

INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL VARIABLES PREDICTING MIGRATION INTENTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: Immigration has become an issue of concern in Nigeria in the recent time, the number of international migrants increased from about 84 million in 1970 to over 272 million in 2019. Nigeria is considered as one of the countries that contribute significantly to international migration. This study investigates predictors of migration intentions among Nigerian undergraduates, focusing on career aspirations and social networks and how the actual migration affects skilled labour supply in the country. Using a sample of 395 students who completed measures of career aspirations, social networks and migration intentions, we tested four hypotheses with multiple regression and correlation analyses. We found that career aspirations significantly predicted migration intention, ($R^2=.081$, $F=11.52$) $p < .001$), while social networks did not. There were also no age differences in migration intention. Our findings suggest that career goals strongly influence migration intent. The implications of the findings on the perennial loss of skilled labour with the attendant challenges, and the implication for career counselling practices were discussed.

Keywords: Migration Intention, Career Aspiration, Social Networks, Undergraduates, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Migration is the movement of people from one location/region/country to another to live and work. It can be temporary or permanent and can occur for many reasons, including changing the environment, escaping trouble, and seeking economic opportunities, among others (Asekun, 2017). Research findings show that its magnitude, complexities, and aversive consequences have increased in recent years (Assfaw & Minaye, 2022). Migration dynamics are continually evolving, and new migration flows develop due to different push and pull factors within the host and sending countries (Kuschminder et al., 2012). The increasing rate of migration and the associated challenges have attracted the interest of scholars, researchers, policy makers and others because of the social, economic, and political implications of migration across the world. McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou (2021) noted that international migration has been increasing over the last 30 years. Globalization is a phenomenon that accounts for a significant increase in the drive for migration (IOM, 2017). It has been estimated that the number of international migrants across the world reached approximately 281 million in 2020, and these migrants could form the fourth largest country in terms of population if they came together (IOM, 2022). The number of migrants globally is expected to reach over 400 million by 2050 (Martin, 2013). The present study is interested in examining career aspiration as a possible predictor of migration intention. Career aspiration is the degree of commitment to a given career (Howard et al., 2021), a strong career orientation, and the extent to which people aspire to leadership positions and continued education within

their career is an indicator of career aspiration. On the other hand, a social network is a social structure made up of individuals or organizations that communicate and interact with each other. Social networks are sets of interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants to each other through relationships of kinship, friendship, and common community origin (Garip, 2019). The migration network is defined by interpersonal relationships in which migrants interact with their family or friends, and it offers a foundation for the dissemination of information as well as for patronage or assistance (Liu, 2020). The social network perspective emphasizes that social connections increase the likelihood of international migration because they reduce the costs and risks of movement, increase the potential for future income, and increase the expected net returns to migration (Palloni et al., 2001). The more social relationships one has at the potential place of destination and, consequently, the more information routes these relationships offer, the more important such information is for the decision to migrate (Dekker et al., 2019).

Present Study

Migration has become a challenging issue for sending and receiving nations; receiving nations contend with the resentment of host citizens, who believe that strangers compete with the lean resources, opportunities and even welfare provisions available for them, whereas sending nations grapple with the challenge of an increasing depletion of professionals, who are difficult to train and replace, which is popularly referred to as “brain drain”. Analysing the intention to migrate is essential for developing clear strategies to manage actual migration (Assfaw & Minaye, 2022). Although social networks of migrants’ destinations have been shown empirically to play an important role in explaining international migration flows (Munshi 2014a), however, identifying the network’s role is difficult due to potential endogeneity (Manchin & Orazbayev, 2018). In addition, there is scarce empirical evidence on the relative importance of networks compared with other factors at the individual level, on the channels through which these networks work, and on the role of different types of networks; moreover, little is known about the role played by social networks at the origin location in explaining individual migration decisions (Manchin & Orazbayev, 2018). The role of networks and the channels through which they influence migration decisions can be manifold (Munshi 2014b). Therefore, the present study aims to fill this important gap.

Study Objectives

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the role of individual and social factors such as career choice aspirations and social networks in predicting migration intent among students.

