

Factors Affecting the Migration Intention for Higher Studies: A Case Study of Management Undergraduates in Sri Lanka

Weerasinghe G.^{a*} , Karunarathne H. D.^b

A B S T R A C T

Sri Lanka is a developing country and the unemployment rate among graduates is relatively high. There is limited access to tertiary education in state universities. On the other hand, dynamic changes could be observed in its education system over time with the effect of the initiation of new private universities. However, the number of Sri Lankan students moving to developed countries is continuously increasing. Most undergraduates have an intention to migrate upon the completion of their degree program. Why do they migrate? What are the factors influencing their migration intention? This skill and professional drain hinder the country's economic growth. This study explores the factors of the desire to study at a world-class university, finding an international career, gaining international experience, political instability, social capital, family influence, and human capital. The number of works that specifically address the Sri Lankan context is inadequate despite substantial growth in research in this field. For this study, the simple random selection method was used to choose 100 management undergraduates from both public and private universities. Data was gathered through an online questionnaire and quantitative techniques were used to analyze the data. The overall result revealed that the desire to study at a world-class university has only a minor impact on Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intentions. Other than that, political unrest, desire to acquire international experience, a global career, social capital, and human capital significantly influence the migration intentions of management undergraduates in Sri Lanka. The findings of this study will provide information about migration intention among management undergraduates in Sri Lanka and the factors that influence migration intention which will be helpful for better the understanding of government and other stakeholders such as private institutions about future student migration.

Keywords: Migration intention, Higher education, Sri Lankan management undergraduates

* Corresponding author: gayaniweerasinghe095@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Globalization has impacted all aspects of every country all over the world and continuously acts as the major mechanism of economic growth and the movement of people, services, capital, goods, ideas, and knowledge around the world. In the past few decades, there was a growing trend of people migrating from developing countries to developed countries for different economic, social, educational, demographic, and physical reasons. As a result, developing countries are losing a higher proportion of the local labor force. Since labor migration is rapidly increasing day by day, it has become a major issue faced by Sri Lanka's labor market (Wickramasinghe & Wimalarathna, 2016). Meanwhile, 'the internationalization of tertiary education has gained growing attention due to this unstoppable phenomenon of globalization. It is the major mechanism that encourages students to move abroad and study there. (Sykes & Chaoimh, 2012). Therefore, this is related to the rising numbers of mobile students in countries like Australia, the USA, France, and the United Kingdom.

Why do undergraduates decide to study abroad? The demand for higher education is rapidly increasing because of the huge competition existing among people in a knowledge economy nowadays. Employers are seeking more qualified and well-experienced workers in order to sustain their businesses and achieve a competitive advantage compared to their competitors in the market. International students account for 14% of the total number of students enrolled in master's programs, while it is 24% of the total students enrolled in PhDs. More than 50% of international students are Asians. This increasing demand for higher education leads to the expansion of the educational opportunities available for students to choose from. Currently, even though there are many more higher education institutes compared to the past decades in developing countries, these opportunities are not sufficient to meet the demand for higher education.

The current education system in Sri Lanka is more open to international studies and it provides many easy and convenient paths and directions for Sri Lankan undergraduates to migrate for their higher studies. However, there is very limited access to tertiary education in Sri Lanka. As per the UGC report, almost 8% of students move abroad for higher education from Sri Lanka. British Council has stated that the outbound mobility from Sri Lanka will exceed 32,000 students in the near future. More than 2 million Sri Lankans have migrated to other countries for the purpose of foreign employment (Ministry of foreign employment, 2015). More than 6,000 professionals have migrated, which was an increment of 16% compared to the previous year (CBSL, 2015). According to the statistics recorded in 2016, there are 19,041 Sri Lankan mobile students abroad. It is 0.4% of the total number of mobile students all over the world. There is a significant portion of the youth population who are not satisfied with the opportunities available in the country (Pingama, 2009).

2. Research Problem

A decade ago, Sri Lanka was a developing country and skill & professional drain was one of the major contemporary issues which Sri Lanka was experiencing (Anas & Wickramasinghe, 2009). Sri Lanka is still considered a less developed country and losing skilled people is highlighted as one of the main impacts of the slow development. Student migration causes positive as well as negative consequences in both host countries and home countries. Since there are graduate unemployment and a mismatch in the labor market in Sri Lanka, the majority of Sri Lankan students migrate to other countries with the purpose of searching for employment opportunities. Ultimately migration hinders the country's economic development. Nowadays Sri Lanka is a country that is highly dependent on other countries'

human resources, while a huge number of Sri Lankans are contributing to other countries' development. Getting them back to Sri Lanka is important because they are highly educated and have numerous capabilities, competencies, exposure, and a better network. Moreover, their international experience is a supportive factor toward the country's development. On the other hand, they can earn higher salaries abroad and can send back more remittances to Sri Lanka which will increase the amount of foreign currency coming to Sri Lanka. Therefore, exploring motivational factors that influence Sri Lankan graduates to migrate to other countries will be timely and important research.

