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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND ALLIED FACTORS ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' INTENTIONS TO LEAVE COUNTRY FOR BETTER CAREER PROSPECTS: INSIGHTS FROM LAHORE, PUNJAB

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Abstract

Pakistan has faced political turmoil in its history and recent political instability s influencing every segment of society particularly university students. This study explores the influence of political instability on the intentions of currently enrolled university students in Punjab to go abroad for better career prospects. The issue is based on continuous instability, disruptions to government, breakdown of institutions and future career prospects identified as constituent elements of students' plans to migrate from their countries. This study employed qualitative methodology. Data from 20 different universities' students from Lahore was collected through semi-structured interviews till saturation. Data were then analyzed thematically so that key themes emerged across participants' responses to interviews. Students see political instability as an extended systemic condition which is reflected by weak institutions, corruption / nepotism, financial crisis, absence of justice, as well as disruption of their education and therefore they view international migration for professional and educational advancement as rational. The study also finds that some students remain conditionally willing to stay if Pakistan offers political stability, merit, justice, jobs, and better educational opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Political instability is one of the major problems of under developing countries of the world and Pakistan has no exception to it. Pakistan has been experiencing political instability since its independence in 1947. A country's socio economic progress and prosperity highly depends upon economic stability of the country as it has a significant impact upon the economic growth and expansion. Due to political instability, Pakistan is struggling in economic field due to which it failed to address other issues like poverty, education and security. Political instability also leads to other issues like weak governance, accumulation of wealth in small

hands, terrorism, un employment, nepotism, socioeconomic difficulties and many more (Rashid & Rashid, 2024).

There are several reasons for political instability in Pakistan. First, the military interference in politics, which weakens the governments. Second, election frauds and rigging results into public distrust and anger. Third, economic problems like, unemployment, high inflation, poverty create unrest, public distrust and anger. Fourth, corruption and no accountability in government institutions lead to poor governance. Some other causes for political instability are weak judiciary and legal systems, ethnic and regional differences which leads to fight over resources. Foreign interference has further limited it's own decision making power. All these factors are responsible for weak governance and political instability in Pakistan (Ismail et al., 2025).

The impact of political instability is much more direct on ordinary Pakistani citizens who suffer from these changes in their daily life. Each time there is a change in government, citizens experience another wave of uncertainty surrounding the economy (job loss/inflation) and each time there is a new policy introduced, no matter how good it may be at first, it usually has little chance to gain the confidence of the citizenry. In addition to this, schools and hospitals are negatively affected by the short term focus of each new administration. Reforms that could greatly improve these areas are often cancelled before they have a chance to be implemented. Budget restrictions also force educators and medical professionals to cut back on what can be provided in order to meet the most basic needs of those receiving care. As a result, people become less likely to express themselves freely. Politically motivated suppression of free speech combined with a severely crippled judicial system makes it much safer for individuals to remain silent when faced with injustice. As a result, people turn to private networks and organizations for help with problems they encounter and begin to view the role of the government as providing protection and service through other means. Therefore, political instability is not some distant issue that is played out in the halls of government; it is something people live with every day in their paycheck, their child's classroom, and their ability to voice opinions publicly. (Babar, Rehman, & Rafiq, 2024).

Political instability in Pakistan affects the economic stability, personal safety, and daily living conditions of ordinary citizens in ways beyond changes in government. Governmental turnover discourages investors from making long-term investments and therefore creates unemployment and inflation issues that affect an increasing number of families. Corruption, mismanagement, and inefficiency create under-resourced public services including health care, education, and law enforcement. Lack of accountability leads to poor delivery of even the most fundamental needs of society. Additionally, the instability contributes to divisions among societal groups. Protests, strikes, and polarizing politics become commonplace as people lose faith in institutions intended to serve their interests. The resulting instability causes many highly educated and trained citizens to seek employment elsewhere outside of Pakistan leading to a "brain-drain" effect that diminishes the future prospects of the country. Political instability in Pakistan results in everyday hardships for its citizens and not simply disruptions within governmental structures (Farooq et al, 2026).

Pakistan has gone through many political events such as changing governments, clash for power and corruption which creates political instability that affect everyone including students (Shah et al., 2023). Due to the political instability protests, strikes, or political unrest happen which causes the schools and universities to shut down for safety reasons, which disturb the whole academic system. A good example of this that when PM Imran Khan's arrest in May 2023 which caused a severe political unrest because of this classes were cancelled, exams got delayed and there is huge waste of time of students. when things reopen teachers focus was only to cover syllabus which disturb the quality of learning and students were

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not able to get the quality of learning thy will get after regular classes. Because of living in such a disturbed environment it become hard for students to focus on studies and student could not be able to perform well (Areej T, 2023).

