

Original Article



Predicting the intention to migrate based on positive and negative perfectionism, income, and gender in university students

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Gender, Students**Abstract**

Background: The increasing globalization of education and the pursuit of enhanced opportunities have spurred growing interest in understanding student migration intentions. This study investigates how the positive and negative dimensions of perfectionism, in conjunction with income and gender, predict the likelihood of university students intending to migrate. This research is novel in integrating both positive and negative perfectionism with socio-demographic variables, an area underexplored in prior migration studies, particularly in a non-Western context.

Methods: This study employed a descriptive correlational design to investigate the relationships between migration intention, perfectionism, and demographic factors. The target population consisted of all students enrolled at Azad University, Shiraz Branch, during the 2023 academic year. A convenience sample of 260 students was drawn from this population. Data were collected using the Migration Intention Questionnaire and the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale. Gender and income data were also collected as demographic variables. Data analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression.

Results: The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between positive perfectionism and intention to migrate ($\beta=0.18$, $R^2=0.34$). Conversely, negative perfectionism exhibited a statistically significant negative relationship with intention to migrate ($\beta=-0.18$, $P<0.001$). A statistically significant positive relationship was also observed between income and intention to migrate ($\beta=0.31$, $P<0.001$). Gender demonstrated a statistically significant positive association with migration intention among students ($\beta=-0.20$, $P<0.001$). Furthermore, the regression analysis indicated that positive perfectionism, negative perfectionism, income, and gender were significant predictors of intention to migrate, collectively explaining 34% of the variance ($R^2=0.34$).

Conclusion: Positive perfectionism fosters migration intentions, likely driven by the desire for achievement, while negative perfectionism acts as a deterrent due to fear of failure. Furthermore, higher income and gender are significantly associated with increased migration intentions, highlighting the need for holistic approaches that consider diverse motivations and contextual factors like cultural background and social networks in future research.

Introduction

The increasing movement of populations internationally, driven by the pursuit of enhanced well-being and improved living standards, is a prominent global trend.¹ While migration from Iran has a long-established history, it has experienced an upward trajectory in recent years, with a substantial portion of the population still expressing a desire to emigrate.² The migration process involves a deliberate and calculated decision-making process aimed at altering one's life circumstances. This decision is not impulsive or emotionally driven but rather a rational and logical behavior unfolding in two primary, sequential stages.³ The first stage involves the decision to migrate

or remain, a choice heavily influenced by individual circumstances and motivations. The second stage concerns the selection of a destination, a decision primarily shaped by the economic, social, and political attributes of potential receiving regions. The former represents a microeconomic perspective, while the latter aligns with a macroeconomic approach. These two decisions, while distinct, are also interconnected.⁴ A key consideration in this process is the motivation for migration to specific destinations. Given the inherent complexity of migration, this phenomenon is influenced by a multitude of factors, necessitating a multifaceted examination of its causes.⁵

While willingness to migrate is a key precursor

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to actual migration, it does not always manifest in migratory behavior, and involuntary immobility can result notes, contemporary discourse on migration should also acknowledge the prevalence of forced residence.⁶ Consequently, the study of migration intentions has garnered significant attention within migration scholarship. An individual is considered to possess a willingness to migrate when they express a preference for migration over remaining in their country of origin.⁷ Examining this willingness, which necessitates a focus on origin countries, is crucial for two primary reasons. First, it constitutes an integral component of migration dynamics: all individuals who ultimately migrate possess a prior willingness to do so, whereas not all those who desire to migrate can overcome the obstacles that prevent them. Second, migration intentions can influence resource allocation in diverse ways and potentially contribute to increased social discontent.^{8,9}

Positive and negative perfectionism appear to be influential factors in an individual's willingness to migrate. Migration is a complex social process with diverse linguistic, social, cultural, and psychological ramifications, impacting the migrant's identity, perfectionistic tendencies, and values.¹⁰ The experience of migration transcends simply crossing a geographical border; the migrant's presence is not merely defined by their location in a new territory. More significant than the change in physical location is the presence of a new culture and the corresponding absence of the familiar one.¹¹ While perfectionism, in its general sense, can be detrimental, consuming an individual's time, self-confidence, and energy to the point where no positive outcome seems satisfactory, it also possesses positive dimensions. When appropriately cultivated, these positive aspects can bolster self-confidence and motivation.¹² Perfectionism is often defined as the pursuit of flawless execution in all endeavors. Many individuals view this pursuit as a constructive and beneficial approach, using it as a benchmark for evaluating their progress. Indeed, perfectionists are often perceived as highly capable problem-solvers.¹³ However, despite their often superior work quality, perfectionists may experience challenges such as anxiety and insecurity. Therefore, maintaining a balance in the pursuit of perfection is paramount.¹⁴