This study is designed to explore factors determining the intention of international migration of management undergraduates from Sri Lankan Universities. What are the push factors and other factors affecting Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention? This study will specifically answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Does the political instability have a positive impact on Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention?

RQ2: Does the world-class university have a positive impact on Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention?

RQ3: Does the international career have a positive impact on Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention?

RQ4: Does the international experience have a positive impact on Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention?

RQ5: Does the social capital have a positive impact on Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention?

RQ6: Does the human capital have a positive impact on Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention?

RQ7: Does the family influence have a positive impact on Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention?

3. Literature Review

Generally, student migrants can be defined as knowledgeable migrants (Raghuram, 2012). Basically, there are four perspectives on studying student migration. The first set of studies examines determinants of student migration based on post surveys and statistical approaches. Beine et al., (2014); Bessey (2012); Choudaha & de Wit (2014); Perkins & Neumayer (2014); Rodr'guezGonzalez, et al. (2011); Van Mol & Timmerman (2014), use statistical approaches such as OECD data and identified a variety of determinants such as network effects, cost of living, geographical proximity, future income, quality of universities, colonial ties, common language, desire to learn a new language, better climates, and the educational background of the students' families. The second set of studies examines the migration intention of students who have not migrated yet and desire to migrate. This type of study has found that university and high school students intend to leave their mother country mostly because of better employment opportunities, better salaries, an improved standard of living, established networks, career progression, better education for children, a higher educational level, and the lack of confidence in the future of their native country (Abuosi & Abor, 2015; Efonyi & Piguet, 2014; Dako-Gyeke, 2015). The third type of study explores how students become

internationally mobile. Authors use qualitative methods and study the processes of international student mobility including immigration education, employment policies, institutional policies, and social and demographic characteristics of students and their families (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Garneau & Mazzella, 2013). Finally, the fourth set of studies examines the experience of students who already have migrated and how their lives have emerged. This type of study mainly addresses the cultural background of host countries (Chiang, 2014; Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012), strategies by which students tend to live in host countries (Collins, 2012; Daniel, 2014), and challenges that international students face during their studies and their career development. The understanding of the students' international experience gives an insight into potential mobility. This study belongs to the second set of studies and it addresses migration intention among Sri Lankan students by examining the thoughts and expectations about migration among management undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Based on the analysis of migration intention, the actual movement of local students can be predicted.

This research applies the Push Pull framework, human capital theory, social capital theory, and new economics theory. Generally, Push factors are associated with the area of origin. Pull factors are associated with the area of destination, such as knowledge and awareness, personal recommendations, cost issues, environment, geographic proximity, and social links (Zhou & Zhang, 2018). The human capital theory is the micro perspective of the neo-classical approach. This theory implies that the socio-demographic factors of individuals are the main determinants of migration (Sjaastad, 1962). Social Capital Theory in migration focuses on the impact of factors such as migrant networks that support transitional movements (Wang & O'Connell, 2010). The set of intangible resources that comprise families and communities that aid in the social development of young people is referred to as social capital. According to the new economics theory, Migration is a group decision taken by families rather than an individual decision. As a result, students' migration decisions may be impacted by their families (Kurekova, 2011).

According to studies done by Krampf & Heinlein, 1981; Mazzarol, 1998; Bourke, 2000; Gutman & Miaoulis, 2003, the universities' world rankings and their high reputation are the most attractive factors that influence students to study in those highly reputed and top-class universities (Zhou & Zhang, 2018). There is a belief among local students that if they complete higher education abroad, it will allow them to compete better in the international labor market. Also, employers in host education countries would highly value the fact that students have completed their higher studies in a foreign university (King & Gunjan, 2016). Political instability is one of the push factors influencing students to migrate (Raul Caruso & Hans de Wit, 2014). Frequent ethnic tension, strikes, poor leadership, and economic blockades have crippled the country. There is a necessity of controlling such political instability as these have a lot of negative impacts on higher education in those regions or countries. Students lack confidence in their future in their home country due to this political instability (Leishangthem, 2017). They may have relatives and friends who have graduated from well-reputed international universities. They share their educational experience and recommend those universities to their relatives and friends living in their home country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001). Current education level might influence acquiring a higher level of education. In order to obtain the expected educational level, they tend to migrate to popular host education countries such as Australia, Japan, etc. Even though the intention to study abroad is a personal thought in general, it is also affected by the family members as well. Studying abroad is very important to their family and family members play a significant role in influencing student

migration intention. Ultimately migration intention is shaped by the expectations of family members such as financial support (Zizhen & Philip, 2018).

