

Gulf Students Crossing Borders to Study Medicine Abroad: A look at the Influencing Factors, Challenges, Perceptions



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Background

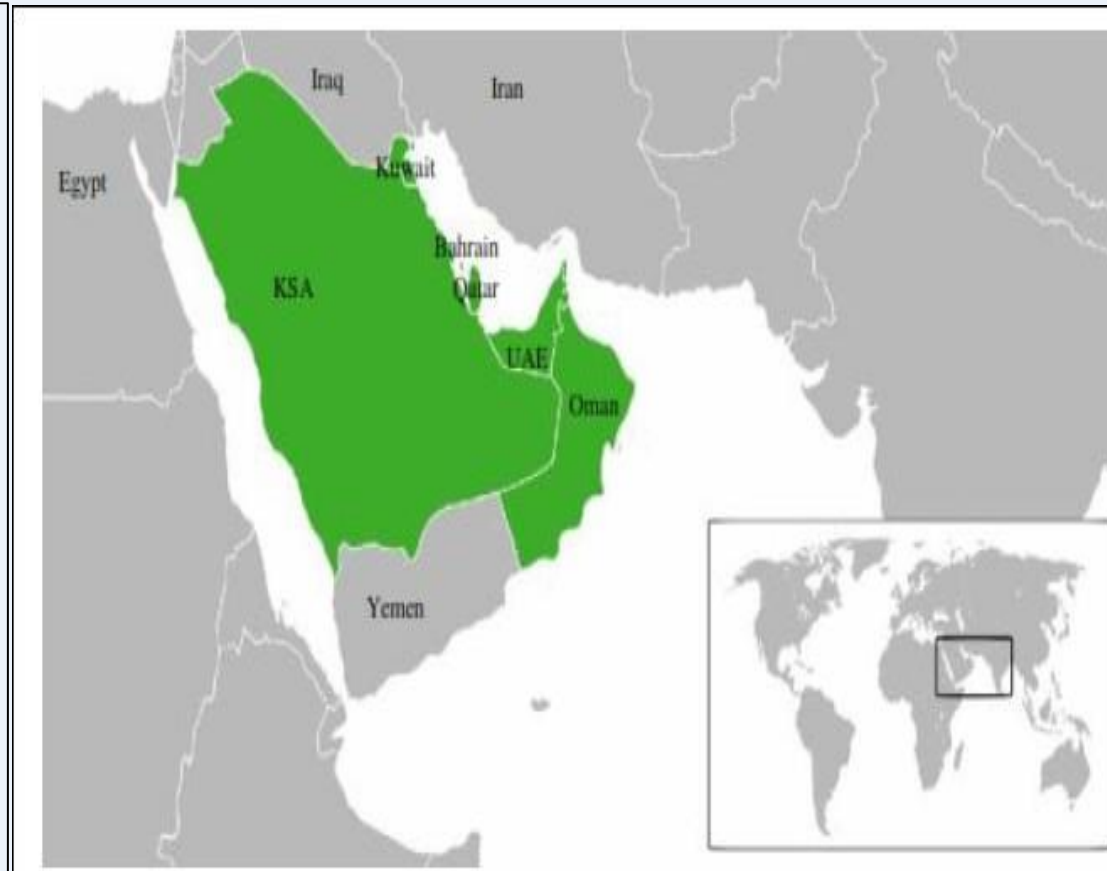
Higher education is no longer provided solely in the confines of national borders as the horizon of education has widened from national school to global universities. Studying abroad offers the ability to learn by doing, interact actively through a trial-and-error approach and deal with lots of information; all factors that have appeal to Millennial students.

National and international education authorities need to understand the underlying reasons behind a student's decision to study abroad, influencing factors, and available sources of information.

Gulf Medical Students are fortunate to have the availability of financial support offered by their countries through international scholarships for highly achieving students. However, students who do not meet the set criteria can still self-fund and study abroad.

The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf is a regional, intergovernmental political and economic union that consists of:

-Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Sultanate of Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.