Because of political instability large number of young Pakistanis go abroad. A survey found that 67% of Pakistani youth would leave the country if they could. Biggest reason behind it is limited jobs opportunities there are about 200 universities in Pakistan but many of them offer degrees in the field which have not enough jobs in Pakistan. There is also limited funding and facilities for research so the students those are serious about doing research have to go abroad for better facilities and opportunities. Those who go abroad for study also stay there for better career prospects. Family expectations also play a key role in staying abroad also in our society it is consider as the sign of success because there is better life opportunities in abroad and also a comfortable life. This is not only happening in Pakistan but youth from other developing countries also take the same step because they think that going abroad is a better choice for better life (Shah et al., 2023).

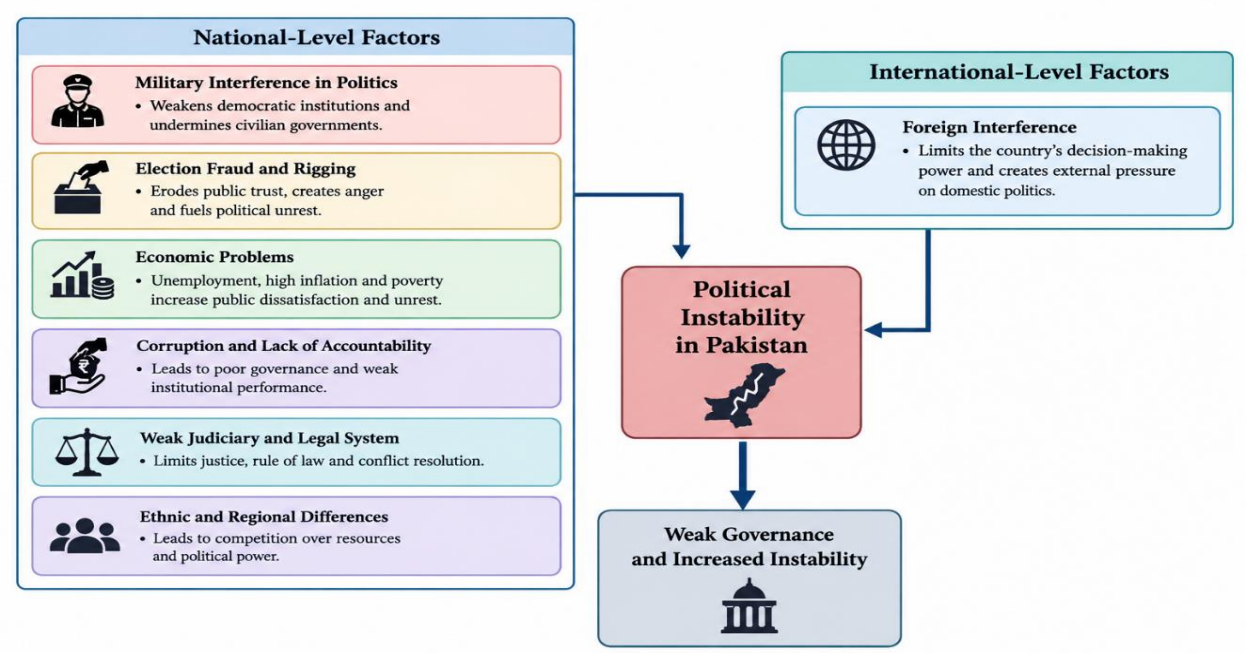


Figure 1. Factors Contributing to Political Instability in Pakistan (National and International Levels).

Source: Author's own work

1.1 Problem Statement

The political instability has a continual impact on the work of universities, decreasing funding (e.g., the HEC budget is set to fall by 35 per cent by 2025-26), and incentivizes insecurity, causing students to run away to other countries as dropout rates grow and research halts (Naveed, 2021). Pakistan whose more than 100,000 students are choosing to take an overseas education annually are now in a risk of losing an irredeemable talent unless they find the solution to these interweaved ills (Naqvi, 2026; Haq, 2024; Bukhari, 2026). The young graduate professional leaving Pakistan is a serious issue of brain drain. The trends and intentions of university students leaving the country are even more problematic, necessitating careful study to identify their causes and connections to the political situation in Pakistan over the years.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The qualitative analysis aims to uncover and thematically analyze:

i The processes by which the political instability drives university students to look for careers in foreign countries.

ii To discover common reasons linked with university students' intention to leave their country (Pakistan) to go abroad.