4. Methodology

Since there is no single theory that describes the whole concept of migration, four theories that are suitable for the Sri Lankan context were chosen. Accordingly, 7 specific determinants namely, perception of political instability, desire to study at a world-class university, desire to acquire an international career, desire to acquire an international experience, social capital, human capital, and family influence were considered independent variables, and the migration intention for higher studies among Sri Lankan management undergraduates as the dependent variable of this study.

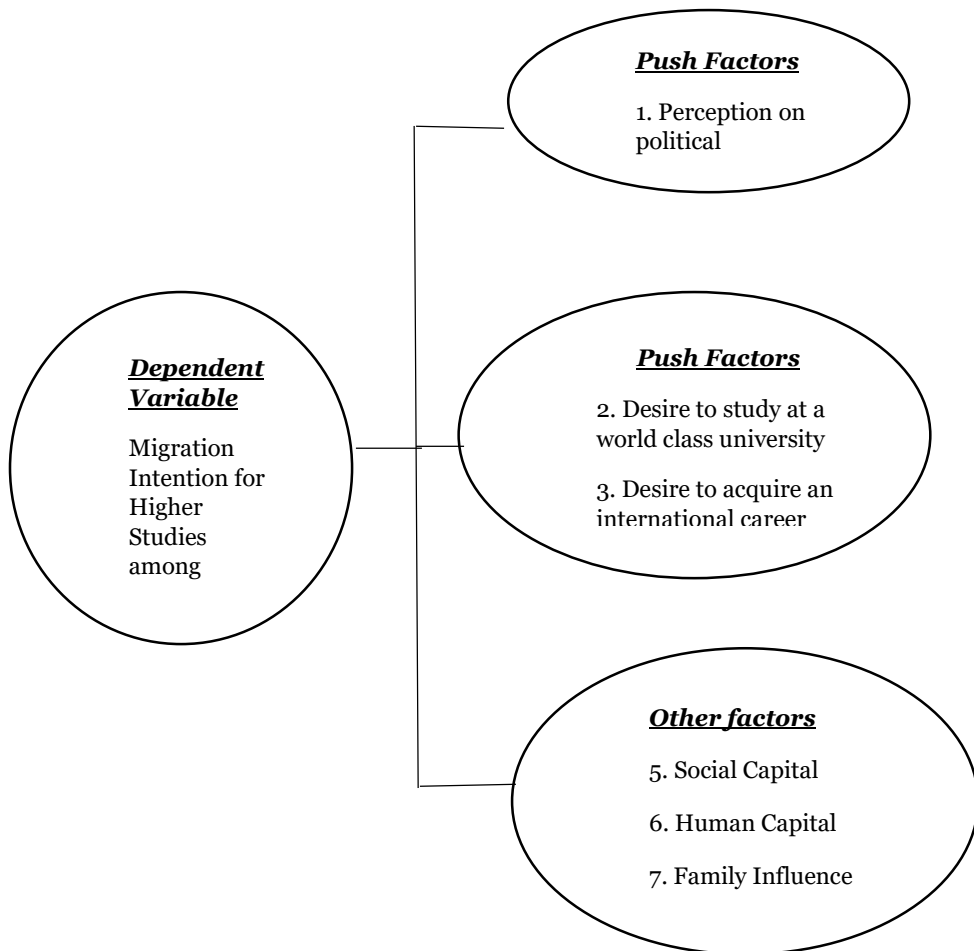


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Econometric Micro Function Estimation

$$MI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PI + \beta_2 LA + \beta_3 WU + \beta_4 IC + \beta_5 IE + \beta_6 HC + \beta_7 SC + \beta_8 FI$$

Where,

•Dependent Variable: MI: Sri Lankan Management Undergraduates' Migration Intention for Higher Studies

•Independent Variables:

PI: Political Instability

WU: World Class University

IC: International Career

IE: International Experience

HC: Human Capital

SC: Social Capital

FI: Family Influence

Hypotheses have been constructed based on acknowledged factors from the literature to determine the impact of identified factors on students' migration intentions for higher education.