The following are the specific objectives of the present study:

1. To examine if career aspiration would be a predictor of migration intention
2. To know if social networks would predict migration intention of undergraduates.
3. To investigate the role of age as a predictor of migration intention
4. To examine the joint influence of career aspirations and social networks as predictors of the migration intentions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Migration intention refers to an individual or group's plan, desire, or predisposition to move from one place to another, typically from their current place of residence to a different location, either within the same country (internal migration) or to a different country (international migration). This intention can be influenced by various factors, including economic, social, political, and environmental considerations (Assfaw & Minaye, 2022). The migration literature has shown that university students from Eastern Europe with a high career orientation and who value work as central in their lives are more likely to report intentions to migrate (Frieze et al., 2004). Similarly, in recent times, migration has become an issue of concern in Africa, with an unprecedented wave of transnational migration of young Africans, even middle-class youths, to other parts of the world, especially Europe, some who are not financially buoyant opt for illegal routes using porous land borders, the Sahara, and across the Mediterranean into Europe, because they cannot meet the requirements of using their standard passport to obtain a visa. This irregular migration endeavour has caused the deaths of many Nigerians and other migrants in the Sahara Desert, the Maghreb region, and the Mediterranean (Awosusi et al., 2021; Ikuteyijo, 2020; Okunade, 2021a). This penchant for living is termed *japa*, a Yoruba word that implies escape. This disturbing trend has generated a national crisis (Nnoruga & Osigwe, 2023) in which young people, 15–35 years old, which represent 45% of the total population of 209 million are relocating mostly to the western world (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2021). Other scholars have attempted to explain the connection between the urge to run for survival and the breakdown of trust between the state and the citizens, arguing that despondence arising from losing faith in the system of the state that supports thriving and having a decent living becomes a push factor for relocation (e.g., Betts, 2013; Asekun, 2022). Other studies have examined how political repression makes people flee and how dissent voices are not usually tolerated in some states, there are instances where laws are promulgated and applied to silence individuals who are considered too outspoken against authorities. Citizens who think that they are being persecuted on account of political ideology may therefore run for survival (Duru 2021). Scholars also extended their analytical frame from military coups and autocratic governance to include infrastructural and institutional disrepair (Duyile & Nwachukwu, 2022). Other studies look beyond this to specifically identify prevailing economic policies that put citizens in a disadvantaged position in their homeland; for example, devaluation and withdrawal of subsidies on petrol, which subsequently increases inflation and the cost of living (see Akanle et al. 2021). Thus, there is a consensus on refuting that ‘violence, persecution, wars, civil conflicts, natural disasters, and similar events’ are the only primary forces catalysing survival migration, economic injustice is also an urgent and legitimate basis for global mobility (Hunkler et al. 2022)

Theoretical background

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a psychological theory that seeks to explain and predict human behavior, particularly behaviors that involve a degree of volitional control. The theory was developed by Ajzen in 1985 as an extension of the earlier theory of reasoned action. The TPB suggests that individuals' intentions to perform a specific behavior are the primary predictors of whether they will actually engage in that behavior. The three main components of the Theory of Planned Behavior are Attitude toward Behavior (A); this component reflects an individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a specific behavior. It is influenced by the beliefs about the likely outcomes of the behavior and the

subjective value attached to those outcomes. Subjective Norms (SN); subjective norms represent the perceived social pressure or expectations regarding a particular behavior. This includes the influence of significant others, such as friends, family, or colleagues, and the individual's perception of whether these people approve or disapprove of the behavior. Perceived behavioural control (PBC); this component reflects the individual's belief in their ability to perform the behaviour successfully. It considers factors such as self-efficacy, perceived difficulty or ease of performing the behavior, and the presence of facilitating or hindering conditions. According to the TPB, these three components (attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) collectively shape an individual's behavioral intention, which is the immediate precursor to actual behavior. In turn, behavioural intentions strongly predict the likelihood that the behaviour will be performed. While the TPB emphasizes the importance of intentions, it recognizes that factors beyond one's control can also influence behavior. Thus, the model includes perceived behavioural control to account for the influence of external factors on one's ability to carry out the intended behaviour. This theory thus offers an insight into the wave of relocation “*Japa phenomenon*” It helps us to understand that an intention occasioned by identifiable factors can subsequently lead to an actual behaviour. More recently, de Haas (2021) proposed the aspiration-capability framework, which integrates various factors influencing migration decisions. This model suggests that migration occurs when people have both the aspirations and capabilities to migrate, providing a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between individual desires and structural constraints

METHOD

Sample size

The target population for this study was 35,436 undergraduates from a university in southwest Nigeria. Using the Taro Yamane Sample Size Calculator, the calculated sample size is 395 (three hundred and ninety-five) students at the assumed error margin or significance level of 0.05.

Taro Yamane Formula and Working

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

N= Population of study

K= constant (1)

E= degree of error expected

n= Sample size

With the above formula, a sample size of 395 was obtained, but it was rounded to 400 and was fairly split between males and females. The participants' ages ranged from 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, and 31-36 years, ranging across various academic levels, such as the 100-500 level, and across religions such as Christianity and Islam. The mean age of the participants was 20.7 years, with a standard deviation of 3.2.

Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to gather data for the study. The study's two major independent variables are career aspirations and social network which is defined in this study as long-term hopes and ambitions which individuals developed based on their experiences, talents, values, and lifestyles, whereas social network which is defined as social network is a social structure which consists of a set of individuals or organisation abroad which an individual has access to for a remote social interactions which offer social capital and insider information.

Research Instruments

This study adopted the instruments described below:

- 1. Migration Intention Scale:** The intention of individuals to migrate abroad was measured with the Migration Intention Scale developed by Chan-Hoong and Soon (2011). The instrument was made up twenty five items. It is on a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score denotes the individual's desire to migrate abroad. The instrument has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.77.
- 2. Career Aspiration Scale-Revised (CAS-R).** The CAS-R is a revised version of O'Brien's original self-report questionnaire of 24 items measuring three subscales of career aspirations, including leadership (8 items), achievement (8 items), and educational aspiration (8 items). The items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 5 (very true of me). Five negative items about. For all negative items, reverse scoring was performed before analysis. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three subscales showed an acceptable level of reliability, ranging between 0.76 and 0.91.
- 3. The Social Networking Scale:** Social network was measured with an instrument developed by Gupta and Bashir (2018). The scale was developed to elicit responses that capture university students' social networking usage behavior. The scale has a summated assessment procedure with a Likert format. The measure is made up of 19 items with the subscales; academic, socialization, entertainment, and in formativeness. These items has each statement rated on five (always = 5, often = 4, sometimes =3, rarely = 2, and neve r=1). The internal consistency reliability was very positive; the Cronbach's for the total scale was 0.81

PROCEDURE

A convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants. This sampling technique was adopted in order to make the research process suit the peculiar situation of the participants to make the process less demanding; moreover, the technique allowed for easier administration of questionnaires and avoidance of logistical constraints. This research required no special group of participants since its objectives were broad-based in reach, the questionnaires were shared with interested students, and only those who voluntarily chose to participate were included in the study. The researcher also sought the help of various faculty and department students' heads to help share with students in their faculties and departments, respectively.

No specific inclusion or exclusion criteria were applied beyond being a current undergraduate at the university; this was done because the researcher wanted to account for possible extraneous variables, such as patterns among student answers, enhanced credibility and diversity of research results. The participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time. The participants were also encouraged to be honest in their response to the questionnaires. The data collection period lasted between April and June 2024, with periodic reminders sent to encourage participation. To ensure that the participants responded as instructed, they were provided with the basic instructions guidance for each section of the questionnaire. The participants completed the questionnaire and returned them for compilation and analysis.

Data analysis

The data were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 27) and then analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Linear regression was used to analyse Hypothesis 1, whereas multiple regression analysis was used to analyse Hypotheses 2 and 4 at < 0.05 level of significance.

Ethical Consideration

The participants in the study were properly informed about the reasons for the study and we also ensured that we did not put the participants to harm in our engagement. The data gathered was strictly used for research purposes and will not be shared in an unsolicited manner for any purpose other than just for academic purpose and no one can link participant to his or her response.

RESULT

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Socio-demographic description of the participants

		N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	189	47.8
	Female	206	52.2
	Total	395	100.0
Age Group	16-20	167	42.3
	21-25	198	50.1
	25-30	26	6.6
	31-35	1	0.3
	36 years and above	3	0.8
	Total	395	100.0
Travelled out of country before	Yes	79	20
	No	316	80
	Total	395	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants included in the study. A total of 395 individuals (females: 206; males: 189) aged 16-35 years and above 16-20 years: (167); 21-25 years: (198); 25-30 years: (26); 31-35 years: (1); 36 years and above: (3)

responded to the questionnaires. The data on gender representation revealed that 47.8% of the participants were male and 52.2% were female. It also shows that 79 individuals from the sample had travelled out of the country before.

Research Hypothesis Analysis

Hypothesis 1: Career aspirations significantly predict migration intentions among undergraduates.

