

# The Role of Life Satisfaction, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Perfectionism, And Demographic Characteristics in Predicting Students' Migration Intention

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Increased globalization and interconnectedness have led to greater student mobility, making it crucial to understand the factors influencing students' decisions to migrate for educational or professional opportunities. This research aimed to investigate the correlational interplay between life satisfaction, tolerance for ambiguity, perfectionism, and demographic characteristics in predicting students' migration intention.

**Methods:** The research employed a descriptive correlational design. The population comprised all students enrolled at Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch in 2023. A convenience sample of 260 students was selected. Data were collected using the Migration Intention Questionnaire, Satisfaction with Life Scale, Ambiguity Tolerance Scale, and Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale. Additionally, students' gender and income were examined as demographic characteristics. For data analysis, point-biserial correlation and discriminant analysis were utilized.

**Results:** The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between life satisfaction and migration intention, and a significant positive correlation between tolerance for ambiguity and migration intention ( $P < 0.001$ ). A significant positive correlation was also observed between positive perfectionism and migration intention. Income was also positively and significantly associated with migration intention ( $P < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, discriminant analysis identified only life satisfaction and income as significant predictors of migration intention ( $P < 0.001$ ). No significant relationships were found between negative perfectionism and migration intention, or between gender and migration intention.

**Conclusion:** The study found that life satisfaction and income are significant predictors of students' migration intention, while tolerance for ambiguity and positive perfectionism also play a role. However, negative perfectionism and gender were not found to be significant factors in predicting migration intention.

**Keywords:** Life satisfaction, Perfectionism, Migration intention, Students.

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## Introduction

Globalization has led to an increase in migration, with more and more countries being affected by population movements. This increase is particularly evident in the realm of student mobility, with a growing number of students pursuing educational opportunities abroad. This phenomenon of international student migration is not merely spatial mobility but a complex phenomenon involving a multitude of factors and consequences <sup>1</sup>. This complexity renders the decision to migrate for educational purposes a significant undertaking for individuals, with

both personal and social implications. Migration involves individuals moving from one location to another, impacting themselves, their countries of origin, and their destination countries. With the increasing number of student migrants globally, both sending and receiving countries are increasingly affected by this phenomenon <sup>2</sup>. The movement of people for educational purposes can have substantial effects on the economic, social, and political systems of both sending and receiving countries. The impact of migration varies across countries, and it

can be expected to have a more pronounced effect on the social and welfare systems of some nations <sup>3</sup>. Although migration has been a feature of all societies throughout history, its nature, causes, and effects vary across different societies <sup>4</sup>. Therefore, understanding student migration intentions (i.e., an individual's conscious and planned desire to relocate to another country) and the factors influencing them can assist sending countries in migration policymaking and management.

Life satisfaction has been identified as a key factor influencing migration intentions<sup>5</sup>. As a crucial component of subjective well-being, life satisfaction reflects individuals' overall evaluation of their lives, encompassing various aspects such as social relationships, financial status, and mental health<sup>6</sup>. Beyond its individual impact, life satisfaction has significant societal implications. By fostering hope and alleviating feelings of helplessness, life satisfaction can contribute to individual and societal well-being and accelerate personal development. While individual circumstances play a significant role in shaping life satisfaction, social factors also exert considerable influence. Society can create conditions that facilitate goal achievement and foster social connections, thereby contributing to overall life satisfaction<sup>7</sup>.

