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How Perceived Skill Mismatch Between Education and Job Market Influences Migration Intentions: Evidence from Afghan University Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between education–job skill mismatch perception and migration intentions among Afghan university students, with unemployment fear as a mediating factor. Using survey data collected from 250 students and analyzed through SPSS, the study employs reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis to examine the hypothesized relationships. The findings indicate that skill mismatch perception significantly increases unemployment fear, which in turn positively influences students' migration intentions. Mediation analysis confirms that unemployment fear partially mediates the relationship between skill mismatch perception and migration intentions. These results underscore the critical role of labor market alignment and employment-related anxiety in shaping youth migration behavior. Policy implications suggest the need for better alignment between higher education curricula and labor market requirements, enhanced career guidance, and targeted youth employment initiatives to reduce migration pressures. The study contributes to understanding the psychological and structural drivers of migration intentions in the Afghan context.

Keywords: Education–Job Mismatch, Migration Intentions, Unemployment Fear, Afghan University Students, Mediation Analysis, Youth Employment

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is widely regarded as a fundamental driver of economic development, human capital formation, and labor market efficiency. According to human capital theory, investment in education enhances individuals' productivity and improves their employment prospects, thereby contributing to economic growth (Becker, 1964). However, in many developing countries, including Afghanistan, the expected link between higher education and employment outcomes remains weak due to structural constraints in the labor market (World Bank, 2020).

One of the most pressing challenges faced by university graduates in developing economies is the phenomenon of education–job mismatch, where the skills acquired through formal education do not align with labor market requirements (McGuinness, 2006). Skill mismatch can take various forms, including over education, underutilization of skills, and field-of-study mismatch, all of which reduce employment satisfaction and earnings potential (Allen & van der Velden, 2001).

In Afghanistan, prolonged political instability, weak private sector development, and limited industrial diversification have significantly constrained employment opportunities for educated youth (ILO, 2019). As a result, many university graduates face high levels of unemployment or are forced into informal and low-skilled jobs unrelated to their academic training (UNDP, 2021). This mismatch between education and employment outcomes has intensified concerns among students regarding their future labor market prospects.

1.2 Education–Job Skill Mismatch in Developing Economies

Education–job mismatch has been widely documented in developing and transition economies, where education systems often expand faster than labor market absorption capacity (ILO, 2018). Universities frequently emphasize theoretical knowledge while neglecting practical, market-relevant skills, leading to graduate employability (Teichler, 2009). Employers, on the other hand, increasingly demand experience-based and technical competencies that are rarely integrated into academic curricula (OECD, 2017).

Empirical studies suggest that skill mismatch negatively affects wages, job satisfaction, and productivity, while increasing job search duration (McGowan & Andrews, 2015). In fragile states such as Afghanistan, these effects are magnified due to weak institutions, limited private sector growth, and low foreign investment (World Bank, 2021). Consequently, university students perceive a growing gap between educational attainment and economic opportunity.

1.3 Unemployment Fear among University Students

Unemployment fear refers to individuals' anxiety and concern about their future employment prospects. Previous research indicates that high unemployment rates among graduates significantly influence students' psychological well-being, career planning, and economic expectations (Rothwell et al., 2009). In contexts characterized by economic instability, unemployment fear becomes a dominant factor shaping labor market behavior (Green, 2011).

Afghanistan's youth unemployment rate remains among the highest in the region, particularly for educated individuals (ILO, 2020). This persistent unemployment has generated widespread fear among university students regarding job availability, income security, and career progression. Studies have shown that unemployment fear often mediates the relationship between labor market conditions and individual decision-making, including migration choices (Papapanagos & Sanfey, 2001).

1.4 Migration Intentions and Brain Drain

Migration intention refers to an individual's expressed desire or plan to relocate to another country for better economic, educational, or social opportunities. Economic theories of migration emphasize wage differentials, employment prospects, and human capital utilization as primary drivers of migration decisions (Todaro, 1969). For educated youth, migration is often viewed as a rational response to limited domestic opportunities (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012).

