

Factors Influencing the Skilled Migration of Graduates from State Universities in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Skilled migration has become a major concern for Sri Lanka, as the continuous outflow of state university graduates poses serious challenges to sustaining economic growth, innovation, and human capital development. This study examines the key factors influencing graduates' migration intentions, focusing on political, social, family, and economic conditions. The study population consisted of 30,329 state university graduates in Sri Lanka, from which a sample of 380 respondents was selected using appropriate sampling techniques. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed among recent state university graduates and analyzed with SPSS software through correlation and regression techniques. The findings reveal that unfavorable economic conditions, such as limited job opportunities, stagnant wages, and rising inflation, are the most influential drivers of migration. Political instability, weak governance, and corruption also significantly shape migration decisions, while social factors, including peer influence, perceptions of better living standards abroad, and access to higher education, further encourage the intention to migrate. Family support, through financial resources, logistical help, and existing migrant networks, strongly facilitates this process. Together, these four factors explained 34.5% of the variance in migration intention ($R^2 = 0.345$, $p < 0.001$), with social factors and economic conditions emerging as the strongest predictors. The lack of clear career development pathways, institutional inefficiencies, and low public trust in governance further aggravate the trend of graduate out migration. The study concludes that these combined pressures prevent the country from retaining its skilled workforce long enough to meet development goals.

Keywords: *Economic conditions, family influence, migration intention, political instability, skilled migration, social factors, state universities*

Introduction

Migration of skilled professionals has emerged as one of the most pressing development challenges for many low- and middle-income countries. The growing movement of educated youth from the Global South to more developed regions has raised concerns about brain drain, human capital loss, and the widening gap in innovation and competitiveness between sending and receiving nations. Within this global context, Sri Lanka presents a striking case, as it invests heavily in free higher education but continues to face significant graduate outmigration. Understanding the

factors that influence graduates' migration intentions, as well as the long-term implications for national development, is critical for shaping effective policies. This research therefore examines the underlying economic, political, social, and cultural drivers of skilled migration among Sri Lankan graduates, situating the phenomenon within both local realities and global labor mobility trends.

The migration of skilled people, particularly university graduates, from developing countries has become a critical social and economic concern in the last few years. In Sri Lanka, this trend is increasingly visible among young

professionals seeking better career opportunities, improved living conditions, and greater social security abroad. Despite the country's strong public education system that annually produces a significant number of qualified graduates, Sri Lanka continues to face challenges in retaining its skilled workforce. The continuous outflow of talented graduates has affected economic growth, innovation capacity, and social development, a trend that is also evident in many developing nations facing similar structural, economic, and political challenges (Jayasooriya et al., 2025).

The Sri Lankan labor market has been unable to absorb the rising number of graduates into high-quality employment. The Institute for Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (Weerakoon et al., 2022) highlights that while the graduate population is expanding annually, the economy has not developed at a pace that can provide sufficient opportunities, especially in specialized fields such as IT, healthcare, and engineering. A 2025 study of private sector employees in the Western Province found that economic and social push factors such as inflation, underemployment, and lack of career prospects play a significant role in shaping migration intentions, while attractive career growth and stable economies in host countries act as strong pull factors (De Mel & Priyanath, 2025). Similarly, research into the construction industry revealed that the economic crisis and limited professional opportunities at home are pushing engineers and skilled workers abroad, with higher salaries overseas serving as a key attraction (Abeynayake et al., 2024).

High living costs, rising inflation, and stagnant salaries are key drivers pushing graduates to consider migration. (Madusanka, 2023,) found that graduates who had planned to stay in Sri Lanka changed their minds after completing their studies, citing economic recession, low-

wage or “minimum wage” jobs, and a lack of marketable opportunities as major concerns. In a related study, management students reported that foreign postgraduate institutions are preferred over local ones because of expectations of better remuneration, greater prestige, and more stable economic prospects abroad (Priyabhashini & Premarathne, 2023).

Political instability significantly drives migration intentions. Jayawardana (2022) notes that governance failures, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiencies undermine institutional trust, prompting graduates to seek stable work environments abroad. Regional studies similarly show that weak governance discourages young professionals from pursuing local careers (Barra & Ruggiero, 2022). Social and living conditions also influence migration decisions. The IOM reports that high-quality healthcare, advanced education, and strong welfare systems attract skilled migrants. In Sri Lanka, deficiencies in public services and infrastructure, coupled with favorable immigration policies in countries like Canada, Australia, and Germany, further motivate graduates to migrate.

Cultural and educational aspirations remain central drivers of graduate migration. Many Sri Lankan graduates pursue postgraduate studies abroad to enhance employability and access better career opportunities. (Gunawardena & Nawaratne, 2017) found that international education is linked not only to career advancement but also to integration into global professional networks, and this trend has intensified with the growth of scholarships and online global learning platforms after 2020. A recent IPS survey in 2022 noted that family influence also plays a vital role, as migration decisions are often collective and shaped by family strategies aimed at improving household economic stability. Graduates with relatives already abroad benefit from

financial and logistical support, lowering the risks of migration.

The consequences of graduate migration are increasingly concerning for Sri Lanka. In 2024, the country recorded its highest-ever outflow of migrant workers, with over 312,000 individuals leaving for overseas employment Ceylon Wire News, 2024. A report in the Daily Mirror highlighted that more than half of university graduates in certain fields migrate and do not return, causing significant losses to sectors such as healthcare, engineering, and IT. This brain drain undermines the returns on public investment in higher education and diminishes the country's innovation and competitiveness. Furthermore, a (Jayasooriya et al., 2025) study revealed that more than 50% of returned migrants plan to re-migrate, citing continued dissatisfaction with domestic opportunities (Gunawardena & Nawaratne, 2017). Finally, the migration of graduates from Sri Lanka's universities between 2020 and 2025 is shaped by

persistent economic hardship, limited labor market absorption, political instability, inadequate social infrastructure, and attractive overseas opportunities. Fiscal pressures, rising costs of living, and weak governance have intensified push factors, while global demand for skilled professionals and favorable immigration policies create strong pull factors.

This report from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka shows trends in labour migration for 2024. The line graph explains the monthly number of people leaving the country for foreign employment. It highlights those departures were higher in the middle of the year, but there was a drop towards the last quarter of 2024. The pie chart shows where Sri Lankans mostly migrated. A large majority, about 80.6%, went to Middle Eastern countries, while smaller numbers went to Asia (except South Asia and Middle East), Europe, South Asia, and very few to Australia and New Zealand. This reflects heavy reliance on Middle East jobs.

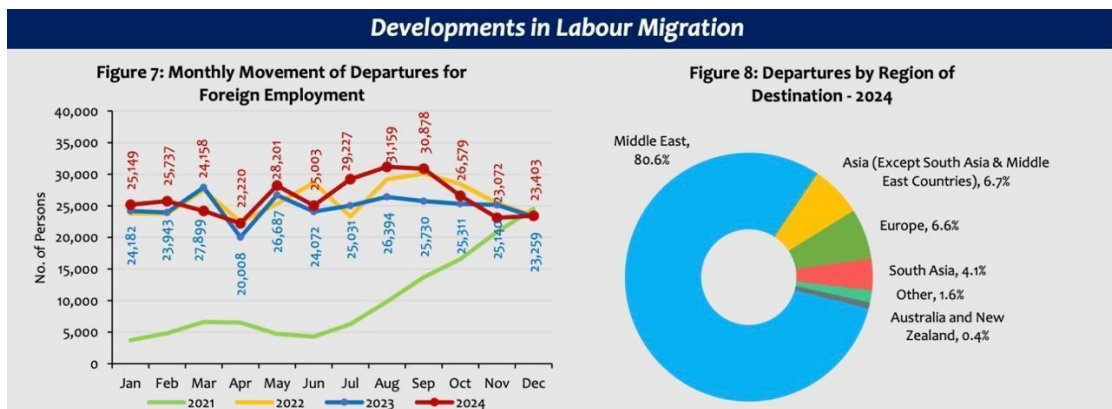


Figure 1: Trend of Labour Migration

Source: Economic Research Department Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2024)