Demographic characteristics, such as income level and gender, also exert influence on migration intentions. Among students, the willingness to migrate emerges from a complex interplay of gender, income, and personality traits.¹⁵ Men are more likely to migrate for economic and occupational advancement, whereas women tend to exhibit greater caution in their migration decisions, often due to cultural and social considerations.^{16,17} Furthermore, students from higher-income backgrounds typically possess more viable migration options, while those from lower-income backgrounds are more inclined to explore alternative pathways, including scholarships and student

employment.¹⁸ Finally, personality characteristics, such as extroversion and risk-taking propensity, can significantly influence the migration process.^{19,20}

In summary, student migration intentions are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including personality traits, gender, and socioeconomic status. These factors not only influence the initial decision to emigrate but also subsequently impact the trajectory, motivations, and challenges associated with migration. Given the multifaceted nature of migration intentions and the potential influence of perfectionism, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature by being the first to examine both positive and negative dimensions of perfectionism alongside income and gender in a non-Western context (Iran), offering unique insights into cultural influences on migration. We hypothesized that positive perfectionism and income would positively predict migration intention, while negative perfectionism would inversely predict it.

Methods

This study employed a descriptive correlational design. The population comprised all students enrolled at Azad University, Shiraz Branch, during the 2023 academic year. A convenience sample of 285 students was initially selected. Inclusion criteria consisted of current enrollment at the aforementioned university during the specified academic year and provision of informed consent to participate. Exclusion criteria included cognitive impairment or legal incapacity preventing informed consent, and incomplete questionnaire responses. Following the removal of incomplete surveys, the final sample comprised 260 participants. After obtaining necessary approvals and explaining the study's purpose to potential participants, questionnaires were distributed. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and to protect individual privacy, results are reported in aggregate form.

Instruments

The Migration Intention Questionnaire

The Migration Intention Questionnaire, developed by Bozorgzad et al,²¹ was utilized to assess participants' intentions to migrate. This instrument comprises 73 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), yielding a potential score range of 73 to 365. Content validity of the questionnaire was established by a panel of 22 experts in the field. Bozorgzad et al²¹ reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, demonstrating adequate reliability. In the current study, the questionnaire was adapted for the Iranian context by translating items into Persian and conducting a pilot test with 30 students to ensure cultural relevance and clarity. The reliability of the Migration Intention Questionnaire was re-evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a coefficient of 0.81.

The Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale

The Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale, developed by Terry-Short et al,²² was utilized to assess both positive and negative dimensions of perfectionism. This 40-item instrument employs a 5-point Likert scale, generating a potential score range from 20 to 100. Besharat²³ reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.87 and 0.85 for the positive and negative perfectionism subscales, respectively. The scale was validated in the Iranian context through a prior study by Besharat,²³ which confirmed its factor structure and reliability in a Persian-speaking population. No further adaptations were made for this study. In the present study, the reliability of the scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.88.

Statistical analyses

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations, were calculated for all relevant variables. At the inferential level, Pearson's correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression were employed to examine the predictive relationship between positive and negative perfectionism, income, gender, and willingness to migrate. Stepwise regression was selected to identify the strongest predictors from the candidate variables, allowing for an exploratory approach to model building while controlling for multicollinearity.

Results

The sample consisted of 154 (59.23%) female and 106 (40.77%) male participants. The mean monthly income was 190.39 million Iranian Rials (SD=30.20). Regarding marital status, 147 (56.54%) participants were single, and 113 (43.46%) were married. In terms of educational attainment, 36 (13.85%) participants held a bachelor's degree, 156 (60.0%) held a master's degree, and 68 (26.15%) held a doctoral degree. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for all study variables, are presented in Table 1. The data met the

Table 1. Means, standard deviations (SD), skewness, and kurtosis of the study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Migration intention	249.65	21.44	1.04	-0.94
Positive perfectionism	57.17	10.38	0.18	-0.42
Negative perfectionism	61.28	13.55	0.04	0.66
Income	190.39	30.20	0.43	-0.81

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis of predictors of migration intention

Step	Predictors	R	R ²	F	P	β
1	Income	0.42	0.17	88.97	0.001	0.47
2	Income; Positive perfectionism	0.53	0.28	67.90	0.001	0.43; 0.18
3	Income, Positive & negative perfectionism	0.58	0.34	56.07	0.001	0.31; 0.18; -0.18
4	Income; Positive & negative perfectionism; Gender	0.58	0.34	56.07	0.001	0.31; 0.18; -0.18; -0.20

assumption of normality, as evidenced by skewness and kurtosis values falling within the acceptable range of -2 to +2 for all variables (Table 1).

Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients between the study variables and migration intention. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between positive perfectionism and migration intention ($r=0.47$, $P=0.001$), indicating that students with higher levels of positive perfectionism tend to have stronger intentions to migrate. Conversely, a statistically significant negative correlation was observed between negative perfectionism and migration intention ($r=-0.27$, $P=0.001$), suggesting that students with higher levels of negative perfectionism are less likely to intend to migrate. Income also demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation with migration intention ($r=0.19$, $P=0.0018$), implying that students with higher incomes are more inclined to consider migration. Notably, gender exhibited the strongest positive correlation with migration intention ($r=0.65$, $P=0.001$), suggesting a substantial difference in migration intentions between genders.

Table 3 presents the results of a stepwise multiple regression analysis examining the prediction of migration intention from income, positive perfectionism, negative perfectionism, and gender. In the first step, income alone significantly predicted migration intention ($\beta=0.47$, $P<0.001$), explaining 17.4% of the variance ($R^2=0.17$, Cohen's $f^2=0.21$). The addition of positive perfectionism in the second step significantly improved the model ($\beta=0.43$ for income, $\beta=0.18$ for positive perfectionism, $P<0.001$), increasing the explained variance to 27.6% ($R^2=0.28$, Cohen's $f^2=0.39$). Introducing negative perfectionism in the third step further enhanced the model ($\beta=0.31$ for income, $\beta=0.18$ for positive perfectionism, $\beta=-0.18$ for negative perfectionism, $P<0.001$), with the model now accounting for 33.6% of the variance in migration intention ($R^2=0.34$, Cohen's $f^2=0.51$). Finally, including gender in the fourth step did not change the explained variance ($R^2=0.34$, Cohen's $f^2=0.51$), although gender

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between study variables

Variables	Migration intention	
	r	P
Positive perfectionism	0.47	0.001
Negative perfectionism	-0.27	0.001
Income	0.19	0.008
Gender	0.65	0.001

was a significant predictor ($\beta = -0.20$, $P < 0.001$). The lack of increase in R^2 upon adding gender suggests potential multicollinearity or overlapping variance with other predictors, such as income or positive perfectionism, which may share explanatory power with gender. All four models demonstrated statistical significance at $P < 0.001$.

Discussion

This study aimed to predict migration intention among university students based on positive and negative perfectionism, income, and gender. Initial findings indicated that migration intention was predictable from both positive and negative perfectionism. These results align with previous research conducted by Raeis Saadi et al.,²⁴ and Blynova et al.²⁵ Perfectionism, a personality trait influencing significant life decisions such as migration, offers a potential explanation for these findings. This trait, characterized by both positive (adaptive) and negative (maladaptive) dimensions, can differentially impact students' willingness to emigrate. While positive perfectionism may frame migration as an opportunity for personal and professional development, negative perfectionism can engender doubt, stress, and fear of failure.²⁴ Students exhibiting positive perfectionism establish high yet attainable standards, often viewing migration as a vehicle for academic and career advancement, typically accompanied by meticulous planning. These students often demonstrate purposefulness, viewing migration not as an escape but as a strategic pathway to achieving academic and professional goals. Furthermore, their high adaptability enables them to integrate effectively into new environments, a crucial factor in successful migration. Finally, their problem-solving skills equip them to manage the inherent challenges of migration, including navigating linguistic, cultural, and academic adjustments. This group often prefers structured and official migration channels, such as university admissions, scholarships, and careful financial planning.²⁶

Conversely, students characterized by negative perfectionism often establish unrealistic and obsessive standards, resulting in anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of failure.²⁷ This form of perfectionism manifests in several ways regarding migration intentions. Primarily, these individuals may harbor a fear of failure in the destination country, leading to procrastination or complete abandonment of migration plans. Secondly, some may view migration as an immediate solution to persistent dissatisfaction with their current circumstances, often lacking concrete plans for resettlement. Thirdly, a lower tolerance for challenges may result in premature abandonment of migration attempts when confronted with obstacles such as visa acquisition or cultural adaptation. Consequently, negative perfectionism can induce hesitancy throughout the migration decision-making process. Some individuals may even experience post-migration regret and persistent stress related to self-validation. While

positive perfectionism facilitates informed and logical migration decisions, negative perfectionism can hinder action or contribute to unsuccessful migration outcomes. Students with positive perfectionism typically engage in thorough pre-migration research, skill development, and strategic planning. In contrast, those with negative perfectionism may exhibit excessive rigidity, delaying decisions indefinitely, or migrate with unrealistic expectations, ultimately experiencing frustration when faced with the realities of resettlement.