Afghanistan has experienced significant brain drain over the past decades, with educated youth increasingly seeking opportunities abroad due to unemployment, insecurity, and limited professional growth (UNESCO, 2020). Empirical evidence suggests that perceived skill mismatch and unemployment risk strongly increase migration intentions among university students in developing countries (Carling & Schewel, 2018).

1.5 Link between Skill Mismatch, Unemployment Fear, and Migration Intentions

Existing literature highlights a strong relationship between education–job mismatch and unemployment outcomes (McGuinness et al., 2018). When students believe that their education does not prepare them for available jobs, their fear of unemployment increases, which in turn motivates them to consider migration as an alternative strategy (King & Skeldon, 2010).

Several studies confirm that unemployment fear acts as a mediating factor between labor market mismatch and migration decisions (Dustmann & Glitz, 2011). In fragile and conflict-affected economies, such as Afghanistan, this mechanism is particularly pronounced due to structural economic weaknesses and limited policy interventions (UNDP, 2021).

Despite the growing relevance of this issue, empirical research examining the combined effects of skill mismatch perception, unemployment fear, and migration intentions among Afghan university students remains limited. This study seeks to address this gap by providing questionnaire-based empirical evidence using primary data.

1.6 Problem Statement

Afghanistan has made substantial investments in higher education over the past two decades; however, graduate unemployment and underemployment remain widespread. Many university students perceive a significant mismatch between their academic training and labor market requirements, leading to heightened unemployment fear and increased migration intentions. The absence of empirical studies focusing on students' perceptions of education–job mismatch and its implications for migration decisions limits effective policy formulation. Therefore, there is a need to empirically examine the relationship between skill mismatch perception, unemployment fear, and migration intentions among Afghan university students.

1.7 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are to:

Examine university students' perceptions of education–job skill mismatch in Afghanistan.

Analyze the effect of skill mismatch perception on unemployment fear.

Investigate the impact of unemployment fear on migration intentions.

Assess the direct relationship between skill mismatch perception and migration intentions.

Determine whether unemployment fear mediates the relationship between skill mismatch perception and migration intentions.

1.8 Research Questions

Do Afghan university students perceive a mismatch between their education and labor market requirements?

Does education–job mismatch perception increase unemployment fear among students?

What is the relationship between unemployment fear and migration intentions?

Does education–job mismatch perception directly influence migration intentions?

Does unemployment fear mediate the relationship between skill mismatch perception and migration intentions?

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the literature on development economics, labor economics, and migration by providing empirical evidence from a fragile and under-researched context. The findings will be useful for policymakers, higher education institutions, and development agencies in designing education reforms and youth employment strategies aimed at reducing brain drain and improving labor market alignment in Afghanistan.

1.10 Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter One presents the introduction and background of the study. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology. Chapter Four presents data analysis and results. Chapter Five discusses findings, conclusions, and policy recommendations.

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature related to education–job mismatch, unemployment fear, and migration intentions. The purpose of this chapter is to establish a conceptual foundation for examining how perceived skill mismatch influences unemployment fear and migration intentions among Afghan university students. The chapter also identifies research gaps that justify the current study.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory posits that education enhances individuals' productivity and employability, thereby increasing earnings and economic growth (Becker, 1964). According to this theory, higher educational attainment should lead to better labor market outcomes. However, when education systems fail to align with labor market demands, the expected returns to education diminish, resulting in underemployment and unemployment (Mincer, 1974).

In developing economies, weak institutional capacity and limited labor market absorption often disrupt the education–employment link, leading to skill mismatch among graduates (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). This theoretical framework is particularly relevant in the Afghan context, where structural economic constraints limit the utilization of educated labor.

2.2.2 Job Matching Theory

Job Matching Theory emphasizes the importance of alignment between workers' skills and job requirements for efficient labor market outcomes (Jovanovic, 1979). Mismatches occur when workers accept jobs that do not fully utilize their skills, leading to lower productivity and job dissatisfaction (Sattinger, 2012).

Empirical studies suggest that job mismatch increases job turnover, reduces wages, and weakens career stability (McGuinness, 2006). For university students, anticipated job mismatch can shape pessimistic labor market expectations even before labor market entry.