iii To unearth specific influence of political, economic and social conditions on university students' decision related to their career.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does political instability in Pakistan impact on the decisions of currently enrolled students in universities to go abroad for better career prospects?
2. What are the most common reasons other than political instability linked with student's intentions to go abroad?
3. How political stability, economic and social conditions influence student's intentions to stay within their country?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The young population of any country is considered highly productive and a rare part of human capital. The future of any nation depends on its young professionals. Pakistan is blessed that its population mix comprises a majority of young people. The future of the country depends on these young people, and their intention to leave the country and settle abroad is a sign of worry for policy makers and the entire nation (Hafeez, 2018). In this scenario the contribution of this study is very significant to unearth the root causes of the trend among university students to leave the country after completing their education. Transforming the minds of students with this study due to its light illuminates the fact that policies can stabilize higher education, brain drain, and retain talents to spur sustainable national development in 2026 as the crisis in the world is here to stay. It bridges a qualitative gap in study regarding those currently enrolled students who wishes to go abroad (Chand & Tung, 2014).

The relevance of this research is hinged on the role that studies on the impact of political instabilities play for students using their perception of the situation, educational experiences, job prospects, and intentions for migration in Pakistan. The study draws meaningful conclusions that can help the policymakers, practitioners, and the general public understand the social, economic, and educational impacts of brain drain and instability. This research contributes to government agencies in comprehending the effect of the political instability, corruption, lack of employment and absence of merit on student's willingness to migrate to the countries abroad. It can serve as an enabler to policies for political stability, improved governance, jobs, and educational reforms. This research raises awareness and understanding of the impact of political instability on educational inclusion, employment, life and youth migration. It emphasizes on stability and merit, justice, and equal opportunities for the nation's future.

2. Literature Review

Student migration is discussed in the existing literature with a reference to the push–pull model, in which negative conditions push an individual towards leaving the country and positive conditions pull an individual towards the foreign country, and which explains student migration as being influenced by economic, social, educational, and political factors. Consistent is the mention of push factors of poverty or scarcity of jobs, lack of employment opportunity, and income inequality, where the lack of jobs at home makes the prospect of working abroad more attractive. The choice also is shaped by socioeconomic factors: Higher-income people may perceive migration as a path to career progression or better standard of living, while those in lower income brackets may see migration as an option for survival and improvement, due to weak domestic opportunities. Moreover, social factors such as

family expectations, peer groups, and culture also, crucially, influence students' intentions and perceptions of migration, with certain social groups supporting or normalizing it. But higher education also plays a significant role, as students seek better academic teaching, exposure and opportunities for research at foreign institutions and would use education to pursue long career prospects overseas and settle there. Political instability in the country is one of the significant factors, which leads to uncertainty in governance, lessens institutional effectiveness and reduces mobility of skilled person to pursue further career, which in turn leads to brain drain. In addition, political unrest also shapes migration intentions indirectly, for example by decreasing job security and opportunity for professional development, thus lowering the capacities of individuals to adjust to domestic job market and raise their preference for migration abroad. Literature indicates that no single factor is found to spur migration intentions but rather interaction of several dimensions, yet current studies do not apparatus and contextually analyses the interplay of these dimensions, especially that of political instability, socioeconomic status or job adaptation, where the interaction of the respective dimensions becomes crucial for students' decisions. There is a need for more synthesized and contextually relevant research. (Rashed Hossain, 2025)

The paper presents brief literature review on this point, highlighting that the literature reviewed so far underscores the influence of politics, in both pulling and pushing aspects of international student mobility. It reminds them of the high level of instability in governance, policy and political environments within the home countries as strong push factors incentivizing them to seek education and career in other countries while the high levels of stability in the political system, hosting policies and perceived safety in the hosting countries is a strong pull factor to consider education and career in such countries. This study uses two broader theories of migration as references: Capability and Human Capital theories to define the thinking on the internationalization of education from the students in order to improve their socio-economic outcomes and to have a longer staying resolution. Moreover, their expectations of what they will experience as interns with the same contexts as their counterparts differs, suggesting that intern international student's experiences in political freedoms, security, and the political environment also have an important effect on their skilled student selection. Moreover, the context of international student flow and the link of the various institutional, political and economic factors are explored by providing an overview on the developing international education markets, and the competitive position of countries for partaking in high quality international student flow. In all, the chosen literature indicates that the non-independence variables (economic opportunity, education, immigration, and the variables are all equally influencing in influencing student decision to study/emigrate. (Setenay Dilek Fidler, 2022)