Another factor that seems to be related to the inclination to migrate is tolerance for ambiguity. This concept has been defined as both a personality variable and an organized trait <sup>8</sup>. Tolerance for ambiguity confronts individuals with a set of unfamiliar, complex, and ambiguous methods. This is because intolerance for ambiguity plays a key role in creating and perpetuating anxiety and stress. Rubiales-Nunez et al.<sup>9</sup> have defined ambiguity as a subjective experience of a lack of commonly available information for a prediction. Sometimes, when defining ambiguity, the focus is on the lack or ambiguity of information when examining a person's use of information. When an individual encounters a set of unfamiliar, complex, and ambiguous methods, they experience ambiguity; in this situation, it is the individual's personality trait that determines to what extent they can successfully cope with a situation with an uncertain outcome <sup>10</sup>. Those who tolerate ambiguity perform well in new or uncertain situations, adapt when tasks or goals are unclear, and are able to learn and perform in unpredictable times or environments <sup>11</sup>.

In addition to tolerance for ambiguity, another significant factor influencing the inclination to migrate is perfectionism (i.e., a personality trait characterized by striving for flawlessness and setting excessively high standards, often accompanied by critical self-evaluations). Perfectionism has been defined as a set of very high

standards for performance, accompanied by critical self-evaluation. Perfectionism includes two dimensions: positive, healthy, or adaptive perfectionism and negative, unhealthy, or maladaptive perfectionism <sup>12</sup>. Positive perfectionism describes aspects of perfectionism that relate to perfectionistic endeavors such as setting high and precise personal standards for performance and striving for perfection; while negative perfectionism encompasses aspects of perfectionism associated with critical evaluations of personal performance, worry about mistakes, and feelings of conflict between expectations and achievements <sup>12</sup>. Perfectionists are motivated not by a desire for progress and advancement, but rather by fear of failure. Fear leads to avoidance behavior, and avoidance behavior constantly keeps the individual on guard, causing them to avoid what they fear. Therefore, fear of failure in perfectionists is a factor in the decision to migrate <sup>14, 15</sup>.

Another influential factor on the inclination to migrate is demographic characteristics such as income level and gender. It is important to note that the different dimensions of migration do not have completely defined boundaries, and in this field of study, due to thematic overlap, a clear categorization of causal factors cannot be provided. For example, when discussing the social status of a specialist, part of it relates to an income that is not commensurate with the individual's education, which is an economic reason, and from another perspective, it can be attributed to feelings of discrimination and lack of justice. One of the main reasons for migration is economic issues; factors such as the mismatch between wages and inflation and the cost of living are considered reasons for migration<sup>16</sup>. Part of the reasons for migration related to gender in occupations; limited job opportunities for women and uncertainty about the future of their careers and unclear career advancement paths are among the reasons mentioned <sup>17</sup>.

Based on the aforementioned, the aim of this study was to investigate the role of life satisfaction, tolerance for ambiguity, perfectionism, and demographic characteristics in predicting the intention to migrate among students. Understanding these predictive factors can inform policies in sending countries aimed at mitigating unwanted emigration. For instance, if low life satisfaction is found to be a significant predictor of migration intention, policies focusing on improving quality of life, economic opportunities, and social support systems could be implemented. Similarly, if specific demographic groups are found to be more likely to migrate, targeted interventions can be developed to address their specific needs and concerns. Ultimately, by understanding the drivers of migration intention, sending

countries can develop evidence-based policies to retain their skilled workforce and promote national development.

## Methods

This research is a descriptive correlational study. The statistical population of this study included all students enrolled at Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch, in 2023. In this study, using a convenience sampling method, a sample of 285 students was selected. The inclusion criteria for this study were: enrollment at Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch, during the 2023 academic year, and voluntary agreement to participate in the study and provide informed consent. The exclusion criteria were: the inability to provide informed consent due to cognitive impairment or legal incapacity, and incomplete questionnaires. The initial sample size of 285 was considered sufficient given the number of research variables being examined (life satisfaction, tolerance for ambiguity, positive and negative perfectionism, income, and gender) and the desire to obtain a reasonably representative sample of the student population at Azad University, Shiraz Branch. After removing incomplete questionnaires, a final sample of 260 students was included in the analysis. To conduct the research, after coordinating with and explaining the study's purpose to the students, the research questionnaires were administered online. This online administration facilitated data collection while adhering to social distancing guidelines (if applicable during the data collection period) and allowed for wider reach within the student population. In order to observe ethical considerations, participants were assured that the information obtained from the research would be used confidentially and anonymously, and to protect personal privacy, the results would be reported at the aggregate level.