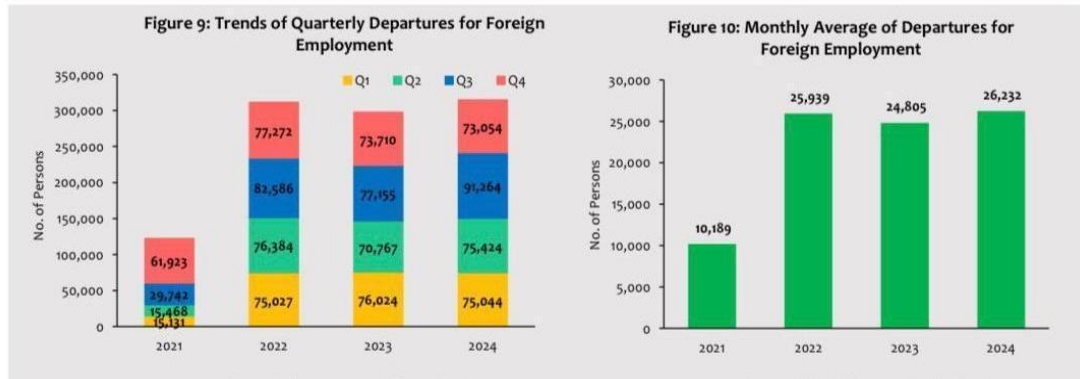


Figure 2: Trend of Quarterly Departures

Source: Economic Research Department Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2024)

These charts show the number of Sri Lankans leaving the country for foreign employment between 2021 and 2024. In 2021, departures were very low, with only around 112,000 people, mainly due to the pandemic.

From 2022 onwards, there was a big increase, with more than 300,000 departures each year. The quarterly breakdown shows that every quarter had over 70,000 departures after 2022. The monthly average also rose sharply, from about 10,000 in 2021 to around 26,000 by 2024. This indicates that more Sri Lankans are seeking jobs abroad, likely due to economic challenges and the search for better opportunities.

Research Problem

In recent years, skilled labor migration has gained international attention, particularly in developing nations. Many educated individuals migrate abroad in search of opportunities with greater salaries, better living conditions, and access to higher education. Often called "skilled migration" or "brain drain," this pattern has long-term effects on the nation's workforce, innovation, and economy. Migration of skilled workers and educated individuals seeking better opportunities abroad has grown to be a major problem

in Sri Lanka. Many public university graduates decide to leave the nation in search of better living conditions, stable employment, higher incomes, and chances for further education. The primary drivers of this movement are social and cultural pressures, political unpredictability, and economic hardships. The purpose of this study is to investigate these aspects in further detail and offer supporting data.

One of the main factors of graduate migration is economic issues. Young professionals find it challenging to establish secure lifestyles in Sri Lanka due to rising inflation, a lack of employment prospects, and low earnings. According to (Perera, 2020), graduates are facing financial strain as living expenses have risen more quickly than income. More recently, it was discovered that many skilled professionals were considering leaving the country because they felt that the new tax measures were unfair and burdensome (Jayasooriya et al., 2025). Graduates in industries like IT, engineering, and healthcare are particularly impacted because there aren't enough good local opportunities.

Political instability is another factor that pushes graduates abroad. Weak governance, corruption, and frequent changes in leadership create uncertainty

about the future of the country. (Wijesinghe & Jayawardane, 2021,) showed that these issues reduce trust in local institutions and discourage young professionals from building their careers in Sri Lanka. As a result, many prefer to migrate to countries with stronger political systems and better job security. Social and cultural reasons also strongly influence skilled migration. Family expectations, the need for a higher quality of life, and better access to healthcare and education encourage graduates to look abroad. The International Organization for Migration reported that countries with strong social systems attract skilled professionals from developing nations. Similarly, (Barra & Ruggiero, 2022,) highlighted that young professional, especially women, are motivated to migrate when they see better opportunities for career growth and work-life balance overseas.

The scale of migration has become alarming in Sri Lanka. In 2024, the country recorded its highest ever outflow of workers, with over 312,000 people leaving for foreign employment (Ceylon Wire News, 2024). Furthermore, a recent study revealed that more than half of skilled professionals who return to Sri Lanka still plan to migrate again because they remain dissatisfied with the opportunities at home (Jayasooriya et al., 2025). And also, Sri Lanka is losing a large share of its educated workforce despite efforts to retain talent. The purpose of this study is to investigate the main factors economic, political, social, and cultural that drive state university graduates to migrate, and to analyze how this trend may affect the nation's future labor force.

Identifying these gaps is essential because it helps researchers focus on aspects that require further investigation and contributes to the development of knowledge. In the context of skilled migration among fresh graduates in Sri

Lanka, several studies have examined factors such as economic conditions, social influences, and political instability. However, despite these efforts, there are still important areas that have not been studied in depth, which creates opportunities for further research.

This study identifies methodological, empirical, and knowledge gaps in existing research on graduate migration. Previous studies lack mixed-method approaches and statistical testing of key factors such as political, social, family, and economic influences. Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the main factors influencing migration intention among fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.

Research Objectives

The main aims of the research is to identify the key factors affecting skilled migration. This would be supported by the following objectives, aiming to analyze economic, political, social influences on graduate migration patterns.

1. To examine the effect of political instability perception on the migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.
2. To analyze the impact of social factors on the migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.
3. To identify the influence of family on the migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.
4. To assess how unfavorable economic conditions, affect the migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.

Significance of the Research

This study is significant as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the key factors influencing skilled migration

among state university graduates in Sri Lanka. The findings offer valuable insights for graduates to make informed career decisions, while guiding universities to better align education with labor market needs. In addition, the study supports policymakers in developing effective strategies to reduce brain drain and strengthen national workforce retention. It also highlights the broader social and economic implications of graduate migration for the general public. Overall, this research contributes to addressing a critical national issue by offering practical recommendations to retain skilled human capital and support sustainable development.

Literature Review

A major problem for many developing nations, including Sri Lanka, is skilled migration, also known as "brain drain." The migration of graduates and skilled workers has increased significantly in recent years, with social and economic impacts. Understanding the multifaceted factors influencing this phenomenon and identifying knowledge gaps about Sri Lankan graduates' migration aspirations require a study of the body of available material.

This review, which draws from earlier research, places the economic, educational, and social determinants of migration in larger national and international settings.

One of the most important studies in this field is by (Palihawadana, 2024), which focuses on the factors that influence youth migration in Sri Lanka with regard to undergraduates and fresh graduates. This study emphasizes how important push and pull variables are. Pull considerations include better possibilities for further education, steady employment, and an improved quality of life outside, whereas push factors include problems like

underemployment, unemployment, and limited career progression options within Sri Lanka. The findings of Palihawadana are especially significant because they draw attention to the vulnerability of recent graduates who, in spite of their credentials, frequently experience marginalization in the local labor market. This lays the groundwork for comprehending the growing desire of recent graduates to migrate.

It's important to consider Sri Lankan migration patterns in the larger Asian perspective. In order to contextualize Sri Lanka's difficulties within regional dynamics, (Perera, 2020) offers comparative views on internal migration trends throughout Asian nations. Although the main focus of Perera's research is internal migration, it also highlights the ways in which regional differences in opportunity, social injustices, and economic inequities all influence migration.

Migration decisions are increasingly influenced by aspirations for education. (Priyabhashini & Premarathne, 2023) investigated the reasons behind Sri Lankan management students' propensity to pursue postgraduate education at overseas universities rather than domestic ones. According to their research, the perceived superiority of foreign education, enhanced research prospects, and international recognition of degrees earned overseas all served as motivators for students. The results support the notion that higher education serves as a catalyst for migration as well as a prelude to permanent relocation overseas.

In addition to individual motivations, broader economic conditions play a decisive role in shaping migration trends. (Weerakoon et al., 2022), in their State of the Economy report, highlight the macroeconomic challenges faced by Sri Lanka, including stagnant growth, rising

unemployment, and declining investor confidence. These economic pressures create a context in which skilled migration becomes not just a choice but, for many graduates, a necessity. The report points out that educated youth, in particular, are disproportionately affected by economic instability, which pushes them to seek more stable futures abroad. The loss of skilled workers further deepens Sri Lanka's economic vulnerabilities, creating a cycle that is difficult to break.

