

Study on Post-Graduation Labor Migration Intentions: A Case Study of University Students in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the factors influencing the labor migration intentions of university students in the Mekong Delta region to provinces and cities in the Southeastern region of Vietnam. This research was conducted by surveying the perspectives of 352 final-year students from various universities situated in three provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta region, namely Can Tho City, An Giang Province, and Kien Giang Province. The results of the Binary Logistic regression model identified six significant factors affecting the labor migration intentions of students in this region. These factors were ranked in decreasing order of impact as follows: Improving the working environment, job stability when migrating, increasing income, family encouragement for labor migration, family economic status, and local climate change. All six of these factors had a positive impact on students' intentions to engage in labor migration. Among them, the impact of family economic status is noteworthy as it represents a new discovery in this research, indicating a direction of influence that is completely contrary to previous studies on labor migration.

Keywords: Labor Migration; University Students; Mekong Delta, Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of developing nations, the interplay between development and migration remains an inherent feature. Migration serves both as a driving force for development and as a consequence of it within the socio-economic landscape of a nation. It substantiates its role in advancing socio-economic development through the intricacies of labor migration, strategically catering to the burgeoning labor needs within industrial zones and regions characterized by foreign direct investment. While recognizing certain constraints such as demographic management and sociopolitical stability, it is indisputable that migration plays a pivotal role in the growth of urban centers and industrial clusters where the demand for a dynamic workforce steadily rises. Migration not only enhances the economic well-being and social welfare of migrants through increased and diversified income sources but also fosters a connectedness between areas of origin and destination, thus mitigating regional disparities.

The Mekong Delta, situated at the confluence of the Mekong River basin, holds a paramount position in Vietnam's economic and social development strategy. It plays a crucial role in the production and supply of essential agricultural products for both domestic consumption and international export. It is not only a key region for rice production, fruit cultivation, aquaculture, and seafood harvesting in Vietnam but also recognized as a significant global agricultural production hub. Unfortunately, the Mekong

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Delta is currently grappling with a 'dual impact' stemming from climate change and upstream development activities. Climate-related events, including droughts, heatwaves, elevated tides, and saline intrusion, are occurring with increasing frequency, causing disturbances to the environment and natural resources in the Mekong Delta. In addition, upstream development activities, particularly the construction of hydroelectric dams on the mainstem of the Mekong River, have disrupted the river's flow, leading to changes in hydrology, reduced dry-season water flow, increased saline intrusion, and erosion. These factors are making the economic situation in the Mekong Delta increasingly challenging, resulting in difficult and unstable living conditions.

Recently, emigration from the Mekong Delta has outpaced that of other regions in the country, particularly among highly educated young workers. The migration rate to the southeast region, especially Binh Duong province and Ho Chi Minh City, has consistently been the highest during the period from 2016 to 2021 (Vietnam General Statistics Office). Therefore, in this research, the author will analyze and objectively evaluate the factors affecting the Post-Graduation labor migration intentions of university students in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Migration

The term "migration," derived from the Latin word "migrate," signifies a change in one's habitual place of residence. The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2018) provides the following definition: "A migrant is any individual who is in the process of moving or has moved across international borders or within the confines of a nation, away from their customary place of residence. This definition applies regardless of (1) legal status, (2) voluntariness or involuntariness of the movement, (3) the causes behind the migration, or (4) the duration of their stay."

In contrast, as per the World Bank (2016), "Internal migrants are individuals who have relocated across administrative boundaries within the geographical borders of a single country." The United Nations offers guidance for the measurement of internal migration, defining it as "geographical relocation from one defined area to another within a specified time frame, encompassing a shift in place of residence" (UN, 1970).

Moreover, the definitions of migration and migrants are subject to variation depending on the data source, including population surveys, migration surveys, and household surveys. Baranov & Breev (1969) link migration to labor, asserting that any form of human movement across territorial regions entails alterations in location, activity, and occupation. Henry S. Shryock (1973) associates migration with the duration of residence, contending that it involves geographic or spatial relocation accompanied by changes in habitual living locations within administrative units. He posits that temporary shifts in residence, such as visits, tourism, trade, or brief border crossings, do not qualify as migration.