## Instruments

### *Migration Intention Questionnaire*

The Migration Intention Questionnaire, developed by Bozorgzad et al.<sup>18</sup>, consists of 73 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with scores ranging from 1 to 5. The minimum and maximum scores for this questionnaire are 73 and 365, respectively. In the present study, a score lower than 182 was considered as low migration intention, and scores of 182 and higher were considered as high migration intention. This median split (182 being the midpoint between 73 and 365) was employed to create two distinct groups for comparative analysis, facilitating the examination of differences in psychological and demographic characteristics between students with

differing levels of migration intention. While acknowledging that other categorization methods are possible, the median split provided a straightforward and balanced approach for this exploratory study. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and was found to be 0.82, indicating that the questionnaire had adequate reliability<sup>18</sup>. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the Migration Intention Questionnaire, and it was found to be 0.81.

### *The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)*

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was used to assess participants' life satisfaction. This well-established five-item scale, developed by Diener et al.<sup>19</sup>, utilizes a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The SWLS has demonstrated high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically exceeding 0.80<sup>20</sup>. In the current study, the scale exhibited excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, indicating that the items effectively measure a singular construct: life satisfaction.

### *The Ambiguity Tolerance Scale (ATS)*

The Ambiguity Tolerance Scale (ATS) was employed to measure participants' tolerance for ambiguity. Developed by McLain<sup>21</sup>, the ATS comprises 13 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from totally disagree to totally agree. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, and 12 are reverse-scored. Scores between 13 and 30 indicate low ambiguity tolerance, 30 to 45 moderate tolerance, and above 45 high tolerance. The ATS has demonstrated adequate internal reliability ( $\alpha=0.85$ ) and validity, as reported by Babaei et al.<sup>22</sup>.

### *Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (PANPS)*

This 40-item questionnaire was developed by Terry-Short et al.<sup>23</sup> to measure both positive and negative perfectionism. The questions are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The score range is 20 to 100 for each subscale, and 40 to 200 for the total score of the scale. In a previous study, Cronbach's alpha for the positive and negative perfectionism subscales was 0.87 and 0.85, respectively<sup>24</sup>. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the perfectionism questionnaire, and it was found to be 0.88.

### *Data Analysis*

SPSS-27 software was used to analyze the data collected in this study. At the descriptive level, mean and standard deviation were used, while at the inferential level, Pearson correlation coefficient and discriminant analysis were

employed to investigate the prediction of migration intention based on life satisfaction, ambiguity tolerance, perfectionism, and demographic characteristics.

## Results

Participant demographics revealed that 154 (59.23%) were female and 106 (40.77%) were male. Within the group expressing low migration intention, 75 (57.69%) were female and 55 (42.31%) were male. Conversely, in the high migration intention group, 79 (60.77%) were female and 51 (39.23%) were male. The participants' average monthly income was  $190.39 \pm 3.20$  million Iranian Rials. Regarding marital status, 147 (56.54%) participants were single and 113 (43.46%) were married. In terms of educational attainment, 36 (13.85%) 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 the study variables, are presented for both the low and high migration intention groups in Table 1. Based on the results in Table 2, the skewness and kurtosis of all variables were between -2 and +2, indicating a normal distribution of data in both the high and low migration intention groups.

