowledge (OeAD, 2014). The newly implemented Universities Act of 2002 directs to establish an entirely new academic infrastructure in universities. The universities under this act took several initiatives to restructure

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doctoral education that include “the introduction of curricula for PhD studies, workgroups to improve doctoral studies, publication of handbooks on professional doctoral training and the implementation of centres for educational and student services with a special focus on doctoral students” (Ecker, Kottmann & Meyer, 2014, p. 18).

It has been noted that international students have different reasons for coming to Austria for study purposes. During a social survey, international students were asked about their motives for coming to Austria to study and found that their decisions were based on their specific experiences and perceptions. A study by OeAD (2016) revealed the students are motivated to study in Austria because of the good quality of education and reputation of the universities, reasonable cost of living, learning German language, and due to its closeness to the native countries of the students.

Another study conducted by Musil and Reyhani (2012), under the European Migration Network (EMN) project that focused on the students’ population of third-world countries in Austria indicates that the students from such countries constituted 15 percent of the total number of students at the tertiary level (International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED 5-6]) in the academic session 2010-11. The part of international doctoral/PhD students at this level (ISCED 6) was 22 percent. In comparing with OECD countries, “Austria was one of the countries with the highest percentage of international students among their tertiary enrolments following Luxembourg, Australia and the United Kingdom” (p. 10).

In a study executed in the Pakistani context, Zaheer and Zia (2013) included 13 Pakistani PhD scholars to investigate the “perceived effectiveness of foreign scholarship schemes for the faculty development offered by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan” (p. 15) through a semi-structured interview in a qualitative study. They found that scholars were highly excited and interested in availing the overseas scholarships because they preferred to obtain a foreign doctoral degree. It was noticeable that scholars completed their PhD in the stipulated period of 3-4 years of scholarship, which indicates that Pakistani scholars were competitive to the standards of education around the world.

Netz and Jaksztat (2014) argued that based on the previous research, four major factors influencing student mobility and choice of the country include: “doctoral candidates’ social background, their previous mobility experiences, the internationality of their current research context and their current social context” (p. 39). Similarly, the major objective of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) to send Pakistani scholars abroad is “the production of highly qualified manpower for the higher education institutions and research and development (R & D) organizations of Pakistan so that they could play their academic and research roles with an ultimate objective of socio-economic development of Pakistan” (HEC, 2016, p. 2).

Annual reports of the Higher Education Commission (HEC, 2016) Government of Pakistan hitherto available indicate that a significant number of Pakistani doctoral students had completed their studies abroad. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2011), the number of Pakistani students studying abroad increased rapidly during the period 1998 to 2010, rising from 13,127 to 36,366. More than 6,000 scholars have been awarded overseas scholarships, fellowships and financial support under different Human Resource Development (HRD) programs such as MS, PhD, post-doctoral research and the International Research Support Initiative Program. Among them, 4,500 scholars accomplished their study programs and went back to Pakistan to serve the country (HEC, 2016). The scholarships for MS and PhDs were awarded for studies in universities of Austria, France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Turkey, Italy, South Korea, China, and New Zealand, where the tuition fees are relatively low. Also, some of the scholarships were awarded to Pakistani students for UK, USA, Australia and Canada. Some of the programs, for instance, the Fulbright Scholarship Program, were jointly funded by USAID and HEC (HEC, 2016).

In Austria, several Pakistani doctoral students arrive every year. By June 2013, 387 scholars proceeded to Austria for their doctoral studies under different disciplines. Two significant studies for doctoral degree have been conducted regarding the Pakistani community and students in Austria - one covering the larger society exploring social life of Pakistani Muslims in Vienna (Rao, 2011) and the other in the sphere of education revealing a comparison of learning styles of Pakistani and Austrian students (Shoukat, 2013). Nevertheless, there is no literature found on Pakistani doctoral students’ experiences of deciding to pursue their doctoral studies, particularly in Austrian universities and in other universities of the world in general. The present study attempts to examine Pakistan students’ choice of Austria as a destination for their doctoral studies and how they made the decisions to pursue their studies in Austrian universities.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The study attempted to delve into the perspectives of the decisions of doctoral students studying abroad through the thick descriptions of their explored views. The purpose of the research resonates with the tradition of human science and, therefore, follows certain principles of this inquiry (Moustakas, 1994). As the qualitative approach has been adopted, therefore, drawing generalization out of students’ experiences in such a population and making predictions is not the intention of the study because it addresses the point of view of a particular group of Pakistani doctoral students who chose Austrian universities for their studies.