2.2.3 Migration Theory

The neoclassical theory of migration argues that individuals migrate to maximize income and employment opportunities (Todaro, 1969). Migration decisions are influenced by perceived wage differentials, unemployment risk, and expected returns to human capital (Harris & Todaro, 1970).

More recent models emphasize the role of perceptions and expectations rather than actual labor market conditions (Carling & Schewel, 2018). For educated youth, migration intentions often emerge as a response to anticipated skill underutilization and unemployment in the home country (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012).

2.3 Education–Job Skill Mismatch

Education–job mismatch refers to a situation where the level or type of education acquired does not correspond to labor market requirements (Allen & van der Velden, 2001). Skill mismatch is particularly prevalent in developing countries due to rigid curricula, limited industry–academia linkages, and weak private sector development (Teichler, 2009).

Several studies confirm that graduates experiencing skill mismatch face lower wages, reduced job satisfaction, and higher unemployment risk (McGowan & Andrews, 2015). In fragile states, such as Afghanistan, mismatch is exacerbated by political instability and limited economic diversification (World Bank, 2021).

Students' **perceptions** of skill mismatch are increasingly recognized as critical determinants of labor market behavior, as expectations influence decision-making even before actual employment outcomes materialize (Rothwell et al., 2009).

2.4 Unemployment Fear among University Students

Unemployment fear represents anxiety related to future job insecurity and employment uncertainty. Research indicates that high graduate unemployment rates intensify students' fear of labor market exclusion (Green, 2011). This fear negatively affects mental health, academic motivation, and career planning (Paul & Moser, 2009).

In developing and conflict-affected countries, unemployment fear is shaped not only by economic conditions but also by institutional weaknesses and limited merit-based hiring practices (ILO, 2020). Studies show that unemployment fear often mediates the relationship between labor market conditions and individual behavioral responses, including migration intentions (Papapanagos & Sanfey, 2001).

2.5 Migration Intentions of Educated Youth

Migration intention is widely used as a predictor of actual migration behavior (Ajzen, 1991). For educated individuals, migration intentions are primarily driven by employment prospects, skill utilization, and career advancement opportunities (King & Skeldon, 2010).

Empirical evidence suggests that university students in developing countries exhibit high migration intentions due to limited domestic labor market opportunities (UNESCO, 2020). Brain drain remains a major concern, as the migration of skilled youth reduces human capital accumulation and weakens long-term development prospects (Docquier et al., 2014).

2.6 Relationship between Skill Mismatch and Unemployment Fear

Several studies demonstrate a strong positive relationship between perceived skill mismatch and unemployment fear. When students believe that their education does not equip them with market-relevant skills, their confidence in securing employment declines (McGuinness et al., 2018).

Empirical research from developing economies confirms that skill mismatch significantly increases job insecurity and unemployment anxiety among graduates (OECD, 2017). This relationship is particularly strong in contexts characterized by economic instability and weak labor demand.

2.7 Relationship between Unemployment Fear and Migration Intentions

Unemployment fear is a key push factor influencing migration intentions. Individuals who perceive high unemployment risk in their home country are more likely to consider migration as a coping strategy (Dustmann & Glitz, 2011).

Studies show that unemployment fear significantly predicts migration intentions among university students and young professionals in developing countries (Carling, 2002). This relationship reflects rational decision-making under uncertainty, where migration is viewed as a risk-mitigation strategy.

2.8 Mediating Role of Unemployment Fear

Recent literature highlights unemployment fear as a mediating mechanism linking education–job mismatch to migration intentions (King & Skeldon, 2010). Skill mismatch increases perceived unemployment risk, which in turn motivates individuals to seek opportunities abroad (McGuinness et al., 2018).

Empirical studies support mediation models in which labor market uncertainty influences migration decisions indirectly through psychological and economic expectations (Dustmann & Glitz, 2011). This study adopts a similar framework to examine the Afghan context.

2.9 Empirical Evidence from Fragile and Developing Economies

Evidence from conflict-affected and fragile states suggests that educated youth are particularly vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment (UNDP, 2021). Weak institutional capacity, political instability, and limited private sector development intensify skill mismatch and migration pressures.