Bilsborrow (1996) identifies two fundamental aspects of migration: (1) geographical space—migration entails the crossing of an administrative, political, or geographic boundary, and (2) duration—migration requires a specified period of residence in a different locale. It is essential to recognize that not all forms of movement are categorized as migration.

In synthesis, while diverse perspectives exist on migration, several key points converge. Migration constitutes the act of human relocation from one locale to another for purposes of habitation. The delineation of departure and destination locations may pertain to territorial regions or administrative units. The motivations for migration may encompass

a wide spectrum of economic and non-economic factors, ultimately culminating in the act of migration and a stipulated duration of residence.

2.2 Literature review

Ernst Georg Ravenstein, in his pioneering work in 1885, laid the foundation for the study of migration theories by employing survey data collected in England and Wales (Ravenstein, 1885). He argued that migration was closely connected to 'push-pull' factors. Push factors, including low wages, high unemployment rates, inadequate healthcare, and political variables such as conflicts, ethnicity, and nationality, as well as economic factors, were identified as driving individuals to leave their habitual places of residence. Essentially, the primary motivation for migration was the promise of better economic opportunities elsewhere. Ravenstein's observations also encompassed key demographic characteristics among migrants, revealing trends such as a preference for urban destinations, higher rates of rural-to-urban migration, a higher incidence of female migration, longer distances traveled by male migrants, and a predominance of adult migrants. Furthermore, Ravenstein noted that migration tended to increase with economic development, as burgeoning trade, industry, and improved transportation infrastructures fueled this phenomenon. This foundational theory set the stage for subsequent migration theories, including the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM), Dual Labor Market Theory, Historical-Structural Theory, and World Systems Theory. The Social Capital Theory, as proposed by de Haas (2007), provides a theoretical framework to explain the enduring nature of international migration.

Subsequent research sought to build upon Ravenstein's insights by identifying the factors propelling migration. Push factors were associated with the origin (place of departure) of migrants and encompassed considerations such as low wages, high unemployment rates, inadequate healthcare facilities in the place of origin, political factors (political conflicts, ethnicity, nationality), economic factors, cultural factors (Lee, 1966), low labor productivity, and labor surpluses in agricultural regions (Lewis, 1954; Lee, 1966). The desire to depart rural areas and homelands under the influence of natural disasters (Lee, 1966), referred to as potential push forces arising from natural hazards, also played a role in motivating migration. Conversely, pull factors were typically linked to the destination of migrants and encompassed aspects such as wage differentials between rural and urban areas (Harris and Todaro, 1970), job opportunities, disparities in living standards and conditions, the allure of urban lifestyles (the aspiration to become urban citizens, with cities being particularly attractive to young migrants) (Lee, 1966), industrialization, and urbanization (Lewis, 1954).

The New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) theory posits that migration decisions hinge on the characteristics of both the migrant and their family (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Stark and Taylor, 1991). Furthermore, the conditions and characteristics of both the origin and destination are crucial factors influencing the 'push' and 'pull' forces acting upon migrants (Mayda, 2007; Kim and Cohen, 2010; Ackah and Medvedev, 2012, as cited in Coxhead et al., 2015). Lee (1966) and Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler (2003) also highlighted key intermediary factors, such as obstacles that motivate individuals to migrate but hinder their ability to do so, such as migration costs (migration is often not feasible for the impoverished, particularly impoverished youth and those in dire poverty), emotional ties to family, friends, and neighbors, and 'individual factors' including age, gender, marital status, and the number of dependents. Each individual's unique circumstances and perceptions lead to varying attitudes toward migration decisions. The acceptance of migration as a livelihood strategy is influenced by the degree of social integration/exclusion, which is reflected in access to and control over resources. This also helps explain why, in identical circumstances and living conditions, some people choose to migrate while others opt to remain.

