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# Brain Drain: Factors Influencing Students' Intention to Leave Nepal

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Career prospect, Friends influence, Salary, Structural equation modeling, Working environment

**ABSTRACT**

Brain drain is a major and emerging concern for most developing countries. Nepal is especially vulnerable to this trend due to its growing youth demographic and the expanding higher education sector. There is increasing interest among students in academic and professional opportunities abroad, which could potentially reduce Nepal's intellectual capital and future leadership. The main objective of this paper is to explore the factors influencing students intention to leave Nepal from a brain drain perspective. The research was conducted within a positivist paradigm using a causal-comparative research design to examine objective reality. The questionnaire survey was conducted on 412 students in Nepal through convenience sampling. The data analysis was based on demographic, descriptive and inferential statistics, measurement and structural equation modeling (SEM) using SPSS and Smart PLS 4.1.1.2. Friends influence, salary, and working environment are important factors that drive brain drain intentions among students. On the other hand, the research found that career opportunities did not have a statistically significant effect on students' decisions to emigrate. Study and employment opportunities abroad are strong motivations for students to leave Nepal. This study has significant implications for the government of Nepal, policymakers and schools and colleges in Nepal.

## Introduction

Migration of skilled and educated people, often referred to as brain drain (Kurokawa & Kusakabe, 2025). It has become an icon of globalization. It is an exchange of intellectual human capital between developing and developed countries, in which professionals and students find improved job opportunities, better pay, and living conditions (Uzun & Klç, 2024). The implications of this talent migration to developing nations such as Nepal are immense, as these nations invest heavily in educating their young people yet struggle to retain them. Educated people are not only being lost, but this also reduces the number of people available to work and makes it harder to progress and innovate in the country (Bassey et al., 2025).

The number of No Objection Certificates (NOCs) given to Nepali students studying abroad has increased tremendously (Timsina, 2024). This drastic rise underscores the

growing trend of studying abroad. The Asia News Network reports that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology currently processes about 600 NOC applications per day. The United States, Japan, Australia, and India are the most popular study destinations for Nepali students (Timilsana, 2025). Also, many nurses are moving to other countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia in search of better career opportunities and professional development.

Migration theories used worldwide suggest that wage, employment, and social welfare inequalities are among the factors driving individuals to migrate between less-developed and developed nations (Boampong & Mouthaan, 2025). The push factors are economic inequalities, lack of career opportunities, and insufficient institutional support, whereas the pull factors are better remuneration, advanced infrastructure, and career development (Ramdan, 2024). The brain drain in most developing countries is now a critical issue, with these countries unable to offer sufficient incentives to retain their skilled workers locally (Akinwalere & Akinrinola, 2025). Understanding that human resources are a primary source of competitive advantage, governments and organizations have tried to develop policies and programs that foster retention and professional satisfaction (Jones & Erhart, 2025).

The brain drain has reached an alarming level in Nepal, especially among students (Ghimire & Neupane, 2025). Thousands of Nepalese students leave their country every year in search of higher education and jobs. Government statistics show that the number of students seeking to study abroad has been growing at an alarming rate over the last ten years. Poor career growth prospects, poor wages and uncertain political and economic situations are perceived by many young people as key obstacles to career development in Nepal (Dangal & Karki, 2025). As a result, studying or working abroad seems to be a better way to achieve financial stability and self-fulfillment.

There are a number of reasons why students have increasingly sought to leave Nepal. The strongest driver is economic constraints, since most graduates believe that their education qualifications are not highly valued in the home job market (Rosenberger et al., 2025). Likewise, the local education system, with its outdated curricula, weak research centers and limited international exposure, does not meet world standards. Corruption, political unrest and slowness in the bureaucracy further make young people not imagine having a stable and rewarding future in the country (Quintero, 2025). Furthermore, the lack of career promotion and institutional support makes emigration look like the only possible way of improvement (Mai et al., 2025).

This stream of educated young people leads to a shortage of qualified specialists, undermines institutional capacity and hinders economic development. The exodus of young talent also reduces innovation and productivity in critical sectors. Thus, it is necessary to understand the factors that determine students' intention to leave Nepal to help solve the brain drain problem at the base level.