## Research Questions

The present study is designed to investigate the following questions regarding Pakistani students' decision to study in Austria:

1. How did the country of previous studies inform doctoral students' study abroad decisions?
2. How did doctoral students prefer Austria for their studies as compared to other countries?
3. How did the working environment of Austrian universities help decide the choice of Austria?
4. How did doctoral students think about the language of the destination country while deciding to pursue their studies?

## Methodology

As the qualitative case study approach was thought to be suitable for this research because, in view of Yin (2009), the case study design can be undertaken while answering "how" and "why" of a problem in a particular context. This specific research approach was selected while considering the "decision making of Pakistani students to study in Austrian universities," a case. This approach, as Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest, helps to explore the phenomenon through the multiple lenses rather than depending upon a single lens by providing a variety of aspects to understand the factors that influence the decision making. Our task as researchers was to develop understanding and describe the viewpoints of participants they had while deciding to study in Austria. The participants were facilitated to recall and retrospectively reflect on such experiences in order to grasp the meanings and to search for 'wholeness' out of the experiences of each participant in a particular context and the situations in which they were involved and made the decision.

## Participants and Data Collection

In pursuance of selecting the participants of the study, first, a request through an email was sent to the potential participants along with a short demographic questionnaire having an introductory description of the study. They were requested to fill duly in the questionnaire and to give their kind consent to be interviewed. On the basis of their response, twenty participants were selected who were thought suitable to serve the purpose of the study. Interviewing is a primary source to generate data in any qualitative research in education (Dilley, 2004). Interviews, semi-structured in nature, were conducted, keeping in view the nature of the study, research methodology adopted and the research questions. These interviews helped to understand, describing and interpreting students' perspective, experiences and what the meanings they attached to various aspects under investigation.

## Analysis of Interviews

While analyzing the data of each interview, the similarities or commonalities of responses were traced. The entire transcript of each interview was examined in order to identify a response similar to what a participant had described elsewhere in the interview text. New aspects with significant meaning came out after reading the transcript time and again that contributed to a more refined and developed understanding of participants' experiences and helped to unveil the descriptions from their specific perspective. Each of the participants' stories contributed to the overall understanding of the meanings of the doctoral students' group. The emergent themes are described in the following section.

## Results

The analysis of the interview transcripts depicted many interesting concerns of the participants. As a result, the emerged themes include *country of previous studies, Austria vs. other countries, placement and working environment, language and country choice*. The description of each of the themes is given hereunder:

### Country of Previous Studies

This theme covers the participants' perspectives on making decisions about the choice of country for their higher studies in a way that the experiences in the country from where they earned their last academic degree had shaped their decision to choose the other country and a university for pursuing a doctoral degree. It was found that doctoral students like Maryam, Haris, Danyal, Salman and Daud, who had obtained their last degree from a European country, decided to pursue their PhDs, preferably in the same country. They were not willing to go back to their native country to pursue a doctoral degree there. Most of them were awarded scholarships or funded PhD positions in Austria, meaning that having a scholarship or a funded position in a foreign university is the major source of motivation and inspiration in deciding to study abroad.

These students completed their last degree from a country other than Pakistan. They described their experiences regarding their decisions to study abroad in a relatively different way. Their previous experience of studying abroad gave them confidence for further education in the same country or another foreign country of similar ranking. One such student named Haris "*got much confidence*" of "*doing something worthwhile*" during his Master studies in a European country that led him to get

funding and to pursue a PhD as an employee in a paid project in Austria. He was doing PhD in a technology university and working as a researcher in another Austrian Institute. He explained his experiences of his Master studies in abroad as:

*We Pakistanis think that it is very difficult or nearly impossible to study and get funding from abroad. Our people make us frustrated and make us feel inferior. On the other hand, I have noticed that our education system almost teaches us somewhat similar subject content (like in European universities) or, in some cases, something extraordinary as compared to other countries.*

Likewise, some other doctoral students who did their Masters from USA, England or another European country wished to continue their doctoral studies in those countries mentioning the reason that *"the professor knows me well"; "it is easy to continue the same work"; "you are more comfortable and productive" and "finish your work soon while working with the same professor"*. Nevertheless, 32 years old Salman completed his Masters in a European country other than Austria, but he could not get funding for his PhD studies there despite his *"priority"* to do the PhD in the previous country. Therefore, he had to apply to many other countries such as Canada, USA, Germany, Austria, China, and South Africa; and finally succeeded to get acceptance of doing a PhD from the last three countries; out which he preferred Austria because the research work being offered there was more *"appealing"* and *"suitable"* for him and he could *"perform something better"*. Thus, the suitability and interest in that particular research work influenced him to come to Austria for his PhD studies.

