Factors Affecting the Migration Intention of IT Undergraduates in Sri Lanka during the Crisis Recovery Period

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***Abstract*—Sri Lanka's ongoing economic and political crises have significantly intensified migration intentions among its educated youth, particularly among final-year undergraduates in the Information Technology (IT) sector. This study investigates the primary factors influencing migration intention during the crisis recovery period by applying Lee's Push-Pull Migration Framework. A structured quantitative survey was administered to a sample of 350 IT undergraduates from both state and non-state universities. The data collected were analysed using statistical methods including correlation, regression, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) through SPSS. The findings indicate that economic and political push factors, such as low wages, unemployment, and perceptions of corruption, are strongly associated with students' intentions to migrate. In contrast, pull factors related to better income prospects, enhanced quality of life, and political stability in destination countries significantly contribute to the attractiveness of migration. Social push factors were found to exert a comparatively limited influence. The regression model accounted for 79.6 percent of the variance in migration intention, indicating a strong explanatory capacity. These results highlight the need for comprehensive policy reforms in areas such as education, employment, and governance in order to address the root causes of migration and reduce the outflow of skilled human capital. The study offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and higher education stakeholders seeking to improve talent retention and support sustainable development in Sri Lanka's IT sector.**

Keywords— ***Brain Drain, Economic Crisis, IT Undergraduates, Migration Intention, Push-Pull Framework***

I. INTRODUCTION

Human migration has historically been driven by the pursuit of better opportunities, influenced by social, economic, and political conditions [7] found that nearly 64% of final-year IT undergraduates from private and public universities had strong intentions to emigrate, with few career opportunities available locally and a declining quality of life being major determinants.

The Push-Pull Migration Framework [10] remains a robust framework for analysing these patterns. Push factors such as economic status, unemployment, and dissatisfaction among individuals drive students away from Sri Lanka, while pull factors such as the availability of higher remunerations, better career prospects, stability in politics, and superior educational facilities in countries such as Australia, Canada, and the UK serve as attractive alternatives [19]. Fresh data point to a 28% increase in the volume of student visa applications by Sri Lankan undergraduate students to OECD countries during 2023 alone [13].

This study examines the migration intentions of final-year IT undergraduates in Sri Lanka by applying the push-pull model to assess the relative impact of these factors. The findings aim to provide insights for policymakers and educational institutions to implement strategies that enhance local career prospects, improve higher education quality, and mitigate talent loss in the IT sector.

The Main research question addresses how economic, social, and political push and pull factors influence IT undergraduates' intentions to migrate?

The main objective is to identify the critical push and pull factors affecting the migration intentions of Sri Lankan IT undergraduates during the crisis recovery period. By understanding these dynamics, the study aims to inform policymakers and educational institutions on how to retain talent and mitigate the adverse effects of brain drain [5].

A deeper evaluation of the literature defines the groundwork for the research, and methodologies are chosen accordingly. According to the literature, migration among qualified professionals, particularly in emerging countries, is becoming more motivated by economic, social, and political instability. The push-pull framework is often employed to explicate these migratory patterns [10] [19]. Economic instability, high inflation, and political uncertainty are important push factors for IT professionals in Sri Lanka, whereas higher wages and better job opportunities overseas are pull factors ([5].

Economic factors are a significant motivator of migration choices, especially in nations facing economic insecurity. In Sri Lanka, high inflation rates, limited career opportunities, and low wages have driven many IT graduates to contemplate relocating for better opportunities overseas [20]. A recent study by [14] indicates that 74% of IT undergraduates surveyed had concrete plans to migrate, primarily due to economic dissatisfaction and a lack of career development. These conditions have severely eroded confidence in the local labour market, particularly among highly qualified youth. Economic pull factors, such as greater earnings and better work possibilities in Canada, Australia and UK stimulate migration even more [13]. According to studies, 71% of IT graduates in Sri Lanka are drawn to greater economic prospects overseas, demonstrating the importance of economic pull factors [18].

Inadequate healthcare, poor infrastructure, and limited access to job opportunities have all been cited as key push factors impacting migration decision-making [21]. Furthermore, political instability and corruption in Sri Lanka have influenced IT graduates' migration aspirations, with 43% stating political issues as a key reason for leaving the country [15]. Political stability and improved governance in destination countries, on the other hand, are important pull factors, with 50% of respondents in a recent study claiming that political stability in their intended destination was a crucial factor in their migration choice [15].

While considerable study focuses on migration among professionals, less emphasis has been paid to IT students during crisis recovery period. This research aims to address this gap by investigating the particular motivations of IT students, providing policymakers with insights on how to reduce brain drain in the field [3].