The structural challenges of Sri Lanka's industries also intersect with migration intentions. (Abeynayake et al., 2024) while studying business model adaptation in the construction industry, emphasize the need for continuous innovation and adaptability in sectors facing global competition. Although their research is not directly focused on migration, it indirectly contributes to the discussion by highlighting the gaps between local industry practices and international standards. The lack of modernization and limited professional opportunities in such industries discourage skilled graduates from remaining in Sri Lanka.

Taken together, these studies illustrate that skilled migration in Sri Lanka is driven by a complex interplay of personal aspirations, educational opportunities, economic instability, and structural weaknesses in key industries.

Theoretical Perspectives

Understanding the skilled migration of graduates from Sri Lankan state universities involves exploring several key theories. Gary Becker's Human Capital Theory (1964) suggests that individuals invest in education to enhance their skills and future earnings. When local job markets do not offer suitable opportunities, as is often the case in Sri Lanka, graduates may seek employment abroad to maximize returns on their

educational investments. James Coleman's Social Capital Theory (1988) emphasizes the value of social networks and relationships. For migrating graduates, connections with friends, family, or community members abroad can provide crucial support, information, and resources, reducing the risks and costs associated with relocation. The concept of the Boundaryless Career, introduced by (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994,), reflects the evolving nature of careers beyond traditional organizational boundaries. This perspective highlights how individuals leverage personal motivations, transferable skills, and professional networks to navigate international career paths, aligning with the experiences of graduates seeking opportunities beyond Sri Lanka. Lastly, Everett S. Lee's Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966) categorizes migration drivers into push factors (e.g., unemployment, political instability) and pull factors (e.g., better job prospects, higher living standards). This framework aids in analyzing the external and internal factors influencing graduates' decisions to migrate. Integrating these theories offers a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the skilled migration of Sri Lankan graduates, encompassing economic incentives, social networks, career aspirations, and broader socio-political dynamics.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory explains that individuals view education, skills, and training as an investment that provides future benefits such as higher earnings, career growth, and social mobility. When local labor markets, like those in Sri Lanka, do not offer sufficient job opportunities, competitive salaries, or proper recognition, graduates tend to migrate abroad to gain better returns on their educational investment. The theory also suggests that individuals with higher levels of education have greater

expectations for returns, making them more likely to seek opportunities overseas. In this context, migration becomes a rational decision for achieving better financial rewards, professional development, and improved living conditions. Additionally, social and professional networks abroad reduce the risks and costs of migration by providing information, support, and opportunities. Therefore, due to underemployment, low salaries, and limited career advancement in Sri Lanka, many graduates choose migration as a pathway to secure higher income, global exposure, and long-term career success.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory was first introduced by James Coleman in 1988 as a means of how social Understanding structures such as networks, communities, and families create value social capital is important when it comes to skilled migration from Sri Lankan state universities. Graduates usually turn to friends, relatives, or members of the local community overseas for assistance, information, or job placement. These networks lower the expenses and hazards associated with relocating abroad. The social capital theory study emphasizes how social relationships can open doors and facilitate migration for talented people looking for better futures.

In the structure of boundaryless careers, where people direct their own career pathways independently of conventional organizational structures, (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994,) address these three categories of professional abilities. This immediately established the foundation for the Career Capital Theory, which Arthur et al. later explained. And also, the article by (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994,) introduces the concept of the boundaryless career, highlighting how modern careers often extend beyond traditional

organizational and geographical boundaries. They identify three key competencies: ‘knowing-why’ (personal motivations), ‘knowing-how’ (skills and knowledge), and ‘knowing-whom’ (professional networks), which individuals develop to navigate such careers. In the context of your research on the skilled migration of graduates from Sri Lankan state universities, these competencies provide a framework to understand why graduates may seek opportunities abroad.

Push-pull Theory

The push-pull theory, first introduced by (Lee, 1966,) in *A Theory of Migration*, remains one of the most widely used frameworks to explain why people move from one country to another. According to this theory, migration is rarely the result of a single factor, but rather a combination of pressures that push individuals away from their home country and attractions that pull them toward a new destination. In Sri Lanka, many university graduates face push factors such as limited job availability, low salaries, mismatches between qualifications and employment opportunities, and dissatisfaction with governance and institutional structures. These challenges reduce the motivation to remain in the country. Therefore, the push - pull model provides a comprehensive explanation of Sri Lanka’s graduate migration trends.

Dual Labor Market Theory

The Dual Labor Market Theory explains international migration by focusing on the structural needs of developed countries rather than the characteristics of migrants themselves. This theory, developed by (Piore, 1979,), argues that migration is driven by a permanent demand for immigrant labor in industrialized nations due to structural inflation, economic duality, and labor market segmentation.

According to Piore, developed countries create two types of labor markets:

In the context of Sri Lankan graduates, even highly educated individuals may find themselves attracted to developed countries where their qualifications place them in the primary labor market offering them job security and high wages, something they may not easily obtain locally due to economic stagnation or lack of opportunities. This theory supports the idea that the pull is not just better salaries, but also the type and security of employment available in foreign markets which is highly relevant when analyzing the migration intentions of university graduates in Sri Lanka (Piore, 1979).

Brain Drain Theory

The Brain Drain Theory explains the large-scale movement of skilled and educated individuals from developing nations to developed countries, creating a shortage of human capital in the home country. This theory is highly relevant to Sri Lanka, where a significant number of state university graduates in fields such as medicine, engineering, management, and information technology migrate to countries like Australia, Canada, and the UK. The main reasons for this outflow are wage differences, limited career growth opportunities, political instability, and poor research and development facilities at home (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). This continuous migration has serious consequences, as it reduces the availability of skilled professionals, weakens innovation capacity, and slows national economic growth. For example, shortages of doctors and IT specialists directly affect healthcare services and technological progress in Sri Lanka. However, some researchers argue that brain drain is not entirely negative. It can transform into “brain gain” if migrants return with new expertise, international exposure, and resources, or if they

contribute from abroad through remittances and knowledge-sharing networks (Stark et al., 1997,). Diaspora communities can also help by connecting local professionals to global markets and industries. Thus, brain drain theory provides a strong foundation for understanding the challenges and possible solutions to skilled migration.

Network Theory

Network Theory explains that migration is strongly shaped by social ties and professional connections, which reduce risks and make relocation easier. In the case of Sri Lankan graduates, family members, friends, alumni associations, and professional contacts abroad often guide individuals through the migration process. These networks provide practical help such as job leads, financial support, and advice on visa applications, which significantly lower the cost and uncertainty of moving (Massey et al., 1993,).

As a result, migration becomes less of an individual choice and more of a collective process supported by social groups. This creates “migration chains,” where each wave of migrants helps the next, leading to a continuous flow of skilled workers abroad. With the rise of digital technologies, networks have expanded beyond family and community ties. Online platforms such as LinkedIn, international job portals, and virtual professional forums make it easier for graduates to connect with employers, mentors, and international opportunities for Sri Lanka, understanding the role of networks is important for policymakers, as it highlights the social factors that influence migration decisions and the need to create better career opportunities locally to retain skilled graduates.

Lee's Migration Model (1966)

Lee's Migration Model (Lee, 1966,) is one of the most influential frameworks in migration studies, as it organizes the different factors influencing people's movement into four categories: push, pull, intervening obstacles, and personal factors. Push factors are negative conditions in the home country that drive people away, such as unemployment, underemployment, political instability, corruption, or poor working conditions. In Sri Lanka, one example of this is academic underemployment, where graduates often accept jobs unrelated to their qualifications due to limited career opportunities in their fields. Pull factors, on the other hand, are the advantages offered by destination countries that attract migrants, such as higher salaries, better health and education systems, advanced technology, and opportunities for career growth.