The results further indicated that migration intention was predictable from the demographic variables of income and gender among students. These findings are consistent with prior research.^{28,29} These results support the notion that migration intention among students is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including personality traits, gender, and income. These factors not only affect the decision to emigrate but also shape the trajectory, motivations, and challenges associated with migration. Gender, in particular, is a salient variable influencing students' migration intentions, with males showing the strongest correlation. This may be attributed to cultural norms in Iran, where men typically experience greater autonomy in decision-making, including migration, due to societal expectations that prioritize male mobility and economic responsibility. Women, conversely, may face greater cultural and familial constraints, such as expectations to prioritize family roles or concerns about safety and social integration in destination countries.²⁸

The findings also align with the aspiration-capability framework proposed by de Haas,⁷ which posits that migration intentions arise from a combination of aspirations (e.g., driven by positive perfectionism and income) and capabilities (e.g., financial resources and gender-based opportunities). Positive perfectionism may enhance aspirations by framing migration as a pathway to success, while income provides the capability to act on these aspirations. Negative perfectionism, however, may suppress aspirations due to fear of failure, particularly among women in a culturally conservative context like Iran. These findings may differ in other settings, such as Western universities, where gender norms and socioeconomic opportunities vary, potentially reducing the gender gap in migration intentions or altering the influence of perfectionism due to different cultural expectations around achievement and risk-taking.

Income and socioeconomic status are also crucial determinants of students' migration intentions. Individuals from higher-income backgrounds typically have greater access to legal migration pathways and formal processes. They are more likely to have opportunities for study at prestigious international universities, access to enhanced employment prospects, and the financial resources necessary to support migration costs.²⁹ Conversely, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to pursue scholarships, work-study opportunities,

or even consider informal migration channels. This latter group may encounter greater challenges, including difficulties in visa acquisition, securing adequate living expenses, and finding suitable employment in the destination country.²⁸ The intersection of gender and income reveals that low-income women generally exhibit lower migration intentions, likely due to a confluence of financial constraints and heightened cultural and familial concerns. Conversely, women with higher incomes and family support have increased opportunities for successful migration. Among men, even those facing financial hardship often maintain a strong willingness to migrate, frequently seeking labor opportunities or informal channels for emigration.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the sample's restriction to students at a single institution (Azad University, Shiraz Branch) limits the generalizability of the results to other student populations. Variations in cultural context, socioeconomic status, and institutional characteristics across different cities, regions, and educational systems may influence migration intentions. Second, the convenience sampling method employed may have introduced selection bias, potentially affecting sample representativeness and further constraining the scope of generalization. Third, the reliance on self-report measures raises the possibility of response bias, including social desirability bias, which may have influenced participant responses. Fourth, the cross-sectional design of this study precludes inferences about causality, as it captures associations at a single point in time. Finally, the study's focus on a limited set of psychological and demographic variables may have excluded other potentially influential factors impacting migration intentions.

Conclusion

This study provides novel evidence for the complex interplay of psychological and socioeconomic factors in shaping students' intentions to migrate, marking the first integration of both positive and negative perfectionism with income and gender in a non-Western student population. The finding that positive perfectionism positively predicts migration intention suggests that the drive for achievement and self-improvement may motivate students to seek opportunities beyond their current environment. Conversely, the negative relationship between negative perfectionism and migration intention implies that fear of failure and self-doubt may act as deterrents to migration, perhaps due to concerns about navigating new challenges and uncertainties. The positive association between income and migration intention aligns with existing literature emphasizing the role of economic factors in migration decisions, suggesting that students from higher-income backgrounds may have greater access to resources and opportunities that facilitate migration. The significant association between gender and migration

intention underscores the importance of considering gender-specific experiences and motivations in migration studies. From a policy perspective, universities could support students with negative perfectionism through targeted counseling programs to mitigate fear of failure, enhance decision-making confidence, and foster adaptive coping strategies for migration-related challenges. Finally, the predictive power of positive perfectionism, negative perfectionism, income, and gender in the regression model highlights the multifaceted nature of migration intentions and the need for holistic approaches to understanding this phenomenon. Future research should explore the underlying mechanisms linking these variables to migration intentions and consider the influence of other contextual factors, such as cultural background and social networks, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student migration.

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Authors' Contribution

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Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

Ethical Approval

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