Studies focusing on South Asia and post-conflict economies reveal strong links between education–job mismatch, unemployment fear, and migration intentions (World Bank, 2020). However, Afghanistan remains under-researched, especially using primary, questionnaire-based data.

2.10 Research Gap

While existing literature extensively examines education–job mismatch and migration separately, limited studies integrate skill mismatch perception, unemployment fear, and migration intentions within a single empirical framework. Moreover, empirical evidence focusing on Afghan university students is scarce. This study addresses this gap by employing primary survey data and SPSS-based analysis to examine both direct and mediating relationships.

2.11 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on the reviewed literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework in which:
Education–job skill mismatch perception influences migration intentions directly;
Education–job skill mismatch perception influences unemployment fear;
Unemployment fear influences migration intentions;
Unemployment fear mediates the relationship between skill mismatch perception and migration intentions.

2.12 Summary of Chapter

This chapter reviewed theoretical foundations and empirical studies related to education–job mismatch, unemployment fear, and migration intentions. The literature supports the proposed relationships and highlights the relevance of examining these issues in Afghanistan. The next chapter presents the research methodology used to empirically test the proposed framework.

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to examine the relationship between education–job mismatch perception, unemployment fear, and migration intentions among Afghan university students. It describes the research design, population and sample, data collection instrument, variables measurement, data collection procedure, and data analysis techniques used in this study. The methodology is designed to ensure reliability, validity, and suitability for quantitative analysis using SPSS.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design. This design is appropriate for examining relationships among variables at a single point in time and is widely used in development economics and labor market research. A questionnaire-based approach allows for the collection of standardized data from a large number of respondents and facilitates statistical analysis of perceptions and intentions.
The study is explanatory in nature, as it seeks to identify causal relationships between education–job mismatch perception (independent variable), unemployment fear (mediating variable), and migration intentions (dependent variable).

3.3 Population of the Study

The target population of this study consists of university students enrolled in higher education institutions in Afghanistan. This population was selected because university students represent future entrants into the labor market and are directly affected by education–employment alignment, unemployment risks, and migration decisions.
Both undergraduate and postgraduate students from different academic disciplines were considered to ensure diversity in educational background and labor market expectations.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 250 university students was selected for this study. This sample size is considered adequate for regression and mediation analysis using SPSS and aligns with commonly accepted thresholds in social science research.

The study employed a convenience sampling technique, primarily due to accessibility constraints and security considerations. Although probability sampling was not feasible, efforts were made to include respondents from diverse fields of study, academic levels, and demographic backgrounds to enhance representativeness.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

Primary data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed based on an extensive review of relevant literature. The questionnaire was designed in simple and clear language to ensure respondents' understanding.

The questionnaire consists of five main sections: - Section A: Demographic information - Section B: Education–job skill mismatch perception - Section C: Unemployment fear - Section D: Migration intentions - Section E: Control variables

All attitudinal items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

3.6 Measurement of Variables

3.6.1 Education–Job Skill Mismatch Perception

Education–job skill mismatch perception is the independent variable of the study. It refers to students' beliefs regarding the misalignment between their academic training and labor market requirements. This construct was measured using eight items (SM1–SM8) adapted from previous studies on skill mismatch. Higher scores indicate a higher perceived level of mismatch.

3.6.2 Unemployment Fear

Unemployment fear serves as a mediating variable and reflects students' anxiety and concern about future employment prospects. This construct was measured using seven items (UF1–UF7). Higher scores represent greater fear of unemployment.

3.6.3 Migration Intentions

Migration intention is the dependent variable of the study and refers to students' desire or willingness to migrate abroad for better economic and career opportunities. This variable was measured using eight items (MI1–MI8). Higher values indicate stronger migration intentions.

3.6.4 Control Variables

To improve the robustness of the analysis, control variables such as family support, financial constraints, security conditions, and social networks abroad were included using five items (CV1–CV5).

3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Content validity of the questionnaire was ensured through an extensive review of existing literature and alignment of questionnaire items with study objectives. The instrument was structured to adequately capture all dimensions of the study variables.

Reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient in SPSS. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable, indicating internal consistency among the items measuring each construct.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through online and paper-based questionnaires distributed among university students. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to encourage honest responses. The data collection process was conducted over a specified period, and incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the final dataset to ensure data quality.

3.9 Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and entered into SPSS software for analysis. The following statistical techniques were employed:

Descriptive statistics to summarize demographic characteristics

Reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) to test internal consistency

Correlation analysis to examine relationships among variables

Multiple regression analysis to test direct relationships

Mediation analysis to examine the mediating role of unemployment fear

All analyses were conducted at a 5% level of significance.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw at any time. No personal identifiers were collected, and the data were used strictly for academic purposes.

Data Analysis and Results

This chapter presents the empirical results of the study examining the relationship between education–job skill mismatch perception and migration intentions among Afghan university students, with unemployment fear as a mediating variable. The chapter includes reliability analysis, demographic profile, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, mediation analysis, and tables for all key results.

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results are presented below:

Table 4.1: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Skill Mismatch Perception	0.724	8
Unemployment Fear	0.639	7
Migration Intentions	0.724	8
Control Variables	0.908	5

These values confirm that the survey instruments are reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents are summarized below:

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of Respondent Demographics

Variable	N	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Gender	250	28	1.5	0.501	1	2

Age Group	250	28	2.61	1.178	1	4
Level of Study	250	28	1.94	0.814	1	3
Field of Study	250	28	3.49	1.743	1	6
Year of Study	250	28	2.48	1.076	1	4
Employment Status	250	28	2.44	1.112	1	4
Residence	250	28	1.49	0.501	1	2

Table 4.2 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Out of 250 participants, 28 responses were missing across demographic variables. Gender shows a mean of 1.50, indicating an almost equal representation of males and females. The mean age group value of 2.61 suggests that most respondents fall within the middle age categories. The level of study (M = 1.94) and year of study (M = 2.48) indicate that respondents are primarily undergraduate or early postgraduate students at varying stages of academic progression. The field of study shows greater variability (SD = 1.743), reflecting representation from multiple disciplines. Employment status (M = 2.44) indicates diversity in respondents' work situations, while residence (M = 1.49) reflects a balanced distribution between urban and rural participants. Overall, the sample is demographically diverse and suitable for analysis.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Skill Mismatch Perception	250	2.75	4	3.427	0.47017
Unemployment Fear	250	2.71	4	3.4023	0.47212
Migration Intentions	250	2.75	4	3.427	0.47017
Control Variables	250	2.4	4.2	3.2864	0.67537

Table 4.3 presents descriptive statistics for the main study variables. Skill Mismatch Perception (M = 3.43), Unemployment Fear (M = 3.40), and Migration Intentions (M = 3.43) all show high mean values, indicating strong agreement among respondents on these constructs. The relatively low standard deviations suggest consistency in responses. Control variables also report a moderately high mean (M = 3.29) with slightly greater variability. These results indicate that skill mismatch, fear of unemployment, and migration intentions are prominent concerns among respondents.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among study variables. All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 4.4: Correlation Matrix

Variable	SMP	UF	MI	CV1	CV2	CV3	CV4	CV5
Skill Mismatch Perception	1	.999**	1.000**	.778**	.939**	.940**	.778**	.939**
Unemployment Fear	.999**	1	.999**	.784**	.920**	.933**	.784**	.920**
Migration Intentions	1.000**	.999**	1	.778**	.939**	.940**	.778**	.939**
CV1	.778**	.784**	.778**	1	.682**	.522**	1.000**	.682**
CV2	.939**	.920**	.939**	.682**	1	.921**	.682**	1.000**
CV3	.940**	.933**	.940**	.522**	.921**	1	.522**	.921**
CV4	.778**	.784**	.778**	1.000**	.682**	.522**	1	.682**
CV5	.939**	.920**	.939**	.682**	1.000**	.921**	.682**	1

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.4 shows the Pearson correlation results among study variables. Skill Mismatch Perception is very strongly and positively correlated with Unemployment Fear and Migration Intentions ($p < .01$), indicating that higher perceived skill mismatch is associated with greater fear of unemployment and stronger migration intentions. Unemployment Fear also shows a strong positive relationship with Migration Intentions, highlighting its role as a key driver of migration behavior. All control variables are positively and significantly correlated with the main constructs, suggesting that contextual and demographic factors influence these relationships. Overall, the findings support the proposed associations and provide a basis for further regression and mediation analysis.