Although the brain drain problem in Nepal is increasingly acknowledged, empirical studies on the relative impact of push and pull factors on students' intentions to migrate are still scarce. Existing studies are mainly for healthcare professionals and/or qualitative studies. In terms of quantitative gaps, there is a lack of understanding of how career prospects, friends' influence, salary and working environment collectively predict students' intention to leave Nepal. Therefore, this study aims to:

1. Examine the effect of career prospects on students' intention to leave Nepal.
2. Evaluate the role of friends in students' migration decisions.
3. Identify the influence of salary expectation on the intention to brain drain.
4. Assess how the working environment affects students' choice of migration.

## Literature Review

Brain drain is a major and contemporary issue faced by many developing and underdeveloped countries (Bassey et al., 2025). It refers to the migration of highly educated and skilled people to other countries in search of better opportunities, security and quality of life (Afshari et al., 2025). Political instability, corruption, weak governance, lack of employment opportunities and insecurity create an uncertain environment for their future (Akindoyin & Obafemi, 2025). As a result, many professionals decide to return to their home country and settle there.

Unless the shortage of highly skilled workers is addressed, developing countries will lose foreign investment and businesses, as businesses are likely to migrate to countries that provide better labor conditions (Glennon, 2024). Poor remuneration and unfavorable working conditions have forced most Nepalese youth to seek jobs abroad, especially in developed countries. Therefore, foreign workers have been used to fill workforce shortages, particularly in Nepal's construction and agriculture industries (Nepal, 2024). The brain drain in Nepal is driven by several factors, including peer influence (Gautam, 2024), the desire for a better quality of life, and the need for a safe, conducive work environment (Phuyal, 2024).

The increasing magnitude of brain drain has been frequently attributed to push and pull factors. The domes-

tic factors that contribute to push factors include political instability, poor governance, low wages, limited job opportunities, and a weak currency (Ghanbari-Jahromi & Ahmadi Marzaleh, 2024). On the other hand, pull factors are the attractions of destination states, including higher salaries, career promotion, political stability, and generally improved living conditions (Ram et al., 2025). The combination of these forces results in the migration of Nepal's skilled workforce, a major challenge to Nepal's sustainable growth and development.

This study draws on social exchange and human capital theories, suggesting that students are more willing to seek opportunities abroad when they feel they are not receiving sufficient returns on their educational investment and do not see career advancement opportunities in their home countries. The study seeks to enhance the effectiveness of policy interventions by identifying these determinants, ensuring that Nepal retains its young intellectual population and develops sustainably as a nation.

## Factors Influencing Brain Drain in Nepal

Brain drain is the migration of highly skilled individuals or professionals who relocate to foreign destinations in pursuit of better opportunities (Wanniarachchi et al., 2020). Students are instrumental in shaping the future of brain drain because their choices often determine the movement of talent (Chankseliani et al., 2025). This is one aspect that researchers should study, as limited employment opportunities in the home country motivate people to seek jobs abroad (Ramdan, 2024). Migration decisions are also affected by family and friends (Ghanbari-Jahromi & Ahmadi Marzaleh, 2024), particularly when family members or friends living abroad offer assistance in settling into the new environment. In addition, many students in developing countries migrate to improve their families' economic status (Gabrielli et al., 2021). Most people are driven by appealing factors in developed nations, including good career opportunities, higher salaries, positive friends' influence, and a good working environment (Ramdan, 2024). These variables are independent variables in the current research.

Poor working conditions and lack of employment opportunities in Nepal, on the contrary, also lead to brain drain. Negative attitudes towards working conditions, low salaries, limited promotion opportunities, strict rules, and the absence of employment benefits motivate people to seek better opportunities abroad (Luwei & Huimin, 2024; Mahat et al., 2024). Consequently, brain drain remains a pressing problem affected by push and pull factors.

## Career Prospects and Brain Drain

Career prospects in Nepal are often constrained by limited job opportunities, low salaries, and inadequate professional growth, especially for highly educated individuals (Jha et al., 2025). Many graduates and skilled workers struggle to find employment that matches their qualifications and aspirations (Upadhya & RoyChowdhury, 2022). As a result, they are drawn to foreign countries offering better career advancement, higher income, and improved working conditions. This continuous outflow of talent contributes to Nepals growing brain drain problem, weakening the nations human resource base and hindering socio-economic development. Addressing these issues requires creating more quality jobs, competitive wages, and a supportive environment for professional growth within the country.