Finally, it explores the reasons and objectives of students who choose to study abroad, who they intend to recruit, and considers the relevance of economic, social, cultural and career issues in the students' decision-making process both in the present and throughout their time abroad; it reveals that many students leave to further their job prospects, to build skills and gain experience, but have an inconsistent perception of whether the students would move to another country or return to their own country; this perception changes over time. The results indicate that past experiences of students in the host country have significant effects on their future intent, such as when they become more attuned to the social norms, work and culture of the host country, they tend to prefer to stay there, while if they have not become attuned to the country's social norms, work and culture they prefer to go back. The research also provides support for the new concept of brain circulation which asserts that even the return students contribute economically and intellectually via transfer of knowledge and linkages with other countries, thus countering the brain drain concept. Moreover, the study

indicates that immigrants' willingness to migrate tends to be higher if they are exposed to real-life experiences of host countries than those who have not experienced this type of exposure (Kingminghae & Lin, 2023; Shen & Wang, 2022).

The governance system overall and bureaucratic delays in routine matters are also reasons discussed by scholars in literature causing disappointment to students, including the latest e-governance-based systems in developing countries like Pakistan (Munir et al, 2024; Hussain et al, 2024). Even though the study is informative, there are however methodological limitations that need to be drawn attention to in a few respects: Firstly it involves a non-probabilistic sample; secondly, answers to the questions regarding attitude and intention to move were given for the brief period of time ahead of the event as prospective as opposed to retrospective, which would usefully extend the dimensions of the relationship between attitude and intention in the attitude to own migration that can usefully towards the completion of other objectives of the study. In general, students' decisions to move internationally are theorized as being a mix of push (e.g., limited opportunities or unfavorable conditions in the home country) and pull (e.g., improved career prospects, enhanced quality of life in the destination country) factors and as being dynamic, context dependent, and shaped by personal aspirations as well as structural factors. (Nghia, 2019)

In recent days, literature gives importance to the brain drain as it is one of the emerging issues in a developing country like Pakistan where economic instability, unhealthy working environment, political insecurity and limited career opportunities inclined promising uplifted young minds to go for foreign studies or employment. Various studies conducted by Nadir F. and Meo S. A. have shown that medical students have plans to migrate Pakistan due to socio-economic and professional concerns and one study by Kousar S. found that lack of employment and poor economic status are the two most important push factors for migration. In the same way, research conducted internationally has demonstrated that the improvements in job security, living conditions and the education and career opportunities abroad draw students to them. This current study by Attyia Rashid (2025) reveals that there is a high unwillingness to stay in Pakistan of both medical and non-medical undergraduate students of Lahore because of the lack of good working conditions, high working hours and poor market security. But upsetting more were political instability and lifestyle problems among the students who were not medical students. When viewed as a whole, all the literature suggests that the brain drain is not only an economic, but a social and institutional issue that harms the skilled human resources of Pakistan in the coming years for the need of skilled manpower (Attyia Rashid, 2025)

In the recent years news has been focused on the brain drain of Pakistan and various institutional issues, lack of proper policies and Economic pressures have been identified as serious issues to push students to go abroad. Many scholars had stressed on the issue that poor education and employment opportunities or insufficient wages drive talented students out of the country. The Danish Khan Tareen (2025) study of Pakistan further investigated these questions by considering institutional, policy and economic factors influencing Pakistani student's intentions to study in foreign countries. The findings revealed that majority of the students planned to enroll themselves into further studies abroad for the following reasons: Job opportunities, insufficient practical learning opportunities, limited foreign exposure, and uncertainty regarding job security and socio-political environment in Pakistan. Although the results obtained from the analysis of regression showed that there was a statistically insignificant association among these parameters and decision to migrate, the study recommended that educational infrastructure, strengthening of government support and improvement of the country's economy were required pillars in determining the brain drain and retention of

skilled young people in the country (Danish Khan Tareen, 2025).

The table no. 1 shown below depicts the number of Pakistani workers registered for overseas employment from 2022-2026 as reported by the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas employment. The statistics show that the total number of registered professional during this period was 218,705, which indicates a clear brain drain trend. This figure shows that higher number of professionals belonged to skilled categories like managers, accountants, engineers and doctors left Pakistan in recent five years. This outflow of skilled professionals suggests that reasons such as political unrest, limited career opportunities, and unemployment are pushing qualified and talented individuals to abroad for better career prospects.