H1: Political instability in Sri Lanka has a positive relationship with Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention.

H2: The desire to go to a world-class university has a positive relationship with Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention.

H3: The desire to acquire an international career has a positive relationship with Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention.

H4: The desire to have international experience has a positive relationship with Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention.

H5: Social capital has a positive relationship with Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention.

H6: Human capital has a positive relationship with Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention.

H7: The family influence has a positive relationship with Sri Lankan management undergraduates' migration intention.

Quantifiable observations lead to statistical analyses in a positivistic approach. The conclusions are based on a bigger sample size that is representative of the population. The study's target demographic was all management undergraduates enrolled at Sri Lankan universities. According to the UGC statistics nearly 5000 undergraduates were recorded from the management & commerce stream under the UGC-approved degree programs. (UGC, 2018) A basic random selection procedure was used to disseminate the questionnaire since it can be the basis of other more complex sampling methods. Further, this method was chosen for its unbiased depiction of the population as well as its simplicity. Every item has the same chance of being picked, according to the random sampling principle. As a result, a sample of 100 undergraduates was randomly picked from management undergraduates in their third year and the final year students from 4 chosen state universities: University of Colombo, University

of Jayewardenepura, University of Wayamba, University of Sabaragamuwa; and four private universities: NSBM, SLITE, ESOF, BMS. Assuming that 50% of the total recorded management undergraduates represent the third year and the final year, the sample size was determined by using Solvin's formula. In this section, the theoretical model which was developed based conceptual framework was empirically tested by using the multiple regression analysis. Furthermore, descriptive statistics were used to describe data quantitatively. SPSS statistical software was used for the analysis.

5. Results/analysis and discussions

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

| | World Class University | International Career | International Experience | Political Instability | Social Capital | Family Influence | Human Capital | Migration Intention among Mgt. Undergraduat |
|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|---|
| Mean | 3.9067 | 4.0520 | 3.6221 | 4.2357 | 3.7333 | 3.4367 | 3.6317 | 4.2312 |
| Std. Error of Mean | 0.0840 | 0.0663 | .05928 | 0.0657 | 0.5584 | 0.7998 | 0.0527 | 0.0668 |
| Std. Deviation | 0.8399 | 0.6634 | 0.5958 | 0.6568 | 0.5583 | 0.7998 | 0.5267 | 0.6684 |
| Skewness | -1.1530 | -0.4810 | 0.1680 | -1.2240 | -0.0880 | -0.5090 | -0.1810 | -0.7890 |
| Kurtosis | 1.7970 | -0.5910 | -0.1220 | 3.0200 | 0.7190 | -0.1070 | -0.6710 | 0.0500 |

Source: Author's Survey

The highest mean value is recorded in political instability. The highest standard deviation belongs to the variable world-class university. Minimum deviation belongs to the human capital variable. The distributions of the variables; human capital, international experience, international career, and social capital are approximately systematic since the skewness is between -0.5 and 0.5. The distributions of family influence and migration intention are moderately skewed. The distributions of a world-class university and political instability are not normal since the skewness values are greater than -1. The distributions of the political instability variable had kurtosis values which are greater than 3, which meant volatility is less. Kurtosis values of a world-class university, international career, international experience, social capital, family influence, human capital, family influence, and migration intention are less than 3 which means the volatility is relatively high.

Table 2: Regression Analysis

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | .801 | .642 | .614 | .41512 | 2.060 |

Source: Author's Survey

R-value is 0.801 which means that there is a strong association between migration intention and the factors affecting migration intention. The adjusted R² value is 0.614 which means that 61.4% of the migration intention is explained by the considered independent variables. Since the DW value (2.06) is between 1.5 and 2.5 there is no autocorrelation which means that residuals are independent. Therefore, the model is appropriate.

Table 3: Table of ANOVA

| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| Regression | 28.376 | 7 | 4.054 | 23.524 | 0.000 |
| Residual | 15.854 | 92 | 0.172 | | |
| Total | 44.230 | 99 | | | |

Source: Author's Survey

Since the P value of the F statistic is less than 0.05, H₀ is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded with 95% confidence that the model is jointly significant. Accordingly, this is an appropriate model.