Intervening obstacles are barriers that can slow down or prevent migration, such as visa restrictions, financial costs, distance, or language barriers. Even when individuals are motivated by push and pull factors, these challenges can influence their final decision. However, networks of family and friends abroad or online resources often help reduce these barriers. Finally, personal factors include individual characteristics such as risk tolerance, ambition, family responsibilities, and personal goals, which can either encourage or discourage migration. Overall, Lee's model provides a comprehensive way to understand the complex combination of structural and personal factors that influence the migration of Sri Lankan graduates

Global Talent Flow Model (Cervantes & Guellec, 2002)

According to Cervantes and Guellec (2002), the Global Talent Flow Model

describes how countries compete with one another to draw in and keep highly qualified professionals. By providing incentives like expedited visa processes, research funding, tax breaks, and desirable living conditions, industrialized countries proactively create policies to recruit skilled professionals, according to this concept. These tactics foster the conditions in which talented migrants perceive more chances for both financial and professional advancement.

The model also highlights how government policies, labor market demands, and international competition for innovation all have an impact on the global skill flow, which is not random. However, issues in Sri Lanka, such as underfunded research institutes, ineffective bureaucracy, low salaries, and little prospects for professional advancement, all encourage graduates to seek opportunities abroad.

According to the Global Talent Flow Model, the brain drain trend will continue unless Sri Lanka creates policies that can equal or at the very least close the gap with destination nations. Retaining talented graduates requires implementing competitive pay, fostering solid industry-university partnerships, and providing improved career routes. Thus, this model emphasizes how crucial policy changes are to lowering skilled migration.

Empirical Literature

The study by Wijesinghe et al. examines the migration intentions of recent graduates in Sri Lanka during the crisis recovery period, focusing on the impact of political and economic instability. Using the push-pull model, the research identifies key factors influencing migration decisions. Data were collected from 232 graduates through structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS, with convenience sampling applied. The

findings indicate that social and political challenges within Sri Lanka act as strong push factors encouraging graduates to migrate, while economic opportunities abroad serve as major pull factors. However, domestic economic difficulties and social or political attractions abroad were found to have a comparatively lower influence on migration intentions.

These findings are consistent with earlier studies, which emphasize that governance failures and institutional weaknesses increase the likelihood of skilled migration (Fernando et al., n.d.), identified wage gaps, unemployment, and lack of professional recognition as major drivers of migration among Sri Lankan professionals. Further highlights how graduate often migrate to recover the costs of their education and to secure long-term stability abroad. The study by (Wijesinghe et al., 2023) therefore strengthens the argument that domestic social and political instability, combined with limited career pathways, continues to be a decisive factor in graduate migration. This suggests that unless Sri Lanka addresses structural issues such as underemployment, poor career advancement opportunities, and lack of research funding, the trend of brain drain among state university graduates will likely persist.

The study titled “Exploring Key Themes and Trends in International Student Mobility Research a Systematic Literature Review” by (Gutema et al., 2023) falls under higher education, focusing on international student mobility (ISM). It aims to understand why students move abroad for education, what challenges they face, and how those moves affect their lives and future. The researchers used a systematic literature review method by analyzing 43 studies published from 2010 to 2022. They followed the PRISMA process to ensure quality and used the push-pull model to explain factors

influencing student decisions. Though traditional variables were not used, they explored themes such as quality of education, immigration policies, cultural adaptation, and career opportunities. The study found that students are mainly influenced by better education and life opportunities. Host country policies, social experiences, and institutional support also play key roles.

These findings are supported by recent Sri Lankan studies. Palihawadana (2024) found that education quality, career prospects, and physical and psychological security significantly influence migration intentions among graduates. Similarly, Kaluarachchi and Jayathilaka (2024) showed that unemployment and the expansion of higher education increase migration, while economic growth reduces it. In addition, De Mel and Priyanath (2025) identified that economic, social, and political pull factors strongly drive migration decisions.

Overall, these studies indicate that both push factors (limited local opportunities) and pull factors (better overseas prospects) influence graduates' migration intentions, highlighting the importance of considering economic, political, and social conditions in migration research.

The study by Wijesinghe & Jayawardane examines why young Sri Lankan engineers migrate to Australia using a quantitative approach based on responses from 63 engineers. The findings reveal that push factors such as political instability, corruption, low salaries, and poor working conditions in Sri Lanka strongly drive migration, while pull factors including better career opportunities, higher education prospects, and cultural exposure attract them to Australia. The study also highlights the importance of the Subclass 476 Skilled Recognized Graduate Visa as a key incentive facilitating migration. Overall,

the research concludes that addressing domestic issues like governance, salaries, and working conditions is essential to reduce brain drain and retain skilled engineering professionals in Sri Lanka.

Additional empirical studies further support these findings. Wijesinghe et al. highlight that political instability, wage gaps, limited professional recognition, and poor infrastructure are key push factors driving skilled migration. Similarly, Wijerathna et al. found that Sri Lanka's economic crisis has accelerated the outflow of skilled workers due to financial instability and attractive foreign incentives. In addition, Rathnayake & Kotapola identified that low salaries, heavy workloads, and lack of recognition push healthcare professionals to migrate, while better wages, career opportunities, and advanced facilities abroad act as pull factors. Overall, these studies emphasize that both domestic limitations and international opportunities jointly influence migration decisions, highlighting the need to address structural issues to retain skilled professionals.

Migration provides individuals with professional and economic benefits but creates challenges for Sri Lanka's healthcare system, including brain drain, loss of educational investment, and reduced services in underserved areas. State universities can play a key role in addressing these issues by aligning curricula with global standards, improving graduates' language skills, collaborating with government policies, and promoting ethical migration practices such as service agreements or temporary programs to encourage brain circulation (Urbanski, 2022). Urbanski (2022) further examined migration motivations in Poland and Romania, surveying 298 and 288 migrants, respectively. The study revealed that pull factors, such as economic opportunities, political stability, and better social conditions, have a stronger

influence on migration decisions than push factors, indicating that the attractiveness of destination countries outweighs the negative aspects of home countries.

Vuong et al. (2021) examine the growing trend of international students choosing East and Southeast Asian countries, specifically China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia, as study destinations. By analyzing literature and policy documents, the study finds that these nations have transitioned from primarily being student sources to becoming major destinations. Key factors driving this trend include improved higher education systems, supportive government policies, and cultural appeal. The study underscores the importance for policymakers and educational institutions to understand these dynamics to effectively attract and support international students.

The research article titled "Migration Aspirations Among Youth in the Middle East and North Africa Region" was conducted by (Ramos, 2019) in the *Journal of Geographical Systems*. This study focuses on understanding the factors that influence young people's intentions to migrate during their transition from school to work in selected countries within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The research specifically examines countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Tunisia. It utilizes data from the school-to-Work Transition Surveys (SWTS) conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) between 2013 and 2015. The study surveys a nationally representative sample of young individuals aged 15 to 29 to examine their internal and international migration intentions, considering social and educational backgrounds. Using micro-econometric models, the research identifies key determinants, including employment status, educational attainment, gender, and socioeconomic

background. Findings indicate that high youth unemployment and a large NEET population in the MENA region increase migration aspirations. Migration is thus often a response to unmet labor market expectations, shaped by personal and contextual factors, providing insights for policymakers addressing youth employment and migration issues.

Madusanka (2023) examined the migration aspirations of Sri Lankan university graduates, focusing on their motivations and family considerations. Using a quantitative approach with 100 randomly selected graduates, the study found that the proportion of graduates intending to migrate increased from 58.2% before higher education to 76.2% after graduation. Key drivers included economic downturns, low-paying jobs, limited employment opportunities, and political instability. Most migrants sought private employment in countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia, often aiming for permanent residency and family relocation. The study highlights potential brain drain and emphasizes the need for policies aligning higher education with labor market demands.