To examine the influence of career aspiration on migration intention, a multiple regression analysis was run to test whether it could predict migration intentions with career aspirations.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis of Career Aspiration (Educational, Leadership, Achievement) on Migration Intentions

Predictor	N	B	df	F	t	p value
Career Aspiration	395	.234	3	11.527	10.437	.000
Leadership Aspiration	395					
Achievement aspiration	395					
		R ²	Regression weights			
		.081	CA-MI			

Note: CA- Career Aspiration, MI- Migration Intention

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	
1	(Constant)	11.566	1.108		10.437	.000
	Achievement Aspiration	.190	.061	.234	3.121	.002
	Leadership Aspiration	-.090	.056	-.113	-1.609	.109
	Educational Aspiration	.108	.042	.159	2.593	.010

a. Dependent Variable: Migration Intention

Table 2 presents the results from multiple regression analysis. The results showed that leadership (B= -.090, t=-1.609, p>0.5) had no significant influence on migration intention, whereas achievement (B= .190, t=-3.121, p<0.5) and education (B= .108, t=2.593, p<0.5) had significant influences on migration intention in undergraduates. The regression results revealed that Career Aspiration accounted for 81% of the variance (R²=.081; f=11.52), t=10.437; p<.001. The result show that career aspirations significantly predict migration intent among undergraduates; therefore, we accept Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2: Social networks would predict migration intentions among University undergraduates

Table 3: Regression Analysis of the Social Network on Migration Intention

Predictor	N	B	df	F	t	p value
Social Network	395	.035	1	.490	.700	.484
		R ²	Regression weights			
		.001	SN-MI			

Note: SN – Social Network, MI- Migration Intention

Table 2 presents the regression analysis result revealed that Social Networks accounted for only 0.1% of the variance ($R^2=.001$; $f=.490$), $t=.700$; $\beta=.035$, $p>.001$. This result shows that social network and support do not significantly predict migration intent among undergraduates; therefore, we do not accept the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a significant difference in migration intention between younger and older undergraduate.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA results for the effects of age group on migration intentions

Age group	N	M	df	SD	f	p value
16-20	167	16.55	4	5.10	1.49	.204
21-25	198	17.04		5.11		
26-30	26	18.46		4.98		
31-35	1	23.00				
36 years and above	3	13.66		3.92		

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	156.121	4	39.030	1.493	.204
Within Groups	10198.122	390	26.149		
Total	10354.243	394			

Table 4 presents the result from a one-way ANOVA to compare the effects of age on the migration intention of undergraduate students. The results revealed no significant effects at 16–20 ($M=16.55$, $SD=5.10$, $p>.05$), 21–25 ($M=17.04$, $SD=5.11$, $p>.05$), 26–30 ($M=18.46$, $SD=4.98$, $p>.05$), 31–35 ($M=23.00$, $p>.05$), or 36 years and above ($M=13.66$, $SD=3.92$, $p>.05$). This result shows that age does not have a significant effect on migration intent among undergraduates; therefore, we do not accept the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Career aspiration and social networks would jointly predict migration intentions among University undergraduates.

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis of the influence of career aspirations and social networks on migration intentions

Predictor	N	B	df	F	t	p value
Career Aspiration	395	.247	2	12.89	5.03	.000
Social Network		.040			.828	
		R ²				
		.062				

Table 5 shows the result of the regression analysis which revealed that career aspiration and social networks accounted for only 6.2% of the variance ($R^2=.062$; $f=12.89$), $t=1.22$, $p<.001$). This result shows that Career Aspiration and Social Networks jointly and significantly predict migration intentions among undergraduates; therefore, we accept this hypothesis.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate individual and social factors that are predictors of migration intention among undergraduates at a university in southwest Nigeria. Four hypotheses were tested, and the results provide valuable insights into the factors that contribute to migration intentions in this population. The first hypothesis posits that career aspirations significantly predict migration intention. The result of the regression analysis strongly support this hypothesis, revealing that career aspiration is a significant predictor of migration intention. This finding aligns with the theoretical framework of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that intentions are influenced by attitudes toward a behavior. The result is also congruent with the findings of Huber et al (2022) who found that students with desire to migrate are 3.8 times likely to do so on a temporary basis, and 15.3 times likely to migrate on a permanent basis compared to those without the intention. In this case, students' career aspirations shape their attitudes towards migration. Interestingly, when examining the subscales of career aspirations, we found differential effects on migration intention. Achievement aspiration and educational aspiration emerged as significant positive predictors of migration intention. This suggests that students with higher levels of achievement motivation and stronger educational goals are more likely to consider migration as a means to pursue their career objectives. These findings align with the push-pull theory of migration, (Czaika & Toma, 2017), which posits that individuals are motivated to migrate by the perceived opportunities for personal and professional advancement in destination countries. Contrary to expectations, leadership aspiration did not significantly predict migration intention. This unexpected finding warrants further investigation and may indicate that students with leadership aspirations perceive opportunities for growth and advancement within their home country, reducing their inclination to migrate. This result is also consistent with previous research by Hope and Fuji Shiro (2015), who reported that, anticipated job benefits and career aspirations were predictive of all migration decision-making phases.