Table 4: Table of Coefficients

| Model | Standardized Coefficients | | | t | Sig. |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | -.635 | .457 | | -1.387 | .169 |
| World Class University | .074 | .056 | .093 | 1.321 | .190 |
| International Career | .173 | .081 | .172 | 2.125 | .036 |
| International Experience | .515 | .099 | .459 | 5.212 | .000 |
| Political Instability | .140 | .069 | .138 | 2.036 | .045 |
| Social Capital | .190 | .087 | .159 | 2.188 | .031 |
| Family Influence | -.027 | .060 | -.032 | -.445 | .657 |
| Human Capital | .219 | .095 | .172 | 2.312 | .023 |

Source: Author's Survey

There are positive relationships between migration intention and factors affecting the migration intention except for family influence. Moreover, the positive slope parameter of international career, international experience, political instability, social capital, and human capital is highly significant. There is a negative constant in the model. That is the mean value (-0.635) of the dependent variable: migration intention when all the independent variables become zero.

6. Discussions and interpretations

When observing the sample characteristics, it can be realized that migration intention among female respondents is higher when compared to migration intention among male respondents. Moreover, the migration intention among students in the age range of 18-25 years is relatively high. Nearly 69% of management undergraduates who participated in this survey have an intention to migrate for their higher studies irrespective of the type of university. Migration intention among students studying in private universities is relatively high in comparison to students studying in state universities. From the descriptive analysis, it was found that “Intention to get an international career”, and “political Instability” in the Sri Lankan context appear to be highly important factors influencing migration intention among management undergraduates since higher mean values were recorded from these variables. The variable “Desire to study at a world-class university” has the highest deviation of its responses. Minimum deviation can be seen in the variable “Human capital”. Data with respect to intention to get an international career, international experience, social capital, family influence, human capital, and migration intention are normal. The distribution of observations with regard to political instability shows a high peak and this variable has less fluctuation. The distribution of observations with regard to a world-class university, international career, international experience, social capital, family influence, human capital, and migration intention has lower peaks and high fluctuation. According to the adjusted R^2 value obtained in the regression analysis, more than 60% of the changes in the dependent variable, migration intention among management undergraduates, are explained by the regression model obtained through the analysis. Also, it is evident that this regression model for the study is jointly significant.

7. Conclusion and implications

International migration and the determining factors have been recognized as key important areas for research nowadays. Moreover, this phenomenon is different from country to country. In this study, the attempt was to understand the factors affecting Sri Lankan management undergraduates' intention to study abroad. Several studies provide subjective views on international student migration. For instance, Bartkowiak & Skuza (2011), explains that a better chance to find a job was one of the least important factors for Polish students in choosing the destination of higher education. This finding is contradictory to the research findings of Gibson & McKenzie (2011). According to their findings, career objectives are the main motivation for migration. Career development after graduation is the key factor influencing migration choice (Ahamed et al., 2017). According to the results of this study, an international career is one of the main significant factors influencing migration intention among management undergraduates. Family opinion is a highly important factor influencing decisions about studying abroad. Especially, female students highly consider family opinion. Students studying in private universities focus on the reputation of the university. The ability to attract international students to host countries mainly depends on pull factors rather than push factors. It is further proved by the findings of this study. Pull factors such as international career and international experience have been recognized as key important factors. Apart from pull factors, political instability has been highlighted as a significant push factor that affects the migration intention of management undergraduates. Gunawardena & Nawaratne (2017) explain that intention to migrate is not merely due to pull factors, but also push factors such as frustration towards the country and the university system. It is evident by the findings of this

study as well. Apart from push-pull factors, human capital and social capital are recognized as significant factors which are positively correlated to the migration intention among management undergraduates. Since this study mainly focused on the migration intention among management undergraduates, it can be said that migration intention among management undergraduates significantly increases when the stock of knowledge and the level of education are enhanced. Also, having social networks such as friends' networks, and family and relatives' networks have a significant impact on migration intention among Sri Lankan students. According to the derived outcome of this study, family influence is negatively associated with migration intention. Further, it can be understood that there are certain limitations in applying new economics theory to the Sri Lankan context. However, according to King & Raguram (2013), intention to migrate is influenced by their family and social networks.

In conclusion, the desire to study at a world-class university has little influence on the migration intention of Sri Lankan management undergraduates. The expectation of getting an international career, desire to gain international experience, frustration with political instability prevailing in Sri Lanka, social capital, and human capital have a great influence on the migration intention of Sri Lankan management undergraduates. Family influence has a negative impact on the migration intention of Sri Lankan management undergraduates.

A larger amount of data was collected from management undergraduates who have different demographic backgrounds in Sri Lanka. The outcome of this study will be helpful for the Sri Lankan economy to improve strategies and mechanisms in order to control the professional and skill drain which is one of the major threats to the development of the country.

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