Objectives

- To explore gulf medical students' influencing factors, challenges, and perceptions of studying abroad.
- Evaluate students' interest in post graduate specialty training and subspecialty.

Methods and Study Design

A cross-sectional prospective study was conducted using electronic survey.

Electronic survey was designed to meet the objectives of the study by expert researcher, piloted, and then adjusted.

This was distributed to gulf medical students abroad by emails.

Study sample was limited to students in two European and two Middle Eastern Universities (United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Kingdom of Jordan, and Kingdom of Bahrain).

Results

- 94 responses met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed.
- Average age was 20.89 years. Female accounted for 68.1%
- Majority of students were in second year and third year (34.0% and 27.7% respectively).

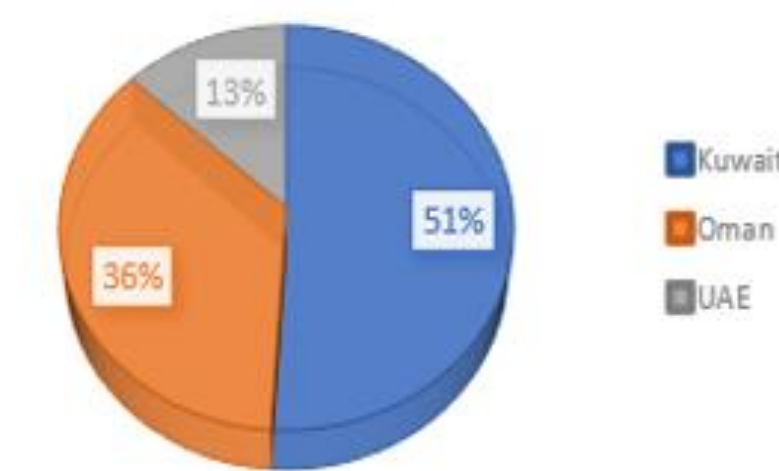


Figure 1: Participants Home country

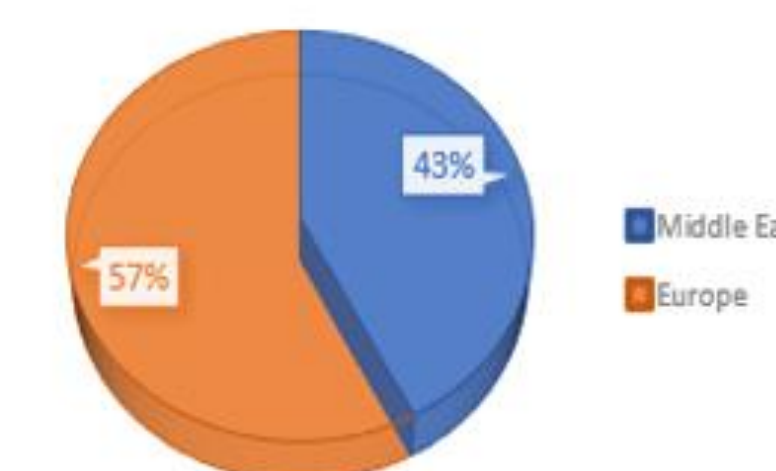
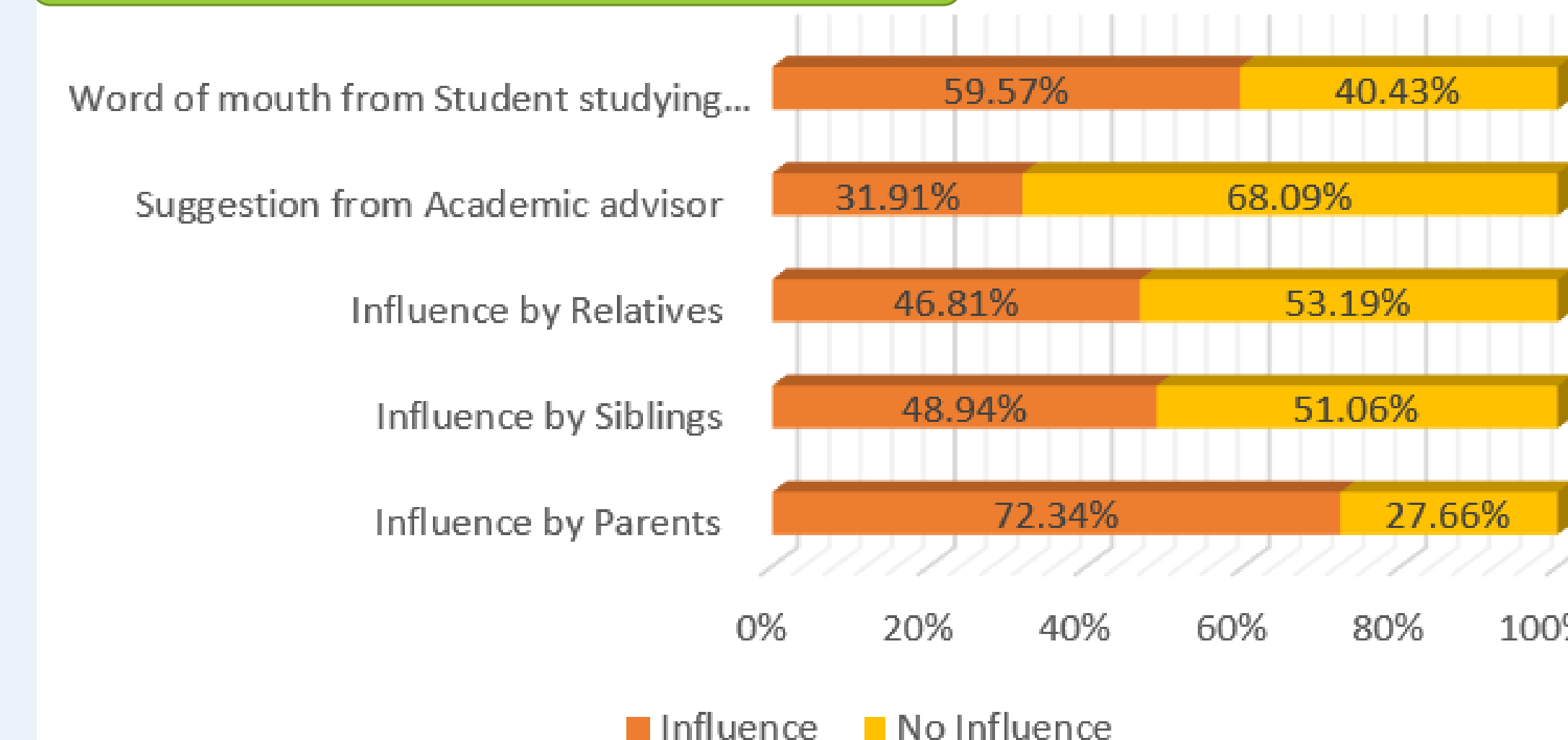


Figure 2: Students Study Regions

A. Influencing factors

- The main influencing factor was to broadening personal experience (score 4.4).
- 76.6% agreed that studying abroad can enhance future employment prospects.
- Three quarters agreed that seeking qualification with worldwide recognition was one of the strong driving factors to studying abroad.
- Surprisingly, analyzing all the results on influencing factors, experience living in more developed country was ranked the least by students.