Table No.1 Number of professional registered abroad during 2022-2026 till June

Sr No.	Categories	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
1	Accountant	7197	7390	5719	5659	2126	28091
2	Agriculturist	3110	6761	1518	1131	782	13302
3	Comp/Analyst	2146	2979	2053	1563	762	9503
4	Doctor	2464	3486	3672	3795	1626	15043
5	Engineer	6093	8741	8018	5946	2868	31666
6	Manager	18093	39274	24760	11777	4897	98801
7	Nurse	1768	4880	3654	1640	914	12856
8	Pharmacist	76	164	155	183	111	689
9	Surveyor	923	364	268	178	124	1857
10	Teacher	1004	1533	1741	1725	984	6987
TOTAL		**42874**	**75572**	**51558**	**33597**	**15194**	**218795**

Source: Reports & Statistics - Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment June, 2026

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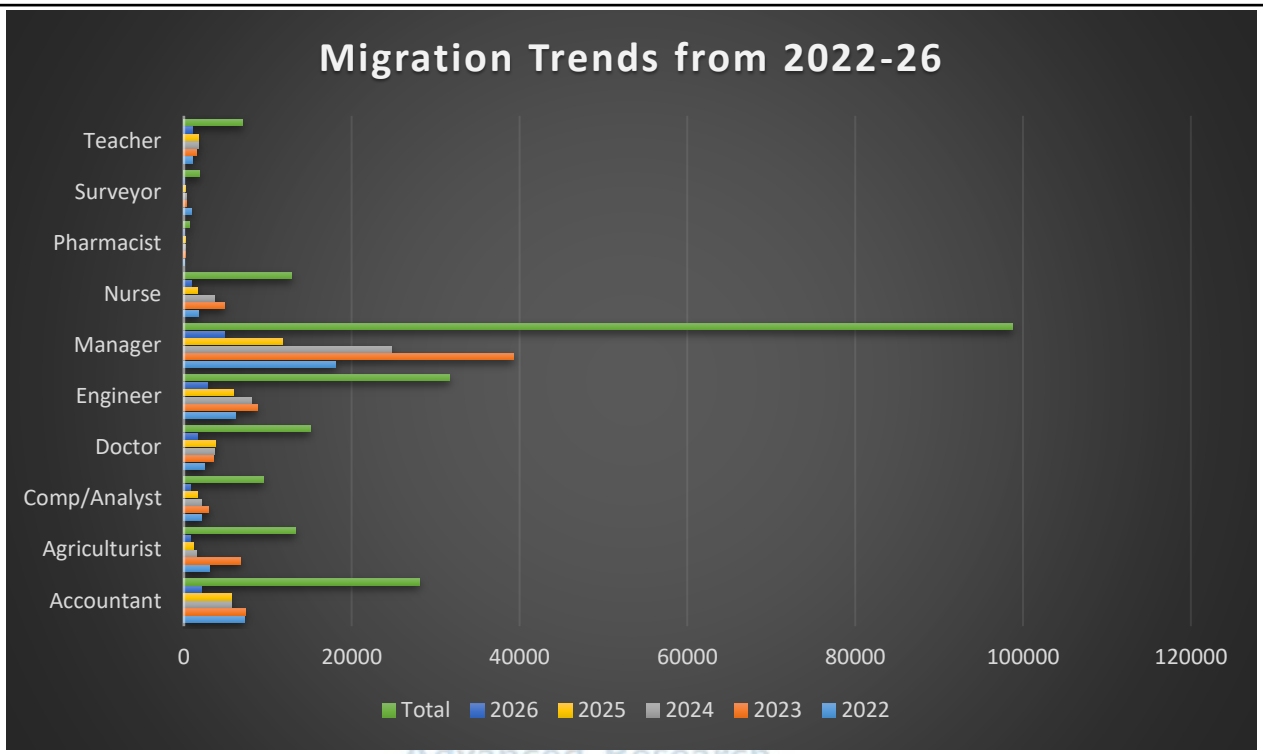


Figure No. 2 Graphical representation of professional migration trends from 2022-26

The Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, Pakistan, presented the latest stats about the young professional leaving Pakistan during 2024-2026. According to these figures, a total of 1,871,666 young graduates and professionals left their homeland during this period. The profession-wise details are given in the below table.

Table No.1 Details of the professional leaving Pakistan during 2024-2026

Category of profession	Year 2024	Year 2025	Year 2026
Highly Qualified	45830	28726	15850
Managers	23674	9562	5190
Engineers	8015	5945	3605
Accountant	4779	4305	1771
Doctors	3625	3795	2093
Teachers	1729	1725	1457
Nurses	2030	1639	626
Computer Programmers	1351	1147	664
System Analyst	388	362	243
Pharmacist	155	183	156
Data Encoders	84	63	45
Highly Skilled Workers	1616	1510	681
Environmentalist	683	923	424