Recent empirical studies conducted highlight that migration intentions among Sri Lankan graduates are not solely shaped by political instability and wage disparities but also by mismatches between university education and labor market demands. For example, (Madusanka, 2023) reveals that the increase in migration aspirations occurs particularly after graduation, when students recognize the limited alignment between their academic qualifications and available career opportunities. Similarly, (Palihawadana, 2024) emphasizes that the quality of higher education and psychological security strongly affect migration decisions, suggesting that even well-educated youth perceive Sri Lanka as incapable of providing long-term

professional growth. Research into professional sectors further supports this trend; (Rathnayake & Kotapola, 2024), studying nurses and allied health professionals, argue that inadequate recognition of professional skills and high workloads encourage emigration, while attractive work environments and advanced technology abroad serve as powerful pull factors. Moreover, (Wijerathna et al., 2024) demonstrate that financial instability following Sri Lanka's economic downturn after 2020 significantly accelerated the departure of construction professionals, signaling that the migration phenomenon is not confined to one field but cuts across multiple graduate sectors. Importantly, (De Mel & Priyanath, 2025,) show that in the private sector, pull factors such as higher earnings and political stability abroad often outweigh domestic economic push factors, reinforcing the notion that graduates increasingly value long-term institutional trust and governance in destination countries. Taken together, these findings suggest that graduate migration is deeply connected to systemic mismatches, professional recognition gaps, and broader institutional weaknesses in Sri Lanka rather than short-term economic conditions alone.

Another significant insight emerging from empirical work is the role of targeted migration policies and global labor market opportunities in shaping graduates' intentions. (Wijesinghe & Jayawardane, 2021), focusing on Sri Lankan engineers in Australia, identify that migration visas such as the Australian Subclass 476 strongly influence decision-making, illustrating that institutional frameworks in destination countries act as deliberate pull mechanisms. Likewise, (Wijesinghe & Jayawardane, 2021) in his thesis on brain drain in the IT industry finds that beyond wages and instability, limited infrastructure and the absence of advanced research funding drive young

professionals toward countries offering structured research grants and recognition. Studies in other regions further reinforce this dynamic. For instance, (Urbanski, 2022), in a comparative study of Poland and Romania, notes that pull factors such as economic opportunities and social stability consistently outweigh negative push factors, highlighting a universal trend that resonates with Sri Lankan graduates as well. Additionally, the literature on international student mobility, such as (Gutema et al., 2023), shows that access to quality education, immigration policies, and institutional support systems abroad remain decisive factors, with parallels for Sri Lankan graduates seeking postgraduate pathways. The implications of these findings are critical: Sri Lanka's inability to reform its higher education system, provide adequate career progression, or negotiate competitive retention strategies means

that graduates will continue to pursue permanent migration routes. Unless structural reforms address underemployment, accreditation gaps, and lack of policy innovation, the brain drain is likely to persist, reinforced by international systems that actively attract skilled migrants through favorable visa policies and career advancement structures.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework shows why fresh graduates might want to move to another country. All of these are independent factors that affect the main result, which is their intention to migrate. The framework helps us see how personal, social, and economic reasons come together to influence young graduates' decisions about migration.

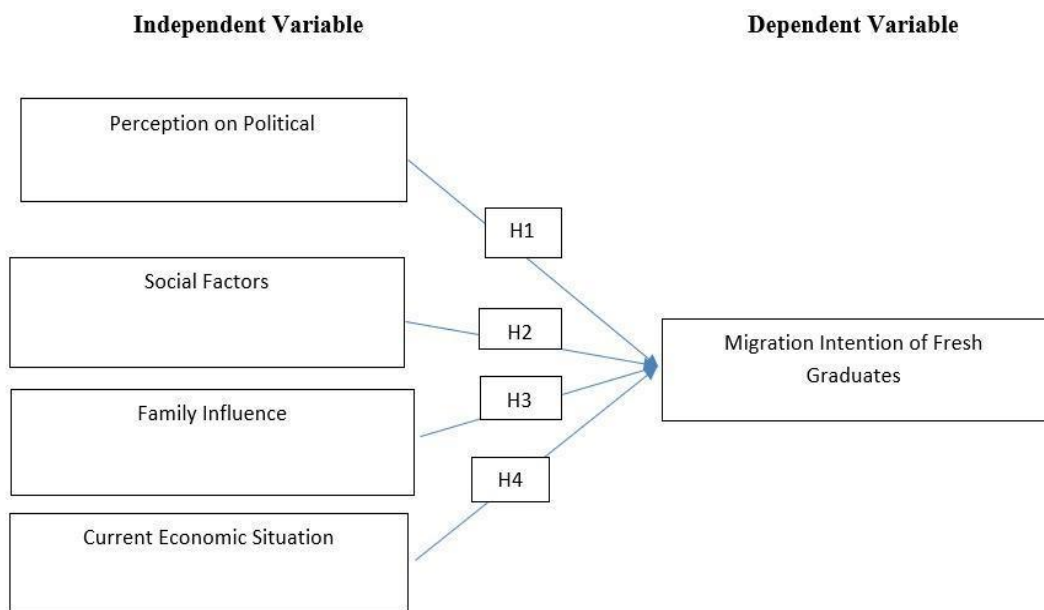


Figure 3: Conceptual framework

Source: Adapted from (Amarathunga et al., 2025)

The researcher developed hypotheses as follows.

H1	There is a positive relationship between perception of political instability and Migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.
H2	There is a positive relationship between social factors and Migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.
H3	There is a positive relationship between strong family influence and Migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.
H4	There is a positive relationship between unfavorable Economic conditions and Migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

This study adopts a positivist research philosophy to objectively examine the factors influencing skilled migration among state university graduates in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, a deductive research approach is employed, where existing theories are used to develop and test hypotheses through empirical data. The research follows a quantitative survey strategy, as it enables the collection and analysis of numerical data from a large number of respondents to identify general patterns and relationships. A structured questionnaire is used as the primary data collection method to ensure consistency and reliability. The unit of analysis is individual graduates, as the study focuses on their personal perceptions and migration intentions. Furthermore, the study adopts a cross-sectional time horizon, where data are collected at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the current factors influencing graduate migration.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The target population of this study comprises all graduates of government state universities in Sri Lanka, including the University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya, University of Moratuwa, University of Kelaniya, Wayamba University, and others, spanning disciplines such as engineering, medicine,

business, arts, and science. According to the University Grants Commission (UGC, 2022), the total number of graduates for the reference year was 30,329, which constitutes the study population.

The required sample size was determined using Morgan and Krejcie's (1970) sample size table, which is a widely accepted method for determining adequate sample sizes for known populations. For a population of 30,329, a minimum sample of 380 respondents is recommended at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. Accordingly, 380 graduates were targeted for data collection. However, 391 usable responses were ultimately received and retained for analysis, as all additional responses met the inclusion criteria and improved the representativeness of the sample. This slight deviation from the target sample is acceptable and consistent with common practice in survey-based research (Hair et al., 2019).

Simple random sampling was employed as the sampling technique, giving every graduate an equal and independent chance of selection. The sampling frame was constructed using graduation lists obtained from the respective university registrar offices and alumni databases. Graduates were contacted through university alumni networks, official social media pages, and direct email, where contact details were available through institutional channels. Only graduates who had completed their degree within the

past five years were included, ensuring relevance to current migration trends.

Operationalization

Operationalization is essential in research to convert abstract concepts into measurable variables. In studying skilled migration among Sri Lankan public

university graduates, key terms such as “migration intention,” “economic factors,” and “social impact” must be clearly defined. This allows the development of targeted survey questions and ensures data collection is consistent and reliable, enabling a clearer understanding of the factors influencing graduates’ decisions to migrate for skilled work.

Table 1: Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Dimensions	Indicators	Measurement	Reference
Perception on Political Factors	Government Stability Policy Support for Graduates	Level of trust in political leadership Perceived fairness of graduate employment policies	5-point Likert Scale	(Wijesinghe et al., 2023,)
Social Factors	Peer Influence Societal Expectations	Number of friends/colleagues who have migrated Perceived social prestige of overseas employment	5-point Likert Scale	(Jayasooriya et al., 2025,)
Family Influence	Financial Support Emotional Pressure	Family's financial contribution to migration costs Frequency of family discussions about migration	5-point Likert Scale	(Weeraratne et al., 2022,), (Gunawardena & Nawaratne, 2017,)
Current Economic Situation	Employment Opportunities Salary Levels	Perceived availability of suitable local jobs Expected salary difference (local vs. abroad)	5-point Likert Scale	(Gunawardena & Nawaratne, 2017,) , (Weeraratne et al., 2022,)

Source: Author Generated

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire, distributed online via Google Forms during a defined data collection period. The online mode was selected due to its cost-effectiveness, wide geographic reach across multiple universities, and suitability for accessing a digitally connected graduate population. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's academic purpose prior to completing the survey. The data collection period spanned eight weeks, during which follow-up reminders were sent through alumni networks to improve the response rate. Of the 450 questionnaires distributed, 391 complete and valid responses were received, representing a response rate of approximately 86.9%.