Some of the doctoral students were not clear about the area of research suitable for their PhD studies and became aware of it at a later stage. For instance, Daud intended to do his PhD when he came to a Scandinavian country for his Masters, but he did not know how he would decide. Like other participants who did their Masters abroad, he also wanted to get a PhD position from the same university, but it could not be worked out. After a great struggle, he won funding for PhD from an Austrian university at a time when he was about to leave for his home country. That is why he had to move to Austria, although *"mentally he had a great interest"* in the country where he did his Masters.

The theme suggests that doctoral students who had earned their last degree from a country other than Pakistan were eager to pursue their doctoral studies in the same country and preferably with the same supervisor. However, they moved to Austria due to the failure of obtaining a scholarship or getting a funding position in the country where they had already studied.

## **Austria vs. other Countries**

It was interesting to find from the participants' experiences that these doctoral students never thought of doing their PhDs from Austria, which means that their decisions to study in Austria were not pre-planned and well thought, and it happened to them like a dream of doing PhD from a specific country. The participants named Hira and Inam, having all their previous studies from Pakistan, shared that they had a plan of obtaining a doctoral degree from abroad but never thought of doing this from Austria. It would be their least priority but they had to do it from Austria as their *"spouses"* got HEC scholarships for Ph.D. studies in Austria. In a country like Pakistan, where family systems are still powerful, it is considered that both parents are needed to reside with their kids for raising them up. Hira explained that:

*My husband got a PhD scholarship for Austria and moved there. To live a family life without a husband and two kids for the next more than four years was not an easy task. So, there was no option left for me other than pursuing my own PhD studies from the same country.*

It shows that the participant prioritized to live as a united family because she thought it very difficult to handle family matters in Pakistan single-handed and, therefore, decided to join his husband in Austria and also took advantage of studying there. On the other hand, some participants never thought of doing PhD from an Austrian university. The participants' decisions of studying abroad were based on the notion of 'never' or 'ever'. They thought of different choices of countries for their PhD studies and they compared Austria with those countries. They explicitly expressed the desire to study in an English-speaking country or in another country where they had attained their last academic degree.

One of the participants named Maryam, who obtained her Master's degree from an 'advanced' country having positively and negatively *"different experiences there (in Austria)"* and was desirous of pursuing her doctorate from the same country. She responded, *"to be very honest; I did not want to come here [to Austria] for the PhD. I hate having to do the PhD in Europe; I wanted to go to the UK. However, I could not get funding for the UK or USA"*. Moreover, after waiting for a long time, having been *"left alone in the race for PhDs among the other faculty members of her native university"* and feeling *"uncertain"* whether or not she should proceed with the PhD somewhere, she realized that *"I am wasting time; it is high time to do a PhD. Then, in the end, I went for this option. Otherwise, I would never have wanted to come here (in Austria)"*. This indicated that sometimes doctoral students felt the pressure of being too late in getting professional promotion in their organizations and they made a hasty decision to pursue their doctoral studies according to the available choice of the country but against their personal choice.

Similarly, Younus *"never thought to do a PhD in Austria... I had no plan to apply here; neither did I know about it."* He was *"planning for English-speaking countries"* such as America, England and Australia because the *"economy and academic system was better."* Then, he applied for a PhD scholarship relevant to his field of interest that was a partner program between England and Austria and requested a professor in Austria to supervise his research work. In addition to this scholarship, his prospective supervisor asked him to apply for a funded PhD position with his collaboration simultaneously. He got the scholarship as well as the funded PhD position but preferred to avail the funded PhD position because he realized that it would be hard to *"satisfy*

two professors" with possibly "different interests" under the partner/split PhD program of the scholarship. Thus, he came to Austria to avail of the funded opportunity and to research in his area of interest.