The second hypothesis posits that social networks would significantly predict migration intention among university undergraduates. Contrary to our expectations, the result did not

support this hypothesis. The regression analysis revealed that social networks accounted for only 0.1% of the variance in migration intention. This finding is surprising, given the substantial body of literature emphasizing the importance of social networks in migration processes (e.g. Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2020). Work by Assfaw & Minaye (2022) however reveals that high social network hinders migration intention. The lack of a significant relationship between social networks and migration intentions in this study could be attributed to several factors. The context of undergraduate students in Lagos may play a role in this unexpected finding. Lagos, as Nigeria's largest city and economic hub, may provide students with a diverse and extensive local network, potentially reducing the relative importance of international networks in shaping migration intentions. This aligns with the concept of "intervening opportunities" proposed by Stouffer (1940), which suggests that opportunities closer to home may reduce the likelihood of long-distance migration. Furthermore, the non-significant result could be interpreted through the lens of the "strength of weak ties" theory. While students may have social connections abroad, these might be predominantly weak ties that provide information but are not strong enough to significantly influence migration intentions at this stage of their lives. The non-significant effect of social networks on migration intentions challenges some aspects of the network theory of migration (Massey et al., 1993). This theory posits that social ties in destination countries reduce the costs and risks associated with migration, thereby increasing migration intentions. Our findings suggest that this may not be universally applicable, particularly in the context of undergraduate students, who may not have extensive international networks. This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how different types of social networks (e.g., local vs. international, strong vs. weak ties) influence migration intentions at different life stages.

We tested for the effect of age on migration intention in our third hypothesis. The result of the one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences in migration intention across age groups. This finding suggests that age, at least within the range represented in our undergraduate sample, and does not play a substantial role in shaping migration intention. This result contrasts with those of several previous studies that reported that age is a significant factor in migration decisions (e.g., Granovetter, 2023). The finding is however consistent with findings from China that identified education, wages, greater opportunities and better lifestyle as significant push factors (Iqbal et al., 2021). However, it is important to note that the age range in our sample was relatively narrow, with most participants falling between 16 and 25 years. This homogeneity in age may have limited our ability to detect age-related effects on migration intentions. The non-significant effect of age could also be interpreted through the lens of life course theory (Gauthier, 2021). Within the context of undergraduate education, students may be at similar life stages regardless of small differences in chronological age, facing similar decisions and challenges related to their future careers and potential migration.

Hypothesis 4 also posited that career aspirations and social networks jointly predict migration intention among undergraduates. The results partially supported this hypothesis. Multiple regression analysis revealed that career aspirations and social networks jointly accounted for 6.2% of the variance in migration intention. However, when individual contributions were examined, only career aspiration remained a significant predictor, whereas social networks did not have a significant independent effect. This finding aligns with the results from our first two hypotheses and provides a more nuanced understanding of how these factors interact in predicting migration intention. The significant joint effect, despite the non-significant

individual contribution of social networks, suggests a potential suppression effect or complex interaction between career aspirations and social networks that warrants further investigation. The results can be interpreted within the framework of the push–pull theory of migration (Lee, 1966). Career aspirations may act as a strong "pull" factor, attracting students to potential migration destinations that they perceive as offering better career opportunities. Social networks, while not showing a significant independent effect, may moderate this relationship by providing information or resources that make these career aspirations seem more achievable through migration. The joint predictive power of career aspirations and social networks, despite the non-significant individual effect of social networks, points to potential complex interactions between these factors. This aligns with integrative approaches to migration theory, such as the aspiration–capability framework proposed by de Haas (2021).

Conclusion

The present study investigated the influence of career aspirations and social networks on migration intention among undergraduate students. The findings provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of migration decision-making among Nigerian youths, contributing to our understanding of brain drain and its consequences. The results strongly support the hypothesis that career aspirations significantly predict migration intention among undergraduates. This aligns with the theory of planned behavior and underscores the importance of professional goals in shaping students' attitudes toward international migration. This finding extends previous research to the Nigerian context, highlighting the universality of career considerations in migration decision-making across different cultural settings.

These findings have important implications for policies aimed at managing skilled migration in Nigeria. They suggest that efforts to retain skilled graduates should focus on creating attractive career opportunities within the country and helping students align their aspirations with local possibilities. Moreover, the results call for more comprehensive research into the multifaceted nature of migration decision-making among young, educated Nigerians. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on youth migration in Africa and provide a foundation for future research and evidence-based policy-making. They highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to understanding and addressing brain drain, one that considers both individual aspirations and broader social and economic contexts.

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