Measurement of Variables

All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), which is widely used in social science research to capture attitudes and perceptions (Bryman, 2016). Each independent variable perception of political instability, social factors, family influence, and current economic conditions was operationalized using six measurement items developed from validated scales in prior migration studies (Wijesinghe et al., 2023; Jayasooriya et al., 2025; Gunawardena & Nawaratne, 2017).

Results and Discussion

Reliability

The internal consistency reliability is measured through Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is a reliability coefficient that indicates how well the items in a set are positively correlated to one another. It is the rule of thumb that if the Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.7 then the reliability is satisfied.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Variables	Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Independent Variables	Perception on Political	0.717	6
	Social Factors	0.717	6
	Family Influence	0.732	6
	Current Economic Situation	0.728	6
Dependent Variable	Migration Intention of Fresh Graduates	0.790	6

Source: Output of SPSS analysis

The reliability analysis presented in Table 2 shows the Cronbach's Alpha values for both independent and dependent variables used in the study. All constructs have

reliability coefficients above 0.7, indicating that the measurement items are internally consistent and reliable.

Validity

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.890
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3272.311
	df	435
	Sig.	.000

Source: Output of SPSS analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test are used to check whether the collected data is suitable for factor analysis. In this study, Base the KMO value is reported as 0.890.

According to general guidelines, a KMO value above 0.80 is considered very good. This result means that the sample size is adequate and the patterns of correlations among the variables are strong enough to proceed with factor analysis.

Table 4: Sample Profile

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	20–24	10	2.6
	25–30	233	59.6
	31–34	123	31.5
	Above 35	25	6.4
Gender	Male	132	33.8
	Female	259	66.2
Marital Status	Single	188	48.1
	Married	203	51.9
Graduated University	Wayamba University	96	24.6
	University of Sri Jayewardenepura	55	14.1
	University of Colombo	61	15.6
	University of Peradeniya	42	10.7
	University of Kelaniya	100	25.6
	University of Jaffna	6	1.5
	University of Ruhuna	1	0.3
	Eastern University, Sri Lanka	7	1.8
	Rajarata University	21	5.4
	Sabaragamuwa University	2	0.5
Subject Stream	Accounting / Finance	131	33.5
	Human Resource Management	108	27.6
	Engineering	36	9.2
	Management / Business Admin	39	10
	Arts / Humanities	41	10.5
	Medicine / Health Sciences	14	3.6
	Law	8	2
	Marketing	5	1.3
	Science (Bio/Physical/Chemical)	2	0.5
	Agriculture	6	1.5

	Other	1	0.3
Class of Degree	First Class	108	27.6
	Second Class – Upper	198	50.6
	Second Class – Lower	60	15.3
	General Pass	25	6.4
Type of Degree	Special / Honours	202	51.7
	General (4 years)	182	46.5
	General (3 years)	7	1.8

Note, N= 391

Source: Researcher Constructed based on Survey Data, 2023

The analysis of the survey data revealed that employees reported moderate levels of training satisfaction ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.75$, Skewness = -0.051), job satisfaction ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.64$, Skewness = -0.412), and intention to retain ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.40$, Skewness = 0.010). The skewness values for all variables fall within the range of -0.5 to +0.5, indicating that the distributions are fairly symmetrical. Overall, these results suggest that while employees are moderately satisfied with

their training and job conditions, their intention to remain with the organization is also at a moderate level.

Descriptive Statistics

In this research, independence variables were Perception on Political, Social Factors, Family Influence, Current Economic Situation. All Tables have presented the Mean, Mode, Median, Standard

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
POP	391	1.00	3.83	1.7583	.42707
SF	391	1.00	4.00	1.8393	.50365
FI	391	1.00	4.00	1.8227	.48418
CES	391	1.00	4.00	1.7805	.42773

Source: Output of SPSS analysis

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for all study variables. All variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Mean values for the independent variables ranged from 1.758 to 1.839, which fall in the low agreement range of the scale, indicating that respondents generally disagreed or only slightly agreed with the survey statements related to political instability, social pressure, family influence, and economic hardship as migration drivers. Similarly, the dependent variable, migration intention of fresh graduates (MIFG), recorded a mean of 1.697 ($SD = 0.328$),

also reflecting low to moderate migration intention across the sample. However, the presence of maximum values reaching 3.83 to 4.00 across variables indicates that a subset of respondents reported considerably stronger agreement, suggesting meaningful variation in perceptions within the sample. Standard deviations ranging from 0.328 to 0.504 confirm moderate dispersion around the mean, reflecting heterogeneity in respondents' experiences and perceptions.

In this research, the dependent variable was the Migration Intention of Fresh Graduates. MIFG presents the mean, Std.

Deviation, Variance, Range, maximum and minimum values of the above category.

Table 06: Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Variable

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MIFG	391	1.00	3.33	1.6969	.32818
Valid N (listwise)	391				

Source: Output of SPSS analysis

According to the above table, the mean value of the Migration Intention of Fresh Graduates factor is around 1.696. The

standard deviation is 0.328 as well as minimum and maximum equals 1.00 and 3.33 respectively.

Table 07: Multicollinearity Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	Statistics
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.781	.068		11.504	.000		
	POP	.091	.046	.119	1.986	.048	.472	2.119
	SF	.168	.041	.258	4.086	.000	.425	2.355
	FI	.071	.039	.105	1.820	.070	.510	1.959
	CES	.177	.038	.231	4.630	.000	.681	1.468

Source: Output of SPSS analysis

The Above Table 14 shows the variance inflation factors of the multiple regression analysis. These VIF values are respectively 2.119, 2.355, 1.959, and 1.468. Those must be less than 10 which

indicates the Independent variables of PP, SF, FI, and CES are not multicollinearity. Which are not highly correlated with each other. This analysis fulfils the no multicollinearity assumption.

Inferential Statistical Analysis

Table 08: Correlation

		POP	SF	FI	CES	MIFG
POP	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	391				
SF	Pearson Correlation	.698**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	391	391			
FI	Pearson Correlation	.587**	.637**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	391	391	391		
CES	Pearson Correlation	.454**	.483**	.521**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	391	391	391	391	

MIFG	Pearson Correlation	.466**	.520**	.460**	.465**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	391	391	391	391	391

Source: Output of SPSS analysis

Table 07 demonstrates the correlation analysis of variables of the study. The correlation analysis has been used in the study to test the hypotheses of the study. Accordingly, all the independent variables of the study have positive as well as significant relationships with the dependent variable of the study, migration intention of fresh graduates. Since all the correlation coefficients of each independent variable; perception of

political, social factors, family influence, and current economic situation – are 0.466, 0.520, 0.460, and 0.465, respectively, they are positive in nature.

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis is used to identify the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable.

Table 09: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.588 ^a	.345	.339	.26691

Source: Output of SPSS analysis

As presented in Table 9, all four independent variables made statistically significant contributions to the prediction of migration intention. In terms of relative importance, social factors emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that for every one standard deviation increase in social factors, migration intention increases by 0.258 standard deviations, holding all other variables constant. Economic conditions were the second strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.231$, $p < 0.001$), reflecting the substantial practical influence of employment constraints and financial pressures on graduates' decisions to migrate. Political instability contributed a moderate but significant effect ($\beta = 0.119$, $p < 0.05$), while family influence recorded the smallest standardized effect among the four predictors ($\beta = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$), though it remained statistically significant.

In terms of practical significance, the overall model explained 34.5% of the

variance in migration intention ($R^2 = 0.345$), which represents a moderate effect size according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, where R^2 values of 0.13 and above indicate medium practical significance. This suggests that while the four predictors collectively capture a meaningful portion of the variability in migration intention, approximately 65.5% of the variance remains unexplained, indicating that additional factors such as individual personality traits, visa accessibility, destination country policies, and institutional quality may also play important roles that fall outside the scope of this study. The positive direction of all beta coefficients consistently confirms that higher perceptions of political instability, social pressure, family support for migration, and unfavorable economic conditions are each independently associated with stronger intentions to migrate among Sri Lankan state university graduates.