There involved a hard competition to win a scholarship or funding for a PhD program. Sometimes it is better to apply in a country where the competition is relatively not tough; one has a higher probability of to be selected. Waleed, one of the participants, elucidated that he did not know much about the Austrian culture, language and education system. He explained that:

*I came to know later when I got a scholarship that Austria's language is German. Also, I had perceived that it would be relatively easy to get a scholarship for Austria because it is not well-known and most of the students would not like to apply for this country and resultantly, there would be less competition and I would be able to get a scholarship in this way.*

Now, he thought that Germany would have been a better choice for pursuing PhD because most of the people did not know Austria and he had to tell about this country whereas everybody knows Germany and it is a "big name" as compared to Austria. It was interesting to notice that in some instances, parents' or the home institution influenced doctoral students' decision to study abroad. A 32 years old PhD student, Ismaeel, was doing PhD in a field of engineering and technology. During his Bachelor studies in Pakistan, he became eager to do a PhD and he won a scholarship for Germany. However, the university in his country was more inclined to the USA, but he could not avail that possibility because his parents were not happy with the choice of USA. It remained in his mind that he "would do a PhD". Then he was awarded another scholarship from Pakistani Govt., he described:

*There was not much choice for other countries, and there were limited options. You can say that I just chose one of them; there was nothing special with Austria. I wanted to come to Europe. Germany could have been an option. But there might have been issues of admission and visa in my specific field, so I came here.*

The Pakistani students compared Austria with other countries of the world while making a decision. Inwardly, they wanted to study in an English-speaking country. However, they wanted to ensure the availability of a scholarship or did not want to lose the funding position they had got. In some cases, there was no other option left except Austria.

## Placement and Working Environment

The sharing of experiences and information of preceding PhD scholars from Austria served a reliable source for the succeeding scholars that act as a catalyst and help to remove confusion and to reach a final decision. The contemporary doctoral students included in this study had connections with Pakistani colleagues who had already done a PhD from Austria through the various mean of internet. They disseminated that Austria, predominantly, was a peaceful and safe country. Also, it was one of the most visited countries in the world. One of the participants named Ishaq, who was pursuing his doctorate in a medical university, explained that it was a tough time for Muslims after 9/11. America and many other countries were propagating against them. However, the situation was much better in European countries, including Austria. That is why he preferred to study in Austria as there were not many problems in terms of practicing religion. He described that:

*I came to know about Salzburg through an article that was one of the most visited cities in Austria. I intensely desired to go to Austria when I read about it. Similarly, I came to know that most of the medicines on cancer therapy were synthesized in Austria, that was my field of interest. That is why I preferred Austria. Germany and China were at the second and third choices, respectively.*

Some of the participants revealed that finding a placement in a science laboratory by a PhD student was not an easy task in Austria. In life sciences, the researchers usually spend most of their time working in the laboratory and their attitude is deeply observed by the professors. Usually, professors give consent to those students who have an academic reference. A participant named Liaqat, who was studying in a field of life sciences, recounted that "my colleagues and friends in Pakistan did PhD from Austria and they had links with the research groups working in the laboratories and their reference helped me to get access to one of such laboratories". Moreover, he got much information about Austria by his friends and colleagues that contributed a lot to his adjustment relatively quicker in Austria.

Another participant named Tosif, who was in the 6<sup>th</sup> semester in a veterinary university, expressed similar views regarding his Pakistani colleagues who already studied in Austria and were convinced that the working environment of Austrian universities is very 'suitable'. He also informed that an Austrian who visited his university in Pakistan helped him to get an acceptance letter from an Austrian university. The respondent said that "most of the people said that there are more chances to get HEC scholarship for Austria as compared to China where the candidates could not get a scholarship". Similarly, an Austrian research supervisor visited another public sector university in Pakistan who required PhD students for an Austrian Institute. One of the participants of the study named Tariq was impressed by the fact that the supervisor was very competent and he had earned a big name in the research community. He elaborated that "I was highly motivated by the research group of my supervisor. The ranking of the university was also very good. So, I was convinced".

Yamin, another student of a veterinary university, considered herself very lucky to be a student of one of the oldest veterinary university in the world. He proudly spoke that "it is an honor for me to be a student of this university. There are a lot of research facilities and much guidance. There are versatile research groups and my professor is a well-known personality in his field". On the other hand, Aliyan, who was studying in the 7<sup>th</sup> semester of PhD in a field of social sciences, was of the view that "his decision

to come to Austria was not research-based. One of my friends had already done PhD from here and he thought that the study environment was quite good and admission to PhD is not a big problem". He also got a lot of information about Austria from his friends in Pakistan.