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

Groups	Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Low Migration intention	Life satisfaction	22.24	3.06	0.12	-0.65
	Tolerance for Ambiguity	37.24	8.12	0.09	-0.55
	Positive perfectionism	57.17	10.38	0.18	-0.42
	Negative perfectionism	61.28	13.55	0.04	0.66
High migration intention	Life satisfaction	20.36	3.17	0.36	-0.49
	Tolerance for Ambiguity	41.62	7.69	0.20	-0.71
	Positive perfectionism	62.25	10.07	0.07	-0.55
	Negative perfectionism	63.45	12.92	-0.36	-0.69

The results showed a negative and significant point-biserial correlation between life satisfaction and migration intention ( $r=-0.29$ ,  $P=0.001$ ). Ambiguity tolerance was positively and significantly correlated with migration intention ( $r=0.27$ ,  $P=0.001$ ). Positive perfectionism was positively and significantly correlated with migration intention ( $r=0.24$ ,  $P=0.001$ ). Negative perfectionism was not significantly correlated with migration intention ( $r=0.08$ ,  $P=0.242$ ). Income level was positively and significantly correlated with migration intention ( $r=0.41$ ,  $P=0.001$ ). Gender was not significantly correlated with migration intention ( $r=-0.04$ ,  $P=0.523$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Point-biserial correlation coefficients between study variables

Variables	Migration intention	
	$r_{bs}$	P
Life satisfaction	-0.29	0.001
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.27	0.001
Positive perfectionism	0.24	0.001
Negative perfectionism	0.08	0.242
Income	0.41	0.001
Gender	-0.04	0.523

To predict migration intention based on life satisfaction, ambiguity tolerance, positive perfectionism, and income, discriminant analysis was employed. Results indicated that only life satisfaction ( $P=0.040$ ) and income ( $P=0.001$ ) were significantly related to migration intention among students (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Discriminant analysis results for predicting migration intention based on life satisfaction, ambiguity tolerance, positive perfectionism, and income

Variables	B	SE	Wald	df	P
Life satisfaction	-0.11	0.06	4.24	1	0.040
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.03	0.02	1.32	1	0.251
Positive perfectionism	0.02	0.02	0.81	1	0.369
Income	0.20	0.05	17.13	1	0.001
Gender	-3.04	2.02	2.28	1	0.131

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine the influence of life satisfaction, tolerance for ambiguity, perfectionism, and demographic characteristics on students' migration intention. The results indicated that migration intention among students could be predicted based on life satisfaction, which aligns with the findings of Rezaei and Sadeghi <sup>25</sup>, Karabchuk et al. <sup>26</sup>, and Wang et al. <sup>27</sup>. To explain this finding, it can be argued that migration intention is a global issue that has attracted the attention of many researchers and policymakers. This phenomenon is influenced by various economic, social, and psychological factors. Life satisfaction refers to an individual's overall level of contentment and happiness with various aspects of their life. This evaluation encompasses various dimensions of life such as social relationships, financial status, educational and occupational achievements, and mental health. Life satisfaction can directly impact individual motivations and life decisions, including the intention to migrate <sup>25</sup>. The intention to migrate refers to an individual's desire and motivation to leave their country or place of residence to settle in another location. This intention can be influenced by economic, social, and psychological factors <sup>27</sup>.

This finding can be explained by the fact that tolerance for ambiguity refers to an individual's ability to manage and respond to uncertain and ambiguous situations. This psychological trait can significantly influence individual decisions and behaviors. Tolerance for ambiguity means the ability to cope with situations where the outcomes are not fully known. Individuals with high tolerance for ambiguity can more easily handle uncertainty and make decisions without needing complete and accurate information. This trait involves cognitive flexibility and the ability to process incomplete and ambiguous information <sup>21</sup>. Among students, migration intention can be influenced by educational and life experiences, social pressures, and available opportunities. Tolerance for ambiguity can significantly impact migration intention. Individuals with high tolerance for ambiguity may be less apprehensive about uncertain situations and major changes like migration. This trait helps them better cope with the challenges and uncertainties of migration and take advantage of new opportunities.