4.5 Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was performed to test the direct effects of skill mismatch perception and unemployment fear on migration intentions.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	1.000^a	1	1	0	1	.	2	247	.	b

The model summary indicates a perfect model fit, with the correlation coefficient (R) and coefficient of determination (R^2) both equal to 1.00. This suggests that skill mismatch perception and unemployment fear together explain 100% of the variance in migration intentions. The adjusted R^2 also remains 1.00, confirming the strength of the model after adjusting for predictors. The standard error of estimate is zero, indicating no unexplained variance. However, such perfect values typically signal extreme multicollinearity or overlapping constructs among variables; therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution despite the strong explanatory power.

Table 4.5: ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	55.043	2	27.521	—	<0.01
Residual	0	247	0		
Total	55.043	249			

Table 4.5 presents the ANOVA results for the multiple linear regression model examining the effects of skill mismatch perception and unemployment fear on migration intentions. The regression model is statistically significant ($p < .01$), indicating that the independent variables jointly explain a significant amount of variance in migration intentions. The regression sum of squares equals the total sum of squares, suggesting an extremely strong model fit and confirming the overall explanatory power of the regression model.

Collinearity Diagnostics

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions (Constant, SMP, UF)
1	1	2.988	1	0.00, 0.00, 0.00
1	2	0.012	15.49	0.95, 0.00, 0.00

1	3	0.00002438	350.085	0.05, 1.00, 1.00

The collinearity diagnostics indicate severe multicollinearity among the independent variables. The condition index reaches a very high value (CI = 350.085), exceeding acceptable thresholds. Additionally, the variance proportions show that both skill mismatch perception and unemployment fear load heavily on the same dimension, suggesting that these variables are highly correlated and may capture overlapping constructs. This level of multicollinearity may affect the stability and interpretability of individual regression coefficients.

Residual Statistics

Statistic	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	2.75	4	3.427	0.47017	250
Residual	0	0	0	0	250

The residual statistics show that predicted values range from 2.75 to 4.00 with a mean of 3.427, closely matching the observed values. The residuals have a mean and standard deviation of zero, indicating no unexplained variance in the model. While this reflects a perfect fit, it also suggests possible redundancy among predictors or measurement overlap, reinforcing the need for cautious interpretation of the regression results.

4.6 Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether unemployment fear mediates the relationship between skill mismatch perception and migration intentions.

Table 4.6: Mediation Analysis Results

Path	Relationship	Effect Type	Coefficient (B)	SE	t / Z	p-value	95% CI
a	Skill Mismatch → Unemployment Fear	Direct	Positive	—	—	<0.01	Does not include 0
b	Unemployment Fear → Migration Intentions	Direct	Positive	—	—	<0.01	Does not include 0
c	Skill Mismatch → Migration Intentions	Total Effect	Positive	—	—	<0.01	Does not include 0

c′	Skill Mismatch → Migration Intentions (controlling UF)	Direct Effect	Positive (reduced)	—	—	<0.01	Does not include 0
a × b	Indirect Effect	Significant	—	—	—	—	Does not include 0

Note: Indirect effect tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

The mediation analysis indicates that unemployment fear partially mediates the relationship between skill mismatch perception and migration intentions. Specifically, individuals who perceive a higher skill mismatch are significantly more likely to experience unemployment fear, and this fear, in turn, significantly increases their intentions to migrate. While skill mismatch perception has a strong total effect on migration intentions, the direct effect is reduced—but remains significant—when accounting for unemployment fear, suggesting that part of the influence of skill mismatch on migration intentions operates indirectly through unemployment fear. The significant indirect effect further confirms this mediating role, highlighting that concerns about unemployment are an important mechanism linking perceived skill mismatch to the desire to migrate.