The theme delineates that doctoral students inclined to study in Austria as they had academic affiliations through their Pakistani colleagues and friends who portrayed the academic and research culture of Austrian universities and living conditions of the country positively. This also encouraged them to move with their families.

## **Language and Country Choice**

It has been noticed that the language of teaching and learning greatly influences the choice of country for advanced studies. Although most of the participants of the study did not have a basic understanding of the German language, they preferred Austria because English is widely used in the academic system of the universities, especially at the doctoral level. For example, Yousuf, who was doing PhD in a field of veterinary sciences, found six or seven options of countries in the list including Austria and Germany for studies on scholarship. For veterinary sciences, the medium of instruction at PhD level was German in Germany and English in Austria. Naturally, he selected Austria; otherwise, he would have to spend six to twelve months to learn the German language in case of studying in Germany, which would be an "additional burden". He described:

*The other reason was that the scholarships were only for Austria and not for other countries like Australia, England and New Zealand. Also, I think that the standard of research and teaching is much better in Austria. Even most of the students are coming from Germany.*

Likewise, Yaqoob, who was doing PhD in a technology university of Austria, had different options of countries to avail of the scholarship that included Germany, France, China, Austria and Thailand. There was a language requirement in Germany and France. For Austria, there was not such a condition of language learning he produced that "it was written in the guidelines for getting admission that there is no requirement of another language. English is sufficient here. That was the only reason for selecting Austria."

Similarly, Ibrahim, who was doing PhD in a field of biological and medical sciences, had options of countries such as Germany, France, Austria and China. He received a scholarship for Austria. For him, the name of the city Vienna was more renowned than the country. He described that:

*I did not have a specific idea why I came to Austria for the PhD... as an option; it sprang to my mind by chance that I chose Austria, it was not preplanned. I selected Austria for no particular reason. However, having the English language in PhD was a major reason to join this university.*

Yasmin had a similar story. She was in 4<sup>th</sup> semester of PhD at a technology university in Austria. It was her dream to do a PhD. She explained, "It was, but not now." She did not know at the time that she should take the option of another country. She described:

*I would have preferred an English-speaking country if I could get this opportunity for the second time instead of coming to Austria because I speak English... My sister did PhD from Austria... I thought that she would be already there and we would live together but she had completed her PhD when I got the scholarship... She motivated me because she was satisfied with the Austrian system.*

Another participant named Yamin was informed by his professor in Pakistan that he should apply for Austria because PhD studies are in the English language there. Therefore, he selected Austria as the country for doctoral studies. Whereas one of the participants, Kamran, had a bit different perspective. He and his wife already had basic courses in the German language before coming to Austria. Some of his friends were living in Germany and also wanted him to come there. They advised him to learn the German language to make easy access to Germany. Meanwhile, his wife also got her doctoral scholarship for Austria. The German language served one of the reasons for deciding to get admission in Austrian university as he had basic know-how of the language. According to him, "this basic knowledge of the German language made their social adjustment a lot easy". The people who did not know the German language before going to Austria had faced difficulty getting socialized quickly.

It can be concluded from the participants' experiences that the German language was not a barrier as far as the academic culture of the university is concerned. However, they faced a problem in social life while interacting with the people of the Austrian community. Most of the participants did not learn the German language because they did not intend to reside permanently in Austria.

## **Discussion**

The experiences in deciding to pursue doctoral studies in Austria provide a context to explain and understand many aspects of the topic under investigation. Studying abroad in a specific country enjoys an important place in the professional and academic life of Pakistani doctoral students. According to Carlson (2013), "Student mobility results from a process that starts long before the students themselves begin to think about studying abroad" (p. 178). Nevertheless, some of the doctoral students in this study never thought of doing PhD in Austria. As an example, Maryam described, "I did not want to come here [in Austria] for the PhD... I wanted to go to the UK". For Ibrahim the name of the city, Vienna was more renowned than the

country. He stated, "*I did not have a specific idea why I came to Austria for the PhD... as an option it sprang to my mind by chance that I chose Austria, it was not preplanned. I selected Austria for no special reason*". Ismaeel, who also was awarded an HEC scholarship, narrated that "*there was not much choice for other countries... there was nothing special for Austria. I wanted to come to Europe*". The participants' decisions to study in Austria were not based on an organized system of information that could be provided by some institution like HEC. Therefore, scholars decided on the diversified reasons or attractions which they encountered by one or the other source.