*H1: There is a relationship between career prospects and brain drain in Nepal.*

## Friends' Influence and Brain Drain

When people observe their friends migrating to other countries in search of education or employment opportunities, they are often motivated to do the same (Carling, 2024). This desire is further enhanced by friends' discussions and experiences about success and better lifestyles in foreign countries. Emotional and practical support is also provided by friends already residing overseas, making migration feel much easier and more achievable (Sava et al., 2025). Therefore, pressure from friends will also be a potent social determinant of the exodus of students and professionals from Nepal, contributing to the existing brain drain and the loss of skilled human resources necessary for the country's development.

*H2: There is a relationship between friends' influence and brain drain in Nepal.*

## Salary and Brain Drain

The high brain drain can be attributed to low salaries in Nepal (Jha et al., 2025). Local wages do not represent the education and skills of many skilled professionals, nor the cost of living. Developed countries, in turn, pay much more, offer more benefits, and provide much more secure employment (Mishra, 2023). This is how the income gap prompts people to move to other countries in search of a more stable financial position and better living conditions. Consequently, Nepal is losing a significant number of its skilled employees, weakening its economic development and performance (Ghimire & Neupane, 2025). Competitive remuneration and fair compensation is necessary in keeping talent and minimizing the loss of talented workers.

*H3: There is a relationship between salary and brain drain in Nepal.*

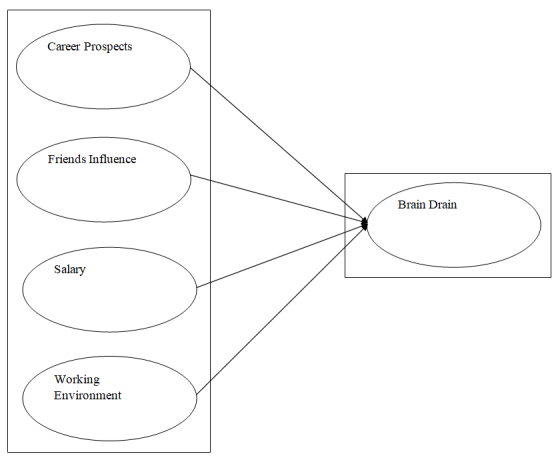
### Working Environment and Brain Drain

One of the reasons for brain drain in Nepal is the unsupportive working environment. Most working environments lack adequate facilities, career growth tools, and equitable management procedures (D. Abasilim & Obozekhai, 2024); as a result, many skilled professionals are dissatisfied with their jobs. Low resources, political influence, favoritism and poor organizational culture are among the problems that deter talented people from pursuing careers in the country (Iles et al., 2012). By comparison, developed countries have professional work environments with updated infrastructure, merit-based promotions, and improved work-life balance. As a result, the professionals in Nepal tend to move to foreign countries in search of more rewarding and stable working environments.

*H4: There is a relationship between the working environment and brain drain in Nepal.*

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development*




## Materials and Methods

Research methodology is a systematic, logical and structured plan that will guide a research study to yield valid and reliable findings (Gamage, 2025). It includes the methods and instruments used to collect and analyze data, and it explains how and why the data were collected and analyzed.

The research used a survey as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was developed in Kobo Toolbox and distributed via multiple channels, including social media and email. The sample population was the students at Nepalese colleges and universities. SPSS was used to calculate demographic and descriptive statistics, and the robust, user-friendly Smart PLS was used for data analysis because the data did not require multivariate normality assumptions and the model included both reflective measurement and structural paths, which are suitable for the PLS algorithm. Secondary data were obtained from credible sources, including academic journals, books, newspapers, and conference papers. The use of previously published and confirmed materials helps ensure that the information used in this research is accurate and reliable.

Data collection consisted of 25 items. This instrument is further subdivided into three parts: Sections A, B, and C. Section A consists of questions on respondents' demographic variables, including gender, age, marital status, and level of education. Section B will include questions that address independent factors, such as salary, career prospects, friends influence, and the work environment. Section C focuses on the dependent variable: students' perceptions of the factors contributing to brain drain in Nepal. B and C both make use of a five-point Likert scale. Measurement items were based on prior research to ensure reliability and validity.