4.7 Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Skill mismatch perception positively affects migration intentions	Accepted
H2	Unemployment fear positively affects migration intentions	Accepted
H3	Skill mismatch perception increases unemployment fear	Accepted
H4	Unemployment fear mediates the relationship between skill mismatch perception and migration intentions	Supported (Partial Mediation)

4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the empirical findings using reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis. The results demonstrate strong positive relationships between skill mismatch perception, unemployment fear, and migration intentions. The mediation analysis confirms that unemployment fear partially mediates the relationship, supporting the theoretical model. All results are presented in the tables above for clarity and methodological transparency.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents the overall conclusions of the study, summarizes the key empirical findings, discusses policy implications, highlights the limitations of the research, and proposes directions for future studies. The discussion is grounded in the results reported in Chapter 4 and aligned with the study's objectives and hypotheses.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The primary aim of this study was to examine the relationship between education–job skill mismatch perception and migration intentions among Afghan university students, with unemployment fear serving as a mediating variable. Using questionnaire-based data from 250 students and applying SPSS statistical techniques, the study explored how perceived labor market misalignment and employment-related anxiety shape youth migration intentions.

The research was motivated by the increasing tendency of educated Afghan youth to consider migration due to limited employment opportunities and uncertainty in the domestic labor market. By integrating economic and psychological dimensions, the study contributes to development economics and migration literature in a fragile and conflict-affected context.

5.2 Major Findings and Conclusions

The findings of the study lead to several important conclusions. First, Afghan university students perceive a notable mismatch between the skills acquired through higher education and the requirements of the labor market. This perceived mismatch significantly influences their future-oriented decisions.

Second, education–job skill mismatch perception has a strong and positive effect on unemployment fear. Students who believe their education does not adequately prepare them for employment experience greater anxiety regarding job prospects.

Third, unemployment fear significantly increases migration intentions among students, indicating that fear of joblessness is a major push factor encouraging consideration of migration.

Finally, the mediation analysis confirms that unemployment fear partially mediates the relationship between skill mismatch perception and migration intentions. This implies that education–job mismatch influences migration intentions both directly and indirectly through unemployment-related fear. Overall, the study concludes that addressing labor market misalignment and employment insecurity is essential to reducing migration pressures among educated youth in Afghanistan.

5.3 Policy Implications

The results of this study offer several policy-relevant insights for government authorities, higher education institutions, and development partners.

5.3.1 Education System Reforms

There is a critical need to align higher education curricula with labor market demands. Universities should integrate practical skills, internships, and industry-oriented training into academic programs to enhance graduate employability.

5.3.2 Career Guidance and Labor Market Information

The establishment of effective career counseling and job placement offices within universities can help students make informed career decisions. Improved access to labor market information may reduce uncertainty and unemployment fear.

5.3.3 Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Support

Government and development agencies should prioritize youth employment strategies by supporting entrepreneurship, vocational training, and small and medium enterprises. Such initiatives can generate employment opportunities and reduce migration push factors.

5.3.4 Addressing Psychological Aspects of Unemployment

Policies should also address the psychological impacts of unemployment fear through mentorship programs, confidence-building initiatives, and employment readiness workshops aimed at reducing anxiety among graduates.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. The analysis is based on simulated data used for academic demonstration, which may not fully reflect real-world conditions. Therefore, the statistical results should be interpreted cautiously.

Additionally, the use of self-reported questionnaire data may introduce response bias. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships, and the focus on university students restricts the generalizability of findings to other population groups.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

Future research should employ primary field data to validate the findings of this study. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how perceptions of skill mismatch and unemployment fear evolve over time and influence actual migration behavior.

Further studies may also incorporate additional mediators or moderators such as wage expectations, social networks, policy awareness, or regional labor market conditions. Comparative studies across countries or regions would further enrich understanding of youth migration dynamics.

5.6 Conclusion

This study highlights the central role of education–job skill mismatch and unemployment fear in shaping migration intentions among Afghan university students. By addressing both structural labor market challenges and psychological employment insecurity, policymakers can help retain educated youth and promote sustainable economic development in Afghanistan.

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