Coxhead et al. (2015) undertook a study investigating the determinants of individual migration decisions in Vietnam, a country experiencing increasing levels of regional labor mobility. The study utilized data from the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS) in 2012 and found that the likelihood of migration was closely related to individual, household, and community-level characteristics. Greater probabilities of migration were associated with younger individuals and those with education beyond high school. Migrants were more likely to originate from households headed by individuals with higher levels of education, households headed by females, and households with a higher youth dependency ratio.

Abdulai (2016) conducted a study that offers a fresh empirical assessment of the socio-economic characteristics of Ghanaian migrants and the determinants of internal migration in Ghana. Data for this study were obtained from the Poverty Escape Migration (POEM) dataset, a collaborative initiative between the Migration Research Centre at the University of Ghana and the University of Sussex. Based on a model elucidating family behavior regarding migration decisions, this study identified economic factors as the primary drivers of migration from the northern region. Additionally, social networks emerged as a significant influence in the migration process of individuals in the study area.

2.3 The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

TPB was formulated by Ajzen (1975), originating from his earlier Theory of Reasoned Action. TPB serves as a framework for comprehending the dynamics of human behavioral alterations. According to TPB, changes in human behavior are neither entirely volitional nor strictly controlled; instead, they are influenced by three key determinants in the decision-making process: Behavioral Attitude (BA), Subjective Norm (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) (Science Direct Freedom Collection, 2018).

In the context of individual migration, these three determinants also play a role in shaping decision-making. TPB posits that the decision to embark on migration is shaped by a multitude of factors, encompassing demographic, economic, and environmental considerations. These factors can be categorized into three primary groups within the TPB framework.

Factor 1 - Behavioral Attitude (BA): Migrants hold the conviction that migration will lead them to attain specific outcomes. This motivational element assumes a pivotal role in their migration decision-making, instilling confidence in their ability to achieve their objectives.

Factor 2 - Subjective Norm (SN): This factor entails individuals' perception of the societal norms and pressures they encounter throughout the migration process. It encompasses the support they receive during migration and the social norms that govern their conduct during the migration journey.

Factor 3 - Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC): This final factor in the prediction of migration behavior encapsulates individuals' perceptions and effective utilization of available assistance during the migration process.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

In the framework of this research study, the author have concentrated their efforts on investigating the phenomenon of labor migration among university students in the Mekong Delta region, particularly their intention to migrate to the Southeastern region of Vietnam. To discern the determinants influencing the intention of post-graduation labor migration among university students, the researchers have employed the Logit regression model formulated as follows:

$$M_{ij} = f(\text{BA}, \text{SN}, \text{PBC})$$

The dependent variable in this model is binary in nature, taking on a value of 1 when university students harbor intentions of embarking on labor migration from the Mekong Delta to the Southeastern region, and 0 when they lack such intentions. The independent variables encompass elements associated with the perceptual and evaluative dimensions of university students, specifically focusing on three aspects: Behavioral Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behavioral Control. To gather empirical data, the author conducted a survey involving 400 final-year university students hailing from diverse universities located in various provinces and cities. This survey encompassed regions such as Can Tho City, An Giang Province, and Tra Vinh Province, effectively representing the population of university students within the Mekong Delta region. After conducting the survey and eliminating questionnaires that did not meet the criteria, the final sample size for the study comprised 352 observations.

The suggested framework, deduced from the comprehensive literature review, is depicted in the diagram below:

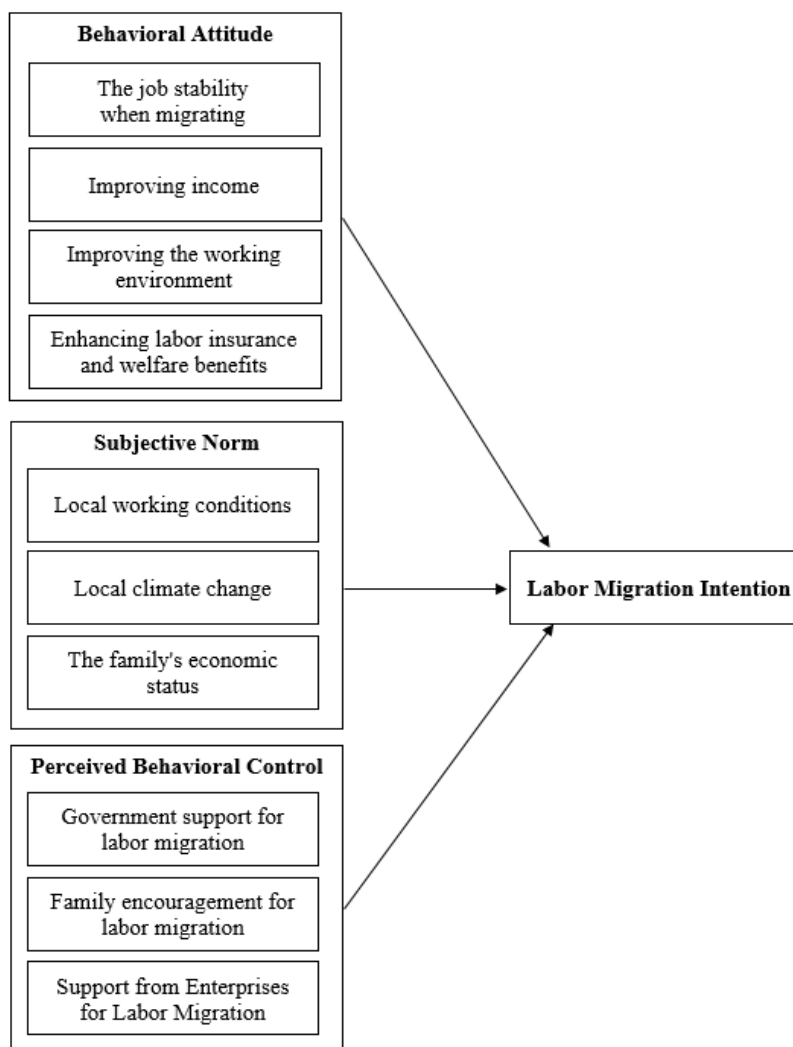


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

With regard to the allocation of the sample, among the 352 final-year university students who were surveyed, it was observed that 52.8% of them hailed from universities located within the city of Can Tho, namely, Can Tho University, Tay Do University, Nam Can Tho University, and Can Tho University of Economics and Technology. Additionally, 19.9% of the students were enrolled at An Giang University, while 27.3% were attending Tra Vinh University.

Concerning the academic disciplines pursued by these students, a broad spectrum was evident, and these disciplines were classified into seven major categories. Notably, the highest proportion of students were pursuing engineering degrees, constituting 27.6% of the total. Subsequently, the other prominent areas of study included Business, Information Technology, Agriculture, Education, Healthcare, and Languages.

Among 352 final-year students who were included in the survey, a substantial portion, specifically 121 students, constituting 34.4% of the total, expressed their intention to engage in labor migration beyond the Mekong Delta region. The majority of these students articulated their relocation plans directed towards the Southeastern region of Vietnam. It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of this group, precisely 109 students, indicated their aspirations to settle in Ho Chi Minh City, whereas 46 students showed a preference for Binh Duong Province, and an additional 38 students exhibited an inclination towards Binh Phuoc Province.

Table 1: Characteristics of the research sample

Criteria	Frequency (Student)	Ratio (%)
Area		
Can Tho City	186	52.8
An Giang Province	70	19.9
Tra Vinh Province	96	27.3
Fields of Study		
Bussiness	84	23.9
Engineering	97	27.6
Agriculture	42	11.9
Information Technology	67	19.0
Languages	18	5.1
Education	25	7.1
Healthcare	19	5.4
Labor Migration Intention		
Yes	121	34.4
No	231	65.6
Intended job location after Graduation		
Hometown in Mekong Delta	42	11.9
Another province in Mekong Delta	79	22.4
Ho Chi Minh City	109	31.0
Binh Duong Province	46	13.1
Binh Phuoc Province	38	10.8
Other provinces or cities in the Southeast region	25	7.1
Other	13	3.7
Total	352	100.0

Source: Survey results of students in the Mekong Delta, 2022

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 2 illustrates that concerning the various influencing factors on the intention of labor migration after graduation, university students in the Mekong Delta region assessed these factors with an average score ranging from 3.06 to 4.39. Interestingly, individuals shared a wide spectrum of perspectives, with some expressing strong disagreement and others displaying a high level of agreement. This variation can be attributed to the diverse range of academic disciplines among the students, resulting in varying preferences for ideal working conditions, distinct immigration policies for different occupational groups, and differing viewpoints and opinions among the students regarding labor migration.