Advisors	836	512	228
Budget Controller	64	38	18
Pilot	33	37	11

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, Pakistan

2.2 Research Gap:

Even though there has been a lot of research on student-migration and brain drift, there are some areas that have been neglected and need to be looked at and investigated. First, although many investigations have shown that economic, social and educational conditions are important determinants of migration intentions, the direct influence of political instability has been investigated generally without looking at it as part of a broader agenda that includes the socioeconomic status and the adaptability of individuals to the local labour markets. Second, most of the literature that has been produced either for the world in general or for students in certain disciplines such as medicine, has been limited in its scope of application to students in other disciplines in a decontextualized environment. No one has conducted a comparative analysis on various disciplines in Lahore. Third, previous research has mostly embraced a quantitative approach, thereby potentially neglecting the subjective notions and lived experiences of students, as well as how they make decisions related to migration. Moreover, the effect of political instability on migration intentions via intermediaries like job insecurity or institutional trust or career uncertainty is less studied. At last, there is a lack of research which studies the different dimensions together in a holistic way from a context-specific point of view. Given the above discussed gaps, this study aims to fill the gap by providing qualitative and context-based analysis which will integrate the analysis of political, economic and social issues together to provide a better understanding of the intentions of migration among the students of Lahore.

3. Research Methodology:

3.1 Research approach and method

The study uses a qualitative research approach because it aims to understand students' lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings related to political instability and migration intentions rather than measure variables numerically. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews. The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. Thematic analysis was selected because it offers methodological flexibility and is not bound to any single theoretical framework, allows identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns of meaning referred to as themes across a qualitative data set (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

3.2 Research philosophy

The research philosophy is interpretivism because the study seeks to understand how students interpret political instability, educational disruption, and future career prospects from their own viewpoints. The interview based design and emphasis on subjective experiences fit an interpretive stance, where reality is understood through participants' meanings and social context (William, 2024).

3.3 Population, sample, and sample size

The population is currently enrolled university students in Lahore. The sample was selected through purposive sampling because participants were chosen based on their relevance to the research topic and their ability to provide meaningful information regarding political instability and intentions to study or work abroad (Ahmed, 2024). The sample size consisted of 20 university students from different academic disciplines and universities in Lahore.

3.4 Data collection method

The data collection method was semi-structured interviews with the help of interview guide. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to explain their experiences, perceptions, and future career intentions in detail. Probing questions were also asked where necessary to gain deeper insights and clarification. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for thematic analysis (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Thematic Analysis:

Thematic Analysis (TA) is the commonly used methods in qualitative research. Which is suggested by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) it provides a flexible and step by step approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns called themes in the qualitative data.

Step 1 : Knowing and understanding your data
Step 2: Make initial codes
Step 3: Search themes
Step 4: Check and improve the main themes.
Step 5: Give name to the themes
Step 6: Make the report

Table No. 2 Final Themes and their meaning

Final themes	Meaning of the theme
Political instability	This theme refers to repeated government changes, weak political continuity, unrest, and instability in the political system that affects daily life and governance.
Weak institutions and power misuse	This theme means that state institutions do not work properly, there is conflict between institutions, and power is often used unfairly or without accountability.
Corruption and lack of merit	This theme refers to bribery, nepotism, favoritism, election rigging, and systems where merit is ignored in jobs, education, and justice.
Economic hardship and daily life disruption	This theme describes rising inflation, unemployment, load shedding, business loss, agriculture problems, and other economic difficulties that affect everyday living.
Education, migration, and future uncertainty	This theme covers poor education quality, learning disruption, graduate unemployment, and the desire to go abroad because people see better opportunities and stability elsewhere.

4.2 Final themes:

4.2.1. Political turmoil and Unrest:

This theme shows that students view Pakistan as politically unstable, which creates uncertainty about their future and pushes them to consider going abroad. Students repeatedly describe the political environment as highly volatile and unpredictable, linking it to anxiety about careers and long-term planning. The perception of constant instability makes them doubt whether Pakistan can offer a secure future for education or employment. For many, this sense of political turbulence is a key reason they start looking at opportunities in more stable countries. Their narratives reflect a broader loss of confidence in

the state's ability to provide a reliable environment for young people.

Participant 001: "Pakistan's political instability is very high right now."

Participant 004: "I feel there is no stability in Pakistan at all."

Participant 007: "The current political situation in Pakistan is very unstable."

Participant 015: "Pakistan has always been extremely unstable."

Research on youth migration from Pakistan identifies political instability as a major "push factor" that undermines confidence in the state and encourages skilled youth to leave (Cheema et al., 2025; Sanaullah & Iftikhar, 2025). Studies link frequent government changes, weak political culture, and policy inconsistency to deteriorating trust among educated youth, who then seek more stable environments abroad (Ali, 2025). These findings align closely with participants' perceptions that political turbulence makes Pakistan an unreliable place to build a future.