B. Influence of others



C. Attitudes and Perceptions

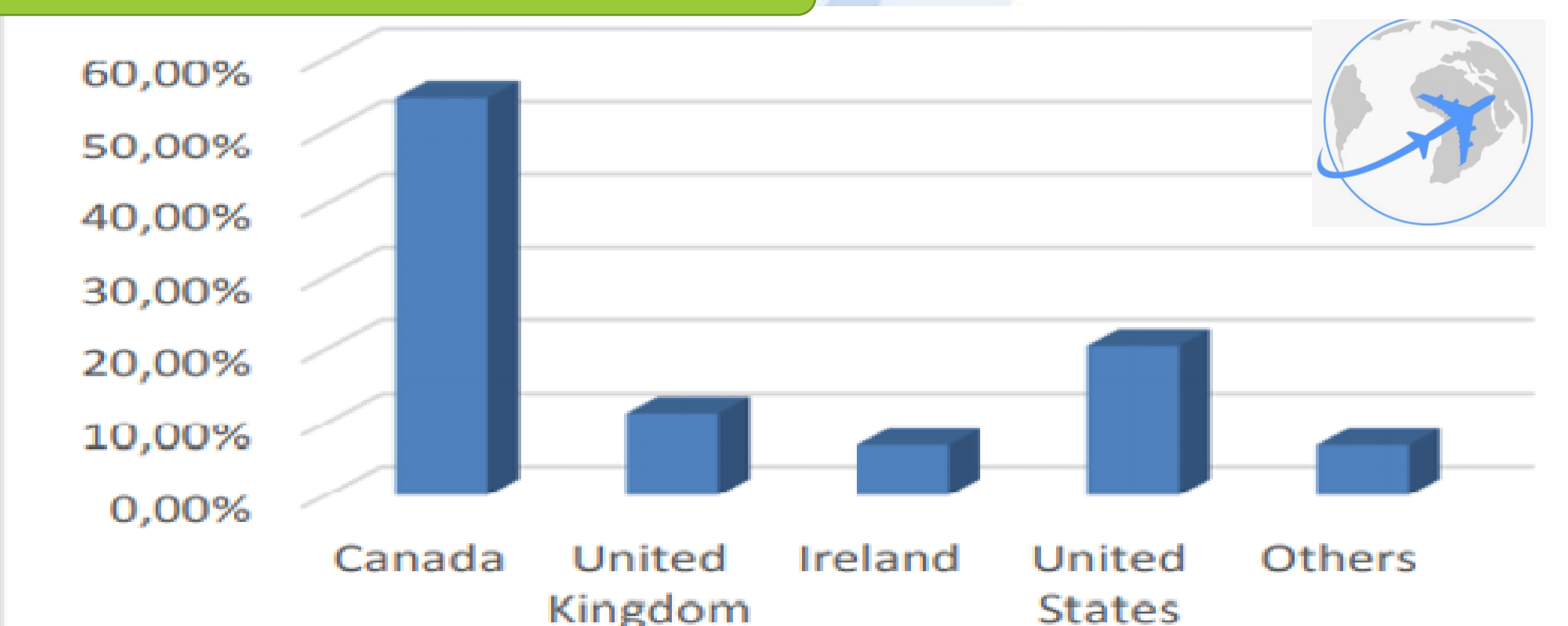
- Twenty students have regretted studying medicine abroad
- Quarter of participants have at least thought, at some stage, of withholding their study abroad and to continue at home country (25.53%).
- 11% of participants would not recommend studying abroad to others.
- Relationship between regretting to study abroad and recommended studying abroad was not significant (21.28%).

D. Challenges

Challenges	Score
Lack of family Support	2.38
Family obligations	2.49
Not wanting to be away from home	2.94
Difficult to live away from home and friends	3.15
Extra-curricular obligations in foreign universities	3.06
Not confident enough with the language	2.21
Fear of safety in other countries	2.83
Fear of racism in other countries	2.89
Security issues in host country	2.79
Not enough financial means to cover living expenses	3.38
Concerns about health service costs	2.87

Table 1. Weighted Scores for Challenges

E. Postgraduate Destinations



- 44.7% were interested in pursuing a career in surgery and its sub-specialties. ➤ General Surgery, Neurosurgery, and Cardiac surgery were the most preferred specialties.
- About 12.8% of participants were not interested in continuing their postgraduate training abroad and preferred to go back home.

Conclusion

Broadening personal experience and word of mouth from parents and other students are main drivers to study abroad among gulf medical students.

Despite the overall satisfactory perceptions of medical students towards studying abroad, the challenges and obstacle facing them has affected a significant proportion of medical students.

The high rate of students regretting studying abroad and at the same time the high rate of recommendation for other to study abroad indicate that personal satisfaction is a key factor, however, studying abroad does not suit everyone.