Table 2: The students' evaluation of the factors influencing labor migration

Factor	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	The level of importance
The job stability when migrating	1	5	4.39	Very Important
Improving income	1	5	4.21	Very Important
Improving the working environment	2	5	3.55	Important
Enhancing labor insurance and welfare benefits	1	5	3.25	Neutral
Local working conditions	1	5	3.59	Important
Local climate change	1	5	3.76	Important
The family's economic status	1	5	3.21	Neutral
Government support for labor migration	1	5	3.06	Unimportant
Family encouragement for labor migration	2	5	3.66	Important
Support from Enterprises for Labor Migration	1	5	3.71	Important

Source: Survey results of students in the Mekong Delta, 2022

To eliminate variables that do not meet the requirements before conducting factor analysis, the reliability of the variables on the scale is assessed based on the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the components of the scale and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for each measurement variable. Variables with total item correlation coefficients less than 0.3 are excluded. A scale is considered to have good reliability when it varies within the range 0.70 - 0.80. If the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is greater than 0.60, the scale is deemed acceptable in terms of reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). After the preliminary assessment of the scale and the reliability of the observed variables using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, these variables are subjected to testing in Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the scale. The results of the reliability testing of the scale using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient indicate that the scale components for factors influencing the Post-Graduation labor migration intentions of university students in the Mekong Delta all have Cronbach Alpha coefficients that are acceptable in terms of reliability (greater than the required 0.6). Additionally, when examining the Corrected item total correlation coefficients of the observed variables, they all meet the requirement of > 0.30 (Hair et al., 2006). Therefore, no observed variables are excluded, and the scale is deemed suitable for use in the subsequent Exploratory Factor Analysis.

Table 3: The reliability coefficients of the scales

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected item total correlation coefficients
The job stability when migrating	0.687	0.603 – 0.694
Improving income	0.752	0.550 – 0.725
Improving the working environment	0.840	0.569 – 0.783
Enhancing labor insurance and welfare benefits	0.763	0.653 – 0.698
Local working conditions	0.795	0.629 – 0.775
Local climate change	0.650	0.647 – 0.662
The family's economic status	0.819	0.603 – 0.761
Government support for labor migration	0.735	0.629 – 0.719
Family encouragement for labor migration	0.806	0.642 – 0.736
Support from Enterprises for Labor Migration	0.638	0.575 – 0.633

Source: Survey results of students in the Mekong Delta, 2022

Following the initial assessment of the components associated with the factors influencing the labor migration intentions of university students in the Mekong Delta for their reliability, as determined by the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, all observed variables were found to meet the prerequisites for conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

The chosen method for factor extraction was Principal Components with Varimax rotation.

The outcomes of the EFA process were concluded after the second iteration. During this iteration, one observed variable within the 'Government support for labor migration' factor category, specifically 'Government's information support for labor migration,' was excluded due to a factor loading below the threshold of 0.5, as established by Gerbing and Anderson (1988), in the prior EFA analysis.

The results of the second EFA iteration revealed a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of 0.857, and Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded statistical significance (P value = 0.000). Nine distinct factor groups were successfully extracted, accounting for a cumulative variance of 62.943%. Importantly, the observed variables within each factor group displayed no instances of cross-loading and consistently met the prescribed loading criterion of above 0.5, thus attaining the required standard of validation.