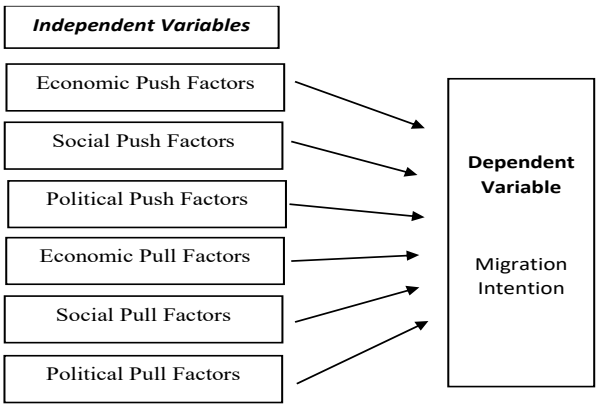


Fig.1 Conceptual framework

II. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

In this research, a quantitative approach was employed to examine the migration intentions of IT undergraduates in Sri Lanka during the crisis recovery period. Structured questionnaires were used for data collection, following the guidelines of [1] for quantitative research methods to gather large-scale data for statistical analysis. This method enabled a comprehensive evaluation of the determinants of migration intentions within the framework of [10] push-pull theory.

The sampling strategy involved selecting 350 final-year IT students from both state and non-state universities, and convenient sampling method was used ensuring representativeness as recommended by [5].

Statistical software the survey data was analysed by using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, which give a short overview and explanation of the data, and correlational analysis, which investigates the relationships between characteristics such as job satisfaction and the desire to migrate, are two often used analytical techniques. Regression analysis is used to determine how different factors influence migration intentions [1].

The main objective of this study is to identify the critical push and pull factors that influence the migration intentions of IT undergraduates in Sri Lanka during the crisis recovery period.
H1: Economic push factors significantly affect migration intention.
H2: Social push factors significantly affect migration intention.
H3: Political push factors significantly affect migration intention.

H4: Economic pull factors significantly affect migration intention.
H5: Social pull factors significantly affect migration intention.
H6: Political pull factors significantly affect migration intention.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Descriptive Analysis

With 350 collected data, both descriptive and inferential statistics were tested using SPSS. Demographic profile for the study and hypotheses testing along with discussion are stated as below.

Table 1: Descriptive Figure (Author's Survey Data, 2024)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Economic_push_factors	4.5164	0.52302	-1.041	1.049
Social_push_factors	4.2381	0.50827	-2.538	12.740
Political_push_factors	3.8324	0.35395	-3.654	20.311
Economic_pull_factors	4.5057	0.48690	-1.909	7.553
Social_pull_factors	4.4705	0.52531	-2.171	9.781
Political_pull_factors	4.5793	0.51270	-1.889	6.602
Migration_intention	4.6543	0.60364	-2.498	10.173

According to the results shown in table 1, the high mean scores, for all factors indicate that economic conditions and social and political issues play a significant role in migration intention and finding supported by earlier studies that highlight economic instability and political turmoil as major reasons, for migration. The higher standard deviation and kurtosis, in migration intentions indicate that there is some variation in how respondents are considering migration. Even though many acknowledge their desire to migrate some individuals may feel more resolute or unsure, about their decision. Accordingly, the findings show that although political and economic aspects play a role, in driving migration intention, social factors also have an effect.

The study involved data collected from 350 respondents of which (53.6%) were male respondents while (46.4%) were female respondents. Out of the total participants, the majority of them belonged to the age group of 22-25 years (93.4%), which was followed by a smaller number of respondents within the age group 18-21 years (2.9%). Number of respondents representing the age groups 26-30 years (3.7%) respectively.

B. Hypotheses Testing Results & Key Findings

The analysis reveals significant insights into the migration intentions of IT undergraduates in Sri Lanka. The correlation analysis shows that all push and pull factors, especially economic, social, and political elements, play a critical role in influencing migration decisions. Notably, economic push factors ($r = 0.726$, $p < 0.01$) and economic pull factors ($r = 0.792$, $p < 0.01$) strongly correlate with migration intentions. This indicates that financial instability in Sri Lanka, such as unemployment and low wages, heavily influences students' desire to migrate. On the other hand, the allure of better job prospects and higher wages abroad acts as a key motivation for migration [5].

Table 2: Correlation Results (Author's Survey Data, 2024)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Correlation Results		Coefficient Results	
		Pearson Correlation Value	P-Value	Beta Coefficient Value	P-Value
Economic Push factors	Migration Intension	0.726	0.000	.231	.000
Social Push factors	Migration Intension	0.686	0.000	-.027	.654
Political Push factors	Migration Intension	0.555	0.000	.261	.000
Economic Push factors	Migration Intension	0.792	0.000	-.469	.000
Social Push factors	Migration Intension	0.764	0.000	.161	.007
Political Push factors	Migration Intension	0.864	0.000	1.054	.000

Based on study results shown in the table 1, there are significant positive relationship among variables and effects also statistically significant, which accepts the H1, H3, H4, H5 and H6. These findings align with migration theories, such as Lee's push-pull model, which suggest that economic hardship and political instability serve as "push" factors, while better job prospects and political stability abroad act as "pull" factors. The analysis reveals that economic and political push factors significantly contribute to the decision of IT undergraduates to migrate. On the other hand, the social push factors did not show significant. Regarding pull factors, political stability and social

benefits in destination countries are the most attractive features, suggesting that students prioritize governance and living standards when considering migration [5].