A large sample size should be taken to ensure that there are no errors in the ratio outcome. According to Jaganathan et al. (2026), using G Power 3.1 software with parameters set to effect size $f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power $(1\text{-}\beta) = 0.80$, and four predictors, the minimum required sample size was calculated to be 138. This questionnaire is based on four independent variables; the researcher chose to sample 412 respondents using convenience sampling. So, that could avoid any misleading information. The researcher has used data from 25 items across five constructs and a measurement model, including factor loadings, Cronbachs alpha, composite reliability, average variance explained (AVE), HTMT ratio, FLC results and model fit tests. Similarly, researchers used a structural equation model with a multicollinearity test, hypothesis testing, path analysis, R-squared, and Q-squared.

### Ethical Considerations

Data collection was carried out with ethical approval. All 412 student participants were informed of the purpose of the study and provided their online consent. Respondents had the option to withdraw at any time, and participation was voluntary. Personal information, including names or addresses, was not taken compulsorily. All data were kept confidential and used only for academic research purposes.

## Results

### Socio-demographic Statistics

This study tries to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of students in Nepal. It explored the 18 to 28 age group, males and females by gender, unmarried and married by marital status, and Bachelor's and below to Masters and above by level of study.

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profile of 412 respondents. The majority (48.1%) were aged 2327 years, followed by 37.9% aged 1822 years. The majority of the respondents were female (57.8%) compared to males (42.2%). The majority of participants were unmarried (76.5%), and 23.5% were married. As for education, 54.6% had a bachelor's degree or less, while 45.4% had a master's degree or higher.

**Table 1**

*Socio-demographic Statistics*

| Respondent profile | Indicators | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age Group | 18-22 | 156 | 37.9 |
| | 23-27 | 198 | 48.1 |
| | 28 and above | 58 | 14.0 |
| Gender Status | Male | 174 | 42.2 |
| | Female | 238 | 57.8 |
| Marital Status | Unmarried | 315 | 76.5 |
| | Married | 97 | 23.5 |
| Level of study | Bachelor's and below | 225 | 54.6 |
| | Master's and above | 187 | 45.4 |

*Note.* Sources: Field survey, 2025.

### Descriptive Statistics

This study analyzed descriptive statistics of five constructs: Career Prospects (CP), Friends Influence (FI), Salary (SL), Working Environment (WE) and Brain Drain (BD) of 25 items.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics*

| Items | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CP1 | 412 | 2 | 5 | 4.35 | 0.608 |
| CP2 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.26 | 0.637 |
| CP3 | 412 | 2 | 5 | 4.10 | 0.802 |
| CP4 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.26 | 0.697 |
| CP5 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.20 | 0.795 |
| FI1 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.28 | 0.663 |
| FI2 | 412 | 2 | 5 | 4.31 | 0.709 |
| FI3 | 412 | 2 | 5 | 4.31 | 0.599 |
| FI4 | 412 | 2 | 5 | 4.21 | 0.664 |
| FI5 | 412 | 2 | 5 | 4.30 | 0.705 |
| SL1 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.23 | 0.783 |
| SL2 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.14 | 0.789 |
| SL3 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.24 | 0.684 |
| SL4 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.11 | 0.907 |
| SL5 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.11 | 0.868 |
| WE1 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 3.75 | 0.942 |
| WE2 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 3.77 | 0.916 |
| WE3 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 3.83 | 0.989 |
| WE4 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.08 | 0.786 |
| WE5 | 412 | 2 | 5 | 4.23 | 0.751 |
| BD1 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.16 | 0.808 |
| BD2 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 3.98 | 0.983 |
| BD3 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.04 | 0.886 |
| BD4 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.18 | 0.752 |
| BD5 | 412 | 1 | 5 | 4.27 | 0.683 |

*Note.* Sources: Field survey, 2025.

Table 2 showed that the mean scores for all items were above 3.75, indicating a generally positive response from the participants. Career Prospects had the highest mean (4.10-4.35), and Working Environment had a relatively lower mean (3.75-4.23). The standard deviations for the 412 respondents ranged from 0.599 to 0.989, indicating moderate variation in the answers given.

## Measurement Model

The present researcher has analyzed the data using measurement models, including factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE).

The results in Table 3 indicate that all constructs have factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeding 0.6 and 0.5, respectively, which are good indicators of strong construct validity and sufficient representation of each item within its construct (Cheung et al., 2023). On the same note, the Cronbachs alpha (CA) and the Composite reliability (CR) values are above 0.6 and above 0.8, respectively, which are the required levels of reliability (Chanie et al., 2025). These results suggest high internal consistency and stability of the measurement model, indicating that the items in the study effectively measure the intended constructs and contribute to the model's overall validity. Some items, CP2, SL3 and WE3, were removed to improve measurement quality due to the lower outer-loading values.