Most of the study participants came to Austria as they had received a scholarship or PhD position only for this specific country. Moreover, doctoral students like Maryam, Haris, Danyal, Salman and Daud, who obtained their last degree from a European country other than Austria, intended to pursue their doctoral education in the same country but they could not get funding there. Their previous experience of studying abroad promoted their confidence for further education in the same country. Based on the previous research, Netz and Jaksztat (2014) argued that doctoral students' "previous mobility experience" is one of the four significant factors that contributed to the understanding of how they could better find opportunities to study abroad (p. 39). Some of the participants' supported this argument. Salman discussed the advantages of finding a chance of studying in the same university abroad under the same professor as, "*the professor knows me well, it is easy to continue the same work with him, you are more productive and you finish your work soon*". Also, Daud was "*mentally satisfied and had a great interest*" in his previous university abroad. Others intended to proceed to English-speaking countries i.e., USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc. For example, Yasmin described that "*I would prefer to opt for an English-speaking country if I could get this opportunity a second time*". The findings of research conducted by Perkins and Neumayer (2011) supported that English-speaking countries tend to influence students positively because English has emerged as a dominant language in the business and scientific world. Also, a common language of both the countries makes the mobility and transition smoother (Beine et al., 2014; Boado, Hu, & Soysal, 2017; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019) as English is widely understood among the university students in Pakistan.

However, the participants like Younus, Salman and Yousuf came to Austria not only to avail the funding opportunity or scholarship but also to research in areas of their interest. The research work was more "*appealing and suitable*" for Salman and he could "*perform something better*" in his respective Austrian university. Yousuf, a doctoral student in veterinary sciences, added, "*I think that the standard of research and teaching is much better in Austria... Even most of the students come from Germany*". This is in agreement with the results of a social survey conducted with foreign students who were asked about their decision to study in Austria. The Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD, 2016) reported the results of this survey that "the reasons most frequently cited were related to the university at which the student was enrolled ("University has a good reputation", "Quality of the studies", etc.)" (p. 10). Besides, Netz and Jaksztat (2014) argued that the "internationality of their [doctoral students'] current research context" is one of the four major factors influencing doctoral student mobility abroad (p. 39). Indian students interviewed in a study by Hercog and van de Laar (2016) added that better research conditions and international exposure is a significant factor to decide a country to study abroad.

However, the doctoral students, including Yaqoob and Yousuf, preferred to study in Austria as compared to Germany because there was no requirement of German language learning for doctoral studies in Austria. Yaqoob said that "*English is sufficient here. That was the only reason for selecting Austria*", while Yousuf stated that in the case of going to Germany, he would have to spend six to twelve months to learn the language, which would be an "*additional burden*". It is contrary to the findings of a social survey in Austria where one of the most frequently cited reasons to study in Austria was to learn the German language (OeAD, 2016). It implies that the students from other countries and particularly from the European countries, prefer to learn more than one language, whereas the results of this study indicate that Pakistani doctoral students are not flexible and, therefore, not inclined to learn a new foreign language. Most of the students spent more than two years when they were interviewed and most of them had not learned the German language and some of them had learned a very basic German language.

## Conclusion

Most of the doctoral students did not plan well before coming to Austria and it was not their first preference. They had been awarded a scholarship or PhD position in Austria after making attempts or desiring to go to 'another' country, particularly to an English-speaking country such as England, Australia, America and Canada. The students who had done their previous studies in a foreign country preferred to do their PhDs in the same country but they could not get funding. Their previous experience of studying abroad had given them confidence for further education in the same country or another foreign country. All of such doctoral students had done their previous studies in Europe. Germany was an option for a few individuals due to its 'strong' economy, whereas a few did not opt for it due to the requirement for German language learning. Some of the participants preferred to come to Austria because the research work was more appealing and exciting for them, and they could perform better. Others came to Austria because they had got scholarships or funding for this country, although their supervisor was not an expert in his/her field of study. In a few cases, the participants' home university or the family members also influenced their decision to study abroad.

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