C. Regression and ANOVA Analysis

The key objective of this research was to identify the reasons behind Sri Lankan Fresh graduates' migration. According to the study results shown in table 2, In order to determine the relative influence on the dependent variable, desire to migrate, a regression analysis was conducted using 6 independent variables. According to the model summary of the analysis, push and pull variables have a significant influence on students' decisions accounting for 79.6% of the variation in migration intentions (R2 = 0.796). Additionally, the substantial p-value of the ANOVA table, which is shown below, corroborated the model's fitness.

Table 2: Regression and ANOVA results

R- Square	R2-Value	Adjusted R- Square	ANOVA Table P-Value
0. .892[a]	0.796	0.792	0.000

According to the ANOVA results, H0 is rejected because the F statistic's P value is less than 0.05. The model is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level. As a result, this model is suitable. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that the economic factors in their desired overseas destination and the unfavorable social and political conditions in Sri Lanka are the primary drivers of the migration intention of Sri Lankan Final Year IT Undergraduates.

The research emphasizes how important economic, social, and political issues are in influencing Sri Lankan IT students' migration intention. Echoing other studies on migration from developing countries owing to economic instability, economic push factors such unemployment and low salaries appeared as significant drivers of migration [20] [3]. This result emphasizes the need of salary increases, job growth, and economic changes in order to lessen these pressures. Previous research has shown the impact of poor public services on migration intentions, highlighting the relevance of social issues such as dissatisfaction with healthcare, education, and social mobility [11]. Global migration patterns are further supported by the fact that political unrest is driving students to seek stability abroad [15]. Additionally, the internal consistency of the scale used in this study is represented by the Cronbach's Alpha score. With an excellent reliability grade of 0.943, the survey questions measuring political, social, and economic matters are mostly consistent with each other.

And also, some sort of limitations on this research. The sample may not be entirely representative of the wider student population or migration patterns since it is limited to 350 IT students from state and non-state institutions in Sri Lanka [15].

Future research could expand beyond IT undergraduates to include students from other disciplines (e.g., healthcare, engineering). Additionally, comparisons between skilled professionals and students could provide a more comprehensive view of the brain drain phenomenon. According to the previous researcher, [20] emphasizes the need to study migration across multiple professions to develop a national retention strategy.

And also, Future studies could incorporate interviews or focus groups to gain more qualitative insights into the emotional and psychological factors influencing migration decisions. This could uncover more personal or cultural reasons behind the decision to leave or stay. Previous Researcher, [5] suggests that qualitative studies are essential in understanding deeper social dynamics that quantitative data might overlook.

Furthermore, since the data was gathered over a two-month period, it may have missed temporal variations in migration intentions brought on by continuous political and economic turmoil [16]. The research emphasizes the actual reasons for migration since it mainly uses self-reported data, which might be skewed by social desirability bias [2].

In order to overcome these obstacles, the report suggests a multifaceted strategy to prevent brain drain, which includes investments in healthcare and education as well as economic changes to increase employment opportunities and wages for IT experts [20].

According to the [21], these tactics further encourage Sri Lanka's long-term economic recovery and diminish inequality by being in connection with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 8 and 10)

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes by highlighting the complex factors influencing Sri Lankan IT students' migration intention throughout the crisis recovery phase. The push-pull model of migration [10] was used to identify important economic, political, and social elements that influence migration choices. Strong push factors included economic hardship including poor salaries and unemployment [20], which were made worse by the nation's persistent political unrest [8] [9]. On the

other hand, students were thrilled to look for possibilities abroad by pull factors such as better job opportunities and greater living standards [19].

Economic push and pull variables and migration intentions were shown to be significantly correlated by quantitative analysis, which is consistent with earlier results that skilled migration is driven by differences in economic conditions across nations [3].

Understanding the variables impacting migration aspirations among Sri Lankan IT graduates, especially during the nation's crisis recovery era, was the key objective of the study. While employment opportunities and political stability overseas were powerful pull factors, the research was able to identify economic and political challenges as key push causes. The goals were accomplished as the data analysis showed how these variables significantly affected migration intentions and provided insightful information to help policymakers solve the talent loss. The findings point to the need of legislative measures aimed at preserving IT expertise by resolving financial difficulties and enhancing political stability [15].

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