**Table 3**

*Outer loading, Cronbachs alpha, composite reliability and AVE*

| Variable | Item | Outer loading | Cronbach's alpha | CR | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brain Drain | BD1 | 0.745 | 0.799 | 0.862 | 0.557 |
| | BD2 | 0.810 | | | |
| | BD3 | 0.780 | | | |
| | BD4 | 0.676 | | | |
| | BD5 | 0.711 | | | |
| Career Prospects | CP1 | 0.665 | 0.733 | 0.832 | 0.555 |
| | CP3 | 0.752 | | | |
| | CP4 | 0.771 | | | |
| | CP5 | 0.786 | | | |
| Friends Influence | FI1 | 0.820 | 0.813 | 0.871 | 0.578 |
| | FI2 | 0.837 | | | |
| | FI3 | 0.829 | | | |
| | FI4 | 0.629 | | | |
| | FI5 | 0.659 | | | |
| Salary | SL1 | 0.788 | 0.807 | 0.873 | 0.633 |
| | SL2 | 0.786 | | | |
| | SL4 | 0.800 | | | |
| | SL5 | 0.808 | | | |
| Working Environment | WE1 | 0.670 | 0.679 | 0.806 | 0.511 |
| | WE2 | 0.775 | | | |
| | WE4 | 0.634 | | | |
| | WE5 | 0.769 | | | |

*Note.* Sources: Field survey, 2025.

## Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Result

The findings from the HTMT ratio analysis are presented in Table 4. The standard cutoff point of HTMT is below 0.90 when performing an exploratory research, whereas a more stringent value of less than 0.85 is used in a more conservative analysis (Hair et al., 2021; Rhayha & Alaoui Ismaili, 2024). According to these criteria, all HTMT values in this study are less than 0.90, indicating that discriminant validity has been satisfactorily established. This demonstrates that the constructs are not similar and that the measurement model has sufficient discriminant validity.

**Table 4**

*Heterotrait Monotrait ratio (HTMT) Result*

| | BD | CP | FI | SL | WE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BD | | | | | |
| CP | 0.270 | | | | |
| FI | 0.517 | 0.251 | | | |
| SL | 0.833 | 0.313 | 0.527 | | |
| WE | 0.702 | 0.436 | 0.460 | 0.688 | |

*Note.* Sources: Field survey, 2025.

## Fornell and Lacker Criteria (FLC) Result

Table 5 shows the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (FLC) with the diagonal values showing the square root of the AVE of each construct and the off-diagonal values showing the inter-construct correlations. The Fornell-Larcker matrix allows for comparison of the square root of AVE with the respective correlations. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the AVE values, the model has sufficient discriminant validity, indicating that the constructs are distinct and measure different concepts as intended (Hair et al., 2021).

**Table 5**

*Fornell and Lacker Criteria (FLC) Result*

| | BD | CP | FI | SL | WE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BD | 0.746 | | | | |
| CP | 0.208 | 0.745 | | | |
| FI | 0.420 | 0.188 | 0.760 | | |
| SL | 0.674 | 0.245 | 0.417 | 0.795 | |
| WE | 0.522 | 0.321 | 0.337 | 0.518 | 0.715 |

*Note.* Sources: Field survey, 2025.

## Model Fit Test

The model fit test result gives the SRMR value of 0.074, which is below 0.12 indicating a good fit of the model (Hair et al., 2018). This finding supports the fact that the model is suitable for the data.

## Structural Model

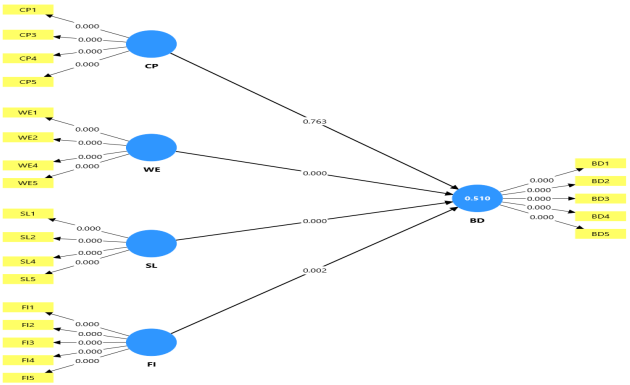
A structural model is a diagram that depicts the relationship among various variables in research. The researcher has discussed the multicollinearity test, Hypothesis testing, Path analysis, R-squared and Q-squared in a structural model.