4.2.2. Weak institutions and power misuse:

This theme shows that students believe institutions do not work fairly and that power is often misused by those in authority. Participants describe institutions as existing on paper but failing in practice, with laws and policies applied inconsistently. They point to recurring leadership and unstable policymaking as signs that decision-making serves those in power rather than the public. This erosion of trust makes students feel that official channels cannot protect their rights or provide fair opportunities. As a result, migrating to countries with stronger, more transparent institutions becomes an attractive option. Their responses highlight a deep frustration with how authority is exercised and how little accountability exists.

Participant 001: "Our corrupt rulers are sitting on everything."

Participant 003: "We have every kind of law in our country, but there is no implementation."

Participant 009: "Within the system, it's the same leadership coming back again and again."

Participant 019: "The policies that are made, the laws that are made, are always extremely unstable."

Academic work highlights poor governance, weak rule of law, and institutional breakdowns as structural drivers of youth migration and brain drain in Pakistan (Sanaullah & Iftikhar, 2025; Jinnah Institute, 2025). Reports note that institutional inefficiency and policy volatility deter investment and reduce quality public services, further pushing skilled youth out (Jinnah Institute, 2025; Cheema et al., 2025). This literature supports participants' view that weak institutions and power misuse make staying in Pakistan less attractive.

4.2.3. Corruption and lack of merit:

This theme explains that students feel opportunities in Pakistan are often not given on merit, but through corruption, recommendations, and favoritism. Students recount specific incidents where qualified candidates were rejected because they lacked connections or could not pay bribes. Such experiences create a strong sense that hard work and talent are not enough to succeed in Pakistan's system. The belief that nepotism and corruption dominate hiring and promotion processes lowers their motivation to compete locally. Many see migration as a way to enter environments where merit is more likely to be recognized and rewarded. Their stories reflect both personal disappointment and a broader critique of systemic unfairness.

Participant 001: "I was there on merit, but I was dropped in the interview just because I didn't have a recommendation."

Participant 008: "Many situations in Pakistan involve this system of recommendations, money, and bribery."

Participant 003: "Corruption and lack of merit."

Participant 003: "It's not merit-based."

Participant 004: "There are no such opportunities in Pakistan for a student to earn a good living."

Qualitative studies on youth migration identify lack of social justice, nepotism, and an unhealthy environment for entrepreneurship as key "push

factors" (Sanaullah & Iftikhar, 2025; Cheema et al., 2025). Research also notes that meritocracy is weakened by favoritism and political interference, causing skilled professionals to leave for societies where performance is better rewarded (Jinnah Institute, 2025; Ali, 2025). These findings echo participants' experiences of being excluded from opportunities due to lack of connections rather than merit.

4.2.4. Economic hardship and daily life disruption:

This theme shows that rising prices, fuel costs, and financial pressure affect students' families and daily life. Participants describe sharp increases in living costs and fuel prices, alongside dramatic drops in family income, which directly limit their daily activities and future plans. They link these economic pressures to reduced opportunities for work, study, and even basic mobility. The combination of high inflation, unemployment, and financial insecurity makes post-graduation life in Pakistan seem bleak. For many, the struggle to meet everyday needs strengthens the idea that better economic prospects lie abroad. Their accounts show how macroeconomic problems translate into personal hardship and migration aspirations.

Participant 001: "Because petrol is so expensive, none of my tours are going out."

Participant 003: "We used to earn nearly one million a month, it has now come down to 100k."

Participant 007: "Every single thing is in a crisis right now."

Participant 016: "We saw the severe oil and petrol shortage."

Participant 020: "After graduation, a person has no hope of financial stability."

Broader analyses highlight stagflation, tax pressures, and eroded purchasing power as contributors to youth unemployment and joblessness, which in turn fuel migration (Jinnah Institute, 2025; Gallup Pakistan, 2026). Studies report that over half of youth aged 15–35 face unemployment or underemployment, and many cite economic hardship and lack of viable career paths as primary reasons for leaving (Jinnah Institute, 2025; Cheema et al., 2025). This macro-level evidence aligns with participants' accounts of daily financial strain and bleak post-graduation prospects.

4.2.5. Quality of Education and future uncertainty:

This theme shows that interruptions in education and uncertainty about the future make students think more seriously about migration. Students describe exam disruptions during the pandemic, unequal access to online classes, and politicized shifts in teaching modes that harmed their academic performance. These interruptions are seen as having long-term consequences for their qualifications and employability. Repeated disruptions deepen doubts about the reliability and quality of Pakistan's education system. Many compare this situation with other countries that offer stable education systems, scholarships, and clearer career pathways. Their narratives connect educational instability directly to increased interest in studying or workingabroad.