Furthermore, the results indicated that students' migration intention was predictable based on positive perfectionism. However, migration intention was not predictable based on negative perfectionism. To explain these findings, it can be argued that migration intention refers to an individual's desire and motivation to leave their country or place of residence to settle in a new location. This intention can be influenced by various

factors such as job opportunities, economic conditions, and the desire for a better quality of life. In this regard, perfectionism, as a personality trait, can significantly influence individual decisions and behaviors. Perfectionism refers to the striving for high standards and ideals, both personal and social, and can have a notable impact on migration intention <sup>13</sup>.

Perfectionism refers to the persistent pursuit of extremely high standards of performance and achievement. This trait can manifest in several ways, including personal perfectionism (setting high standards for oneself), social perfectionism (expecting others to meet high standards), and idealistic striving (the need for constant improvement). Perfectionism can have various implications for migration intention, as follows: Pursuit of better opportunities: Perfectionists may be more inclined to migrate as they seek better job and educational opportunities and more ideal living conditions. They may view migration as a means to achieve higher goals and improve their quality of life. Escape from perceived failures: Perfectionists may feel dissatisfied with their current lives due to a failure to meet their high standards <sup>12</sup>. This dissatisfaction may drive them to migrate to new locations perceived to offer better opportunities to realize their goals and aspirations. Coping with pressure and stress: Perfectionism can be associated with psychological distress and stress related to the pursuit of high standards. Some perfectionists may view migration as a way to escape from existing pressures and find an environment with better opportunities and less stress. Adherence to social expectations: Perfectionists may be influenced by societal expectations and pressures to succeed and achieve. These pressures may increase their inclination to migrate to new environments that may offer more favorable social expectations.

Furthermore, the results indicated that students' migration intention was predictable based on the demographic variable of income. This finding is inconsistent with the results of Sadeghi Jafari and Sheyni Mirzadeh <sup>28</sup> study but aligns with the findings of Abdollahi and Rezaee <sup>29</sup>. However, students' migration intention was not predictable based on the demographic variable of gender. To explain these findings, it can be argued that income is a key economic factor that can significantly influence individual life decisions, including migration intention. Among students, financial status and income level can play a crucial role in shaping motivations and decisions related to migration. Income refers to the amount of money an individual regularly receives from employment, financial aid, or other sources. On the other hand, migration intention refers to an individual's desire and motivation to leave their country or place of residence to settle in a new location. This

intention can be influenced by factors such as job opportunities, quality of life, and financial status. Income can have various impacts on migration intention.

Individuals with higher incomes may be more inclined to migrate as they are better able to afford the costs associated with migration and take advantage of improved economic opportunities in new locations. High income can signify the financial capacity to cover migration-related expenses, including travel, housing, and establishing a new life<sup>29</sup>. Students with higher incomes may seek better job and educational opportunities in other countries, which can facilitate their career and academic advancement. Additionally, gender, as a socio-psychological factor, can have varying impacts on migration intention. Among students, gender differences may lead to significant variations in the nature and intensity of migration intentions. Gender can influence migration intentions in various ways. Men and women may consider migration for different reasons. For instance, men may be more inclined to seek job and career opportunities in other countries, while women may seek better educational opportunities or improved quality of life in a safer and more supportive environment<sup>30</sup>. These differences can lead to varying migration intentions between genders. Gender can also influence access to resources and opportunities. Women may face more limitations in some countries, which may increase their motivation to migrate<sup>29</sup>.

In this study, the univariate analysis revealed a significant relationship between life satisfaction and income with migration intention. A similar study that comprehensively examined all variables was not found. To explain these findings, it can be argued that access to higher-quality academic programs and prestigious universities can motivate migration. Students may seek to study at renowned international universities with superior facilities and resources. Better job opportunities and higher potential for professional advancement in other countries can be a significant reason for the inclination to migrate<sup>2</sup>. Job opportunities with higher incomes and more favorable working conditions can be a strong incentive for the decision to migrate. Improved quality of life, including healthcare, safety, social welfare, and environment, can be a driving factor for migration. Some students may seek countries with lower costs of education and living to reduce their financial burden. Access to scholarships and financial aid can also significantly impact the inclination to migrate. Better financial opportunities can encourage students to pursue studies in other countries. Seeking new cultural experiences and exposure to different cultures can be a motivation for migration<sup>16</sup>. Students may wish to learn new languages and cultures and gain international experiences. Some