## Path Analysis

Figure 2 presents a structural model showing that the relationship between four constructs: Career Prospects (CP), Working Environment (WE), Salary (SL) and Friends Influence (FI), which predict Brain Drain Intention (BD). The result shows that the relationship between CP and BD is not significant (p = 0.763); hence, career prospects do not significantly affect the intention to brain drain. The relationships of WE (p = 0.000), SL (p = 0.000), and FI (p = 0.002) with BD are statistically significant (p < 0.05), indicating that these variables significantly influence brain drain intention. Moreover, the value of Rš for BD is 0.510, thus indicating that the four predictor variables account for 51% of the variance in Brain Drain Intention. This means that the model has a moderate level of explanatory power.

**Figure 2**

*Path Analysis*




## Multicollinearity Test

Table 6 shows the multicollinearity test. The criterion for the multicollinearity test is that the VIF is less than 3.3 (Vishnoi et al., 2024). The VIF value for each item in the table above has been below the criteria. This indicates there is no multicollinearity issue.

**Table 6**
*Multicollinearity Test*

| Item | VIF | Item | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|
| BD1 | 1.741 | SL1 | 1.545 |
| BD2 | 1.853 | SL2 | 1.641 |
| BD3 | 1.782 | SL4 | 1.684 |
| BD4 | 1.354 | SL5 | 1.731 |
| BD5 | 1.416 | WE1 | 1.320 |
| CP1 | 1.297 | WE2 | 1.423 |
| CP3 | 1.449 | WE4 | 1.201 |
| CP4 | 1.430 | WE5 | 1.503 |
| CP5 | 1.433 | | |
| FI1 | 2.316 | | |
| FI2 | 2.065 | | |
| FI3 | 2.230 | | |
| FI4 | 1.342 | | |
| FI5 | 1.426 | | |

*Note.* Sources: Field survey, 2025.

## Hypothesis Testing

Table 7 presents the results of the hypothesis test. The researchers conducted a bootstrapping exercise with 5,000 resamples at the 5% significance level to assess the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. The PLS-SEM findings showed that all relationships in the structural model were significant except for the one between career prospects (CP) and brain drain (BD). In particular, friends influence (FI) had a strong and positive impact on brain drain (= 0.138, p = 0.05), salary (SL) exhibited a strong and significant impact on brain drain (= 0.507, p = 0.000) and working environment (WE) also strongly predicted brain drain (= 0.217, p = 0.000). The above findings revealed that friends' influence, salary, and the working environment are also important determinants of students' intentions to leave Nepal, whereas career prospects did not play a significant role in this model. Consequently, H2, H3 and H4 are accepted.ss

**Table 7**
*Hypothesis Testing*

| | | | | | Confidence Interval | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hypothesis | Beta | S.D. | T-values | P-values | 2.50% | 97.50% | Decision |
| CP → BD ($H_1$) | -0.012 | 0.038 | 0.302 | 0.763 | -0.085 | 0.064 | Unsupported |
| FI → BD ($H_2$) | 0.138 | 0.045 | 3.082 | 0.002 | 0.055 | 0.231 | Supported |
| SL → BD ($H_3$) | 0.507 | 0.052 | 9.722 | 0.000 | 0.398 | 0.605 | Supported |
| WE → BD ($H_4$) | 0.217 | 0.056 | 3.895 | 0.000 | 0.109 | 0.330 | Supported |

*Note.* Source: Field survey, 2025.

The value of R-squared (0.510), which is 51 percent of the variance in the dependent variable, indicates that the model explains variance. The adjusted R-square (0.506) is adjusted for the number of predictors, suggesting it is slightly less than the explanatory power. That is 0.510, i.e., 51 percent of the variance of the dependent variable has been accounted for by the model. Adjusted R-squared (0.506) considers the number of predictors with an implication of slightly lower explanatory power (50.6) to avoid over-fitting. It is a moderately explanatory model.

Q-squared value (0.492) is greater than zero, indicating that the model is predictive (Sudrimo & Mutmainnah, 2025).