Table 10: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.503	4	3.626	50.892	.000 ^b
	Residual	27.500	386	.071		
	Total	42.003	390			

Source: Output of SPSS analysis

The whole regression model is significant, as the statistical significance ANOVA shows that the significance value is 0.000,

where it is less than the 0.05 specified level of significance.

Regression

Table 11: Regression Statistics

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.781	.068		11.504	.000
	POP	.091	.046	.119	1.986	.048
	SF	.168	.041	.258	4.086	.000
	FI	.071	.039	.105	1.820	.049
	CES	.177	.038	.231	4.630	.000

a. Dependent Variable: MIFG

Source: Output of SPSS analysis

Table 11 demonstrates the regression coefficient table of the study. Accordingly, all the independent variables of the study have positive as well as

significant impact on the dependent variable of the study, migration intention of fresh graduates (MIFG).

Table 12: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Correlation	Regression	P value	Decision
H1: there is a positive relationship between perception of Political instability and migration intention of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.	0.466	0.091	0.048<0.05	Accept
H2: there is a positive relationship between negative social factors and migration intention of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.	0.520	0.168	0.000<0.05	Accept
H3: there is a positive relationship between strong family influence and migration intention of fresh graduates.	0.460	0.071	0.049<0.05	Accept

H4: there is a positive relationship between unfavorable economic conditions and migration intention of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka.	0.465	0.177	0.000<0.05	Accept
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Source: Author developed

The hypothesis testing results reveal that all four hypotheses are accepted, indicating statistically significant positive relationships between the independent variables and migration intention of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka. Social factors and current economic conditions demonstrate comparatively stronger effects, while perception of political factors and family influence show moderate positive relationships. Overall, the findings confirm that these factors significantly influence the migration intention of graduates.

Discussion

This study examined four factors that may influence the migration intentions of fresh graduates from Sri Lankan state universities: political instability, social factors, family influence, and unfavorable economic conditions. The regression results confirmed that all four factors positively and significantly predict migration intention, together explaining 34.5% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.345$, $p < 0.001$). The following discussion interprets these findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies presented earlier in this paper.

Unfavorable economic conditions were found to be a strong predictor of migration intention ($\beta = 0.231$, $p < 0.001$). This finding is consistent with Becker's (1964) Human Capital Theory, which explains that people invest in education expecting future rewards such as good jobs and competitive salaries. When the local job market cannot offer these rewards, graduates are likely to seek better

opportunities abroad. In Sri Lanka, issues such as limited job availability, low wages, and rising inflation reduce the returns on graduates' educational investments, making migration a logical response. This is supported by Weerakoon et al. (2022), who highlight that the economy has not grown fast enough to absorb the increasing number of graduates into suitable employment. Similarly, Madusanka (2023) found that many graduates changed their migration plans after completing their studies when they realized that local job opportunities did not match their qualifications or salary expectations. These findings together confirm that economic dissatisfaction is a core driver of graduate migration in Sri Lanka.

Social factors emerged as the strongest predictor of migration intention in this study ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$), with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.520$. This result is well explained by Coleman's (1988) Social Capital Theory, which argues that social relationships and networks create value that helps individuals make important decisions, including the decision to migrate. When a graduate sees peers, classmates, or community members successfully moving abroad, this creates both social encouragement and practical information about migration pathways. As more people migrate, they share their experiences and reduce the uncertainty and cost for those who follow. Massey et al. (1993) describe this as a "migration chain," where early migrants make it easier for later ones, gradually building a self-sustaining flow of movement. The

strong influence of social factors in this study suggests that Sri Lanka may already be caught in such a cycle, where migration has become socially normalized among graduates, particularly in competitive fields such as information technology, engineering, and healthcare. This is further supported by Jayasooriya et al. (2025), who found that peer influence and social expectations about overseas employment are key drivers of migration intentions among Sri Lankan professionals.

Although family influence was the weakest predictor among the four variables ($\beta = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$), it still showed a significant positive relationship with migration intention ($r = 0.460$). This finding aligns with Boyd's (1989) argument that migration is rarely a purely individual decision but is instead shaped by family strategies aimed at improving the overall well-being of the household. Graduates who have family members already living abroad often receive financial support, guidance on visa procedures, and practical assistance, which lowers the barriers to migration. Lee (1966) refers to such barriers as "intervening obstacles," and family networks are known to reduce these effectively. DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) also highlight the importance of "knowing-whom," meaning that having the right connections significantly shapes career decisions, including the choice to migrate. In the Sri Lankan context, Weeraratne et al. (2022) similarly found that family involvement plays a meaningful role in shaping students' migration decisions, reinforcing the idea that migration is both a personal and a family-level process.

The perception of political instability also showed a significant positive relationship with migration intention ($\beta = 0.119$, $p < 0.05$; $r = 0.466$), though its effect was comparatively smaller than economic and

social factors. This finding is explained by Lee's (1966) Push-Pull Theory, which identifies poor governance, corruption, and political uncertainty as push factors that reduce a person's motivation to stay in their home country. When graduates do not trust the political system or government institutions, they feel less confident about their future in the country and are more likely to look for stable opportunities abroad. Docquier and Rapoport (2012) connect this to Brain Drain Theory, noting that political instability leads to the loss of skilled professionals who are essential for national development and innovation. In the Sri Lankan context, Wijesinghe et al. (2023) similarly found that political challenges and institutional weaknesses act as strong push factors encouraging graduates to migrate. The moderate but consistent effect of political instability in this study therefore confirms that governance quality plays a supporting role in shaping migration decisions, even when economic and social pressures are stronger.

Together, the four factors explain 34.5% of the variance in migration intention. While this is a meaningful result, it also indicates that approximately 65.5% of the variation remains unexplained by this model. Piore's (1979) Dual Labor Market Theory helps to explain part of this gap by highlighting that migration is also driven by structural demand for skilled workers in developed countries. In other words, graduates are not only being pushed out of Sri Lanka by domestic problems but are also being actively pulled toward foreign labor markets that offer better job security, professional recognition, and career advancement. This suggests that future research should also consider destination-country factors, such as visa policies and overseas labor market conditions, alongside domestic push factors.

At a broader level, the Cervantes and Guellec (2002) Global Talent Flow Model provides a useful lens for understanding these findings. This model argues that developed countries actively compete to attract skilled professionals through favorable immigration policies and career incentives. Sri Lanka, by contrast, has not yet developed strong enough counter-strategies to retain its graduates. As Wijesinghe and Jayawardane (2021) observed, structured visa pathways in countries like Australia serve as deliberate pull mechanisms that make migration more accessible and attractive. Unless Sri Lanka introduces competitive policies in areas such as salary reform, research funding, and career development, the outflow of graduates is likely to continue.

In summary, the findings of this study are supported by a combination of theoretical frameworks. Human Capital Theory explains why graduates make the rational decision to migrate when local economic returns are insufficient. Social Capital Theory and Network Theory explain how peer and community influences build social momentum around migration. Push-Pull Theory and Brain Drain Theory frame political instability and weak governance as background conditions that reinforce the decision to leave. Finally, Dual Labor Market Theory and the Global Talent Flow Model remind us that migration is also shaped by the attractiveness of destination countries, not just by problems at home. Together, these perspectives confirm that graduate migration in Sri Lanka is a complex, multi-layered issue that requires a coordinated policy response addressing economic, social, political, and institutional dimensions simultaneously.

Contribution and Recommendation

This study contributes to the understanding of graduate migration in Sri Lanka by providing empirical evidence on

the main factors influencing migration intentions. While earlier studies have emphasized economic or political conditions as the key drivers of migration, this research demonstrates that migration intention is shaped by a combination of political instability, social factors, family influence, and the current economic situation. By testing these variables with fresh graduates from Sri Lankan state universities, the study offers a more comprehensive explanation of why young professionals consider leaving the country.