students may seek new opportunities for personal growth and independence. Migration can provide an opportunity for personal development and greater independence. Additionally, negative experiences in the home country, such as social or economic pressures, may drive students towards migration. Furthermore, this analysis can contribute to a better understanding of the needs and motivations of students to migrate and can assist in developing support and counseling programs for international students.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was drawn from students at a single university (Azad University, Shiraz Branch), which limits the generalizability of the findings to students in other cities, regions, or educational systems with differing cultural contexts, socioeconomic backgrounds, or institutional characteristics. Second, the use of a convenience sampling method may have introduced selection bias, potentially impacting the representativeness of the sample and further restricting generalizability. Third, the reliance on self-report questionnaires raises the possibility of response bias, including social desirability bias, where participants may provide responses they perceive as socially acceptable rather than reflecting their true beliefs or intentions. Finally, the study focused on a limited set of psychological and demographic variables, potentially overlooking other influential factors.

Based on these limitations, several directions for future research are suggested. To enhance generalizability, future studies should employ probability sampling techniques, such as stratified random sampling, and conduct research in diverse geographical locations and educational settings to assess the cross-cultural validity of the findings. To mitigate the limitations of self-report data, future research could incorporate objective measures or employ mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative data with qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing migration intention. Furthermore, future studies should explore a wider range of potential predictors of migration intention, including perceived opportunities in the destination country, family influences, political and economic instability in the home country, and other relevant contextual factors. Finally, longitudinal studies would be valuable to investigate the dynamic nature of migration intentions and track actual migration behaviors over time, providing a more nuanced understanding of the migration process.

## Conclusion

This study explored the interplay of psychological and socioeconomic factors influencing student migration intentions. Key findings revealed a significant negative correlation between life satisfaction and migration intention, indicating that students with lower life satisfaction are more inclined to migrate. Conversely, tolerance for ambiguity and positive perfectionism showed positive correlations with migration intention, suggesting that students comfortable with uncertainty and those driven by high standards are more open to migrating. Income also emerged as a significant predictor, with higher-income students more likely to consider migration. Notably, life satisfaction and income were identified as the strongest predictors through discriminant analysis. While negative perfectionism and gender did not significantly predict migration intention, the study highlights the crucial roles of life satisfaction and income, with contributing influences from tolerance for ambiguity and positive perfectionism. These findings underscore the need for holistic interventions addressing both psychological well-being and socioeconomic factors to effectively support students and inform relevant policies.

## Highlights

### What Is Already Known?

Existing research acknowledges the increasing trend of student migration due to globalization and the need to understand its influencing factors. Prior studies likely explore general motivations for migration, but may lack a focused examination of the interplay between specific psychological factors and demographic characteristics in predicting migration intention among students.

### What Does This Study Add?

This study specifically investigates the correlational relationships between life satisfaction, tolerance for ambiguity, positive and negative perfectionism, income, and gender with students' migration intention, identifying life satisfaction and income as significant predictors. It highlights the role of certain psychological traits and socioeconomic status in influencing students' decisions to migrate for educational or professional opportunities.

## Authors' Contributions

TKL: Study concept and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, and statistical analysis. FH: Administrative, technical, and material support, study supervision. TKL and FH: Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content.

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## Conflicts of Interest Disclosures

No conflict of interest to declare.

## Consent For Publication

We declare consent for publication.

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## Ethics approval

The ethical committee of Islamic Azad University confirmed the protocol of this study with IR.IAU.SHIRAZ.REC.1402.325 code.

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