Participant 001: "I had three exams during Corona that completely ruined my results."

Participant 002: "When they shifted to online, some people living in backward areas didn't even have internet."

Participant 003: "Classes shift online, so everything gets affected by this politics."

Participant 004: "Seeing all these events, a student often considers moving abroad."

Participant 004: "Those countries also offer you free education and countless scholarships."

Research on Pakistan's education during COVID-19 documents significant learning losses, widened digital divides, and disrupted assessments, disproportionately affecting poorer and rural students (Khan et al., 2022; Adnan & Anwar, 2020). These educational shocks are linked to reduced employability and increased migration aspirations, especially where higher education and research opportunities are perceived as limited domestically (Cheema et al., 2025; Sanaullah & Iftikhar, 2025). Participants' narratives of ruined exams and unequal online

learning fit closely with these documented patterns.

5. Key Findings:

The analysis of interview data yields key research findings:

i Political instability is recognized as an issue since the establishment of Pakistan the governments never completed their tenure, military has taken over the government and conflicts between judiciary and executive have also become common effecting every segment of the society including universities students.

ii Students highlight issues such as the widespread corruption and referral system "parchi" system, which is deep rooted and it is also supported by literature in similar studies.

iii Political instability (rigging of elections) and economic crisis (inflation, unemployment, utility issues), have been identified as main cause of intention to migrate from the country.

iv The absence of justice/law enforcement, as well as the absence of quality education (rote learning, failure to take online classes, institutions closures). All of the above foster a "no future at home" attitude and influence emigration to seek employment or study abroad; although many people report that they feel like they have a "hope if the reforms happen" attitude toward emigration.

6. Recommendations and Suggestions:

The findings of this study and the literature on 'governance reform' lay the groundwork for considering the possibility that inclusive institutions, rule of law and transparency measures could contribute to decreasing the brain drain. Eligible to draw youth, need for merit based systems, accountability of power & political stability, improved education & employment, economic fairness. The remedies according to academic sources are prosecute patronage that occurs on civil service recruitment and deal with economic debts loads.

Concentrate on education reform that is promoting skills development instead of rote learning and stable internet/utilities to minimize the disruptions of protest. Targeted scholarships/jobs and enforcement against corruption based on student's perception of the attractiveness of the abroad (merit and safety). Merit audits could be included in public administration as well, inspired from data on the impact of nepotism on the levels of trust.

7.Target Audience to get benefits from this study:

The target audience of our research is the students and parents. Through this research they can make informed decisions. Secondly our audience is policy makers. They can get benefit to improve policies and make informed decisions. Thirdly our audience is political leaders and stakeholders. They can use our research to improve the political conditions in Pakistan to overcome brain drain. Fourthly the consumer of research can be students of political sciences and social sciences, they can get benefit from our research in their higher studies.

8. Limitations:

We have faced difficulty in few of interviews that we have conducted online because it is a challenge to build a rapport with the participant. Second it is also difficult to observe the surroundings, the facial expressions, non-verbal cues that contribute to rich description. But we overcome it and tried our best to conduct the online interviews effectively. Because participant convenience is our first priority. We do not treat participants as a source of data only, from which we only want to collect their stories, perceptions or experiences but we consider them as a human who have their own opinions and choices. So conducting interviews online was a challenge because of participants' convenience but we tried our best to conduct the interviews efficiently.

Thirdly, we also faced difficulty in conducting interviews with participants (ID 003 and 006) who were getting nervous. But we make them comfortable and used probing questions to stimulate responses.

9. Conclusion:

It is instability that brings rational migration as the student compares his failures at home with what he sees at abroad and hopes for reform, calling it sadly, but in most cases, none will come home in order to seek stability and equity. It is related to the structural problems which are part of the literature on Pakistan's cases of more or less frequent change in governments, economic stagnation and the need to make institutional change so as to prevent the skilled emigration. The document, overall, reflects that if the root cause such as corruption and weak governance are not solved brain drain will go on.

Political unrest in developing countries generally and in particular in Pakistan contributes to students' decisions to leave the country. It creates uncertainty and concerns about employment opportunities for them. Unemployment is not the sole reason; the governance system, law, and order situation in the country and judicial system also discourage young people and divert their attention to look for a better future abroad. Economic conditions, employment opportunities, quality of education, and perceived stability are other main factors along with political instability, contributing to high brain drain. Overall the decision to leave one's homeland is a combination of political, governance, economic, and career-related factors.

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