A second important contribution is the quantitative measurement of predictive power. The regression results indicated that the selected factors explained 34.5% of the variation in migration intention, providing statistical evidence that these variables significantly shape graduate decision-making. Previous research in Sri Lanka has often been more descriptive, while this study provides stronger statistical proof by using correlation and regression analysis. This enhances the academic discussion with more precision and measurable results.

Another contribution lies in highlighting the role of social factors and family influence. The findings show that social factors, such as peer networks and societal pressures, have one of the strongest impacts on migration intentions, while family influence also plays a moderate but clear role. Many earlier studies did not pay much attention to these dimensions, focusing more on economic and political push factors. By showing that social and family aspects matter, this study adds a new perspective to the literature and suggests that migration is not only an economic decision but also a socially embedded process.

Last but not least, the study demonstrates that both gender groups are concerned about migratory intention. There was no

discernible difference in the desire to migrate between male and female graduates, according to the data. This suggests that the desire for migration overseas is not specific to any one population. Policymakers and educators can benefit from this study since it implies that programs aimed at lowering migration intentions should be comprehensive and should target all graduates, regardless of gender.

According to the results of this research, all four hypotheses were accepted because the data showed a clear positive relationship between each factor and the migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka. For H1, the perception of political instability increases the likelihood that graduates want to migrate, meaning when graduates feel the country is politically unstable, they are more likely to think about leaving. In H2, negative social factors, such as lack of opportunities or social pressure, were strongly linked to migration intentions, showing that social challenges encourage graduates to consider moving abroad. For H3, strong family influence also played a role; if family members support or encourage migration, graduates are more likely to have intentions to migrate. Finally, H4 showed that unfavorable economic conditions, like low salaries or unemployment, significantly increase graduates' desire to migrate. Overall, all hypotheses were accepted because the results indicate that political, social, familial, and economic factors all positively influence migration intentions, which matches the expectations of this research.

Implication of the Study

The research's conclusions show that a number of important characteristics, including political unpredictability, adverse social elements, strong familial influence, and bad economic conditions,

significantly positively affect new graduates' aspirations to migrate to Sri Lanka. In order to retain young talent and prevent brain drain, policymakers, businesses, educational institutions, and other stakeholders must have a practical understanding of these aspects. The findings emphasize the necessity for policymakers to concentrate on establishing a stable political and economic climate that motivates graduates to stay in the nation. Migration pressures could be lessened by actions including increasing governmental transparency, guaranteeing good governance, generating employment possibilities, and providing financial incentives or support programs for young professionals.

Employers in both private and public sectors can use these insights to design effective retention strategies, such as providing competitive salaries, career growth opportunities, and better workplace conditions, which can reduce the influence of social and familial pressures to migrate. Educational institutions also have an important role to play by offering career guidance, mentorship programs, and awareness campaigns about local employment opportunities. These initiatives can help graduates make informed decisions and reduce the impact of family and social pressures on migration intentions.

The research also suggests that it is not enough to address these factors individually. Stakeholders need to develop both short-term and long-term strategies that work together to manage the migration intentions of fresh graduates effectively. For example, government initiatives, employer retention programs, and educational guidance should all be coordinated to create a supportive ecosystem for young professionals. Additionally, public awareness campaigns, workshops, and training sessions can help change perceptions

about local opportunities, reducing the perceived need to migrate. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the main drivers of graduate migration in Sri Lanka. It emphasizes that addressing political, economic, social, and familial influences in a systematic and coordinated manner can help retain skilled graduates, improve workforce stability, and contribute positively to the country's economic development. Stakeholders can use these findings to plan practical actions that balance immediate needs with long-term strategies, ultimately creating a more supportive environment for young professionals in Sri Lanka.

Limitation of the Study

Every research study has limitations that limit the applicability of its findings, and this one is no exception. There are a number of limitations that must be noted, even if it offers helpful insights into the migration strategies of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka. These restrictions are related to the research's scope, sample selection, methodology, and time and resource constraints. By drawing attention to these flaws, the study not only identifies areas where care should be taken when interpreting the findings, but it also creates avenues for future researchers to enhance and broaden the work.

One key limitation is that the study mainly focuses on four specific factors: political instability, negative social factors, strong family influence, and unfavorable economic conditions. While these factors are important, they do not capture the full range of reasons why graduates may decide to migrate. Personal ambitions, career development opportunities, or global job market trends are also likely to play a role, but these were not included in the scope of this study. As a result, the findings may not provide a complete

picture of the many motivations behind migration intentions.

Another limitation relates to the study sample. The research was conducted among graduates from specific institutions or regions in Sri Lanka. Because of this, the results cannot fully represent the views of all graduates in the country, especially those from different provinces, educational backgrounds, or social and economic groups. A wider and more diverse sample could have produced results that were more accurate and representative of the whole graduate population.

The research design also presents a limitation, as it used a cross-sectional approach where data was collected at a single point in time. Since graduates' ideas and intentions can change depending on political events, economic situations, or personal life changes, the findings may not reflect long-term migration patterns. This restricts the ability of the study to show how migration intentions might shift in the future.

In addition, the study relied on data collected from a specific group of graduates, which reduces the ability to generalize the findings to all young people in Sri Lanka. Finally, the study was carried out within a limited timeframe and with restricted resources. These constraints affected the number of participants and the depth of analysis, which means that some factors influencing migration may not have been studied in detail. By recognizing these limitations, the study encourages future researchers to use broader samples, longer timelines, and deeper exploration of factors, ensuring a more complete understanding of graduate migration in Sri Lanka.

Suggestions for the Future Research

Future research can still be enhanced and expanded upon, even if this study offers valuable insights on the migratory intentions of recent graduates in Sri Lanka. Since migration is a complicated topic influenced by numerous variables, an in-depth knowledge of it calls for more comprehensive strategies, a wider range of samples, and a variety of research techniques. Future research can expand on the existing findings and provide a more thorough understanding of the reasons behind graduates' migration decisions and how their intentions evolve over time by taking these factors into account.

Future study should consider additional potential variables, such as international employment prospects, personal goals, work-life balance, exposure to technology, and worldwide economic trends, in addition to the four primary elements examined here. Including such elements would provide a fuller understanding of the different motives that drive graduates to consider migration.

Using a longitudinal study approach is another crucial recommendation. Longitudinal studies follow participants over an extended period of time, in contrast to cross-sectional studies that gather data at a single point in time. This would provide a more realistic view of long-term trends by enabling researchers to monitor how graduates' migration intentions alter in response to changes in political, social, and economic circumstances. Furthermore, a bigger and more varied sample of participants may be used in subsequent research. The results would be more trustworthy and applicable to the larger graduating population in Sri Lanka if graduates from other universities, academic disciplines, geographical areas, and socioeconomic backgrounds were included.

Finally, future research could benefit from combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. While surveys provide useful numerical data, adding interviews or focus group discussions would allow researchers to understand the deeper reasons, feelings, and thought processes behind migration decisions. This mixed-method approach would create richer and more meaningful insights.

Conclusion

This study explored the main factors influencing the migration intentions of fresh graduates in Sri Lanka, focusing on political instability, social factors, family influence, and the current economic situation. The research found that all these factors positively affect graduates' decisions to consider migrating, with social factors, political instability, and economic conditions showing the strongest impact. Using data collected from 391 graduates across state universities, and analyzed through correlation and regression methods, the study confirmed that these factors together explain a significant portion of the variability in migration intentions.

Demographic analysis revealed that the majority of respondents were female, aged 25–30, and held Special/Honours or Second Class - Upper Division degrees, reflecting a well-educated group with high aspirations. The findings emphasize that migration is influenced not only by economic or political conditions but also by social and family pressures, demonstrating that it is both a personal and socially embedded decision. The study provides important insights for policymakers, employers, and educational institutions, highlighting the need for coordinated strategies to retain skilled graduates, such as improving job opportunities, offering career guidance, and creating a stable political and

economic environment. And also, this research contributes to understanding graduate migration in Sri Lanka, confirming that multiple interconnected

factors drive migration intentions, and it offers a basis for practical interventions to reduce brain drain.

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