## Discussion

This paper analyzes four hypotheses about the factors influencing students intentions to leave Nepal. The researcher found that the first hypothesis ($H_1$), career prospects are not significantly associated with brain drain intention, with a p-value of 0.763. This result is not supported, in that career opportunities have no bearing on students' migration decisions. This is in contrast to previous research, Jha et al. (2025); Upadhya and RoyChowdhury (2022), which suggested that weak career prospects cause skilled workers to migrate out of the country.

The second hypothesis ($H_2$) assumed a positive relationship between the influence of friends and brain drain intention. This hypothesis was supported (p = 0.002), in line with Sava et al. (2025); Carling (2024), who reported that peer migration prompts others to follow. The third hypothesis ($H_3$), salary and brain drain intention, was found to be strongly positively related (p = 0.000), which is in line with the findings of Ghimire and Neupane (2025) and Mishra (2023). The fourth hypothesis ($H_4$) that the working environment also had a significant positive effect (p = 0.000) was similar to Ramdan (2024). The explanatory power (R-squared = 0.510) suggests that these variables account for 51% of the variance in brain drain intention.

## Conclusion

This paper set out to review the factors that affect students' intention to leave Nepal, specifically those that cause brain drain. The analysis has shown that salary, the influence of friends and the working environment have a significant influence on students' migration decisions, whereas career prospects were not found to be significant. Of these factors, salary was the most significant, indicating that economic factors remain the

strongest driver behind students' exploration of opportunities abroad. This implies that higher salaries and financial security overseas are a potent appeal to Nepalese youth when they cannot find jobs in their home country that they feel content with.

Moreover, the influence of friends was positive and significant, indicating that social networks are crucial in shaping migration decisions. Students will tend to follow the same paths when their peers or acquaintances migrate and post positive experiences. On the same note, another important factor identified was the working environment, which encompasses working conditions, job satisfaction, and professional treatment, all of which determine students' choice of foreign employment over domestic jobs.

On the other hand, the limited availability of career opportunities means students may find few professional development opportunities in Nepal. This image lowers their morale about staying in the country, given their qualifications and skills. In general, the results provide empirical evidence that financial and social considerations are more influential than professional progression in shaping students' intentions to migrate. The findings highlight that Nepal should improve its salary structures, working conditions, and career prospects to reduce the current brain drain.

Based on the study, Nepal needs to make specific reforms to minimize brain drain. The government and private sectors must collaborate to develop competitive compensation systems to attract and retain talented professionals. At the same time, the country's working environment should be improved through policies that provide job security, professionalism, and a healthy work-life balance. In addition, friends' influence can be counteracted by launching a national media campaign featuring successful Nepali professionals who have built careers locally and by establishing mentorship programs that connect current students with alumni who have chosen to remain in Nepal. This can be achieved by developing clear and attractive career opportunities in Nepal through grants to entrepreneurs, public-private collaborations, and incentives for industries that hire highly educated youth, thereby making their stay in Nepal a more attractive and viable alternative.

## Implications

The findings have significant implications for policymakers and educational institutions. Implications for Policymakers: Salary was the strongest predictor of brain-drain intention ($\beta = 0.507$). So, the government needs to provide competitive wages, particularly to young healthcare, engineering and IT workers. Implications for Educational Institutions: The influence of friends on migration decision is strong ($\beta = 0.138$). Alumni mentorship programs should be established at universities to connect successful alumni who have remained in Nepal with current students, providing positive role models for students seeking success abroad.

There are some limitations to this study. First, the results may not be representative of unemployed or employed graduates, as data were only gathered from students. Second, there is the possibility of response bias, for example, social desirability, in self-reported questionnaires. Third, the cross-sectional design provides information about intentions at a single point in time, rather than about migration behavior or change over time.

Future studies may investigate other variables, such as job satisfaction, political stability and quality of work life, to better understand migration intentions. Comparisons between various parts of Nepal or between developing nations might yield more information. In addition, longitudinal research may determine changes in these determinants over time as economic and social conditions change.

### Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use and Disclosure

Statement: In the preparation of this manuscript, AI tools were used for some sections, with minimal or no editing.

### Similarity and Originality Confirmation

The manuscript is original, not under review elsewhere, and complies with TUJ publication ethics.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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### Data Availability

Data available from the corresponding author on request.

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