The research employed a Forward method, sequentially introducing each independent variable into the model and retaining them if they had statistical significance until the model yielded the best results. The analysis results revealed that out of the total of 9 factors influencing the post-graduation labor migration intentions of university students in the Mekong Delta, 6 factors were found to be statistically significant. These factors were ranked in decreasing order of impact as follows: Improving the working environment, job stability when migrating, improving income, family encouragement for labor migration, the family's economic status, and local climate change. The total correct prediction probability reached 74.28%, and the value of -2Log likelihood was 92.462, which was sufficiently small to affirm the overall suitability of the research model for the study area. Additionally, the results indicated that all 6 factors among the identified ones exerted a positive influence on the labor migration intentions of university students in the Mekong Delta.

Table 4: The results of the analysis of factors influencing the labor migration intentions of university students

Factor	Coefficient	P value	Exp(B)
Constant	0.375	0.062	3.484
Improving the working environment	2.975	0.036	1.394
The job stability when migrating	1.949	0.021	0.845
Improving income	1.882	0.018	1.263
Local climate change	1.137	0.005	2.369
The family's economic status	1.086	0.027	1.367
Family encouragement for labor migration	0.747	0.004	2.496
- 2Log likelihood			92.462
The total correct prediction probability			74.28%

Source: Survey results of students in the Mekong Delta, 2022

The research findings strongly emphasize the pivotal role played by the nature of work and the work environment as the most profound factors influencing the migration decisions of university students in the Mekong Delta. Among the essential needs that labor migrants seek to fulfill—such as the working environment, job stability, and income improvement—these factors wield the greatest influence and decisively shape the labor migration intentions of university students, propelling them from the Mekong Delta to various provinces and cities in the Southeastern region of Vietnam.

In addition, the reasons related to climate change and living environment are gradually gaining significance in the decision-making process among the younger generation, specifically university students. Through the survey process, it becomes evident that a majority of students with intentions to migrate for work do not perceive climate change as the primary driver behind their migration decision. Instead, they consider labor migration

as a means to address other factors, such as working conditions, income, and more. Nonetheless, climate change remains a factor that students take into account when contemplating labor migration. They view it as a consideration in their pursuit of a more suitable living environment and long-term stability. These students possess a clear and distinct awareness of the impacts of climate change on their lives and the livelihoods of their families, readily identifying phenomena associated with climate change, including storms, floods, saltwater intrusion, and erosion.

On a different note, an intriguing revelation within the research results pertains to 'The family's economic status' and 'Family encouragement for labor migration,' both of which exert a positive influence on the labor migration intentions of university students in the Mekong Delta. Some prior migration studies, typically the studies of Abdulai (2016), Coxhead et al. (2015), and Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler (2003), have indicated that labor migrant households often belong to economically disadvantaged households, and the family's economic condition is considered a negative factor affecting migration decisions. However, the present study yields contrasting findings, revealing that students from families with better economic statuses and stronger family support exhibit a higher likelihood of migrating for work after graduation compared to their peers. This can be explained by the fact that university students typically choose labor migration not due to economic hardship in their hometowns but to seek better job opportunities and a dynamic work environment that fosters learning and skill development. In this context, the family's economic condition serves as significant support for students, especially during the initial stages of their labor migration journey. For students with better family economic conditions and strong family support, the transition to labor migration becomes less challenging.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the analysis underscore the substantial influence of factors related to employment and working conditions on the labor migration intentions of university students in the Mekong Delta. These factors exert the strongest impact on the students' intentions to engage in labor migration. Additionally, the intentions are influenced by the family's economic status and family encouragement for labor migration. Strong family economic conditions and family support play a pivotal role in supporting students' intentions to engage in labor migration. Lastly, the awareness of climate change and its impacts on livelihoods and family life also serves as a motivating factor for university students to consider labor migration.

From these research findings, it becomes evident that the Mekong Delta region must implement more open and investment-friendly policies, particularly attracting large enterprises with advanced technology and management capabilities to generate more employment opportunities and improve overall working conditions locally. In doing so, the Mekong Delta can retain a high-quality workforce, thereby stimulating regional economic development. Furthermore, local governments should also consider policies that promote and support economic development models suitable for the context of climate change. Instead of viewing climate change solely as a negative aspect, it can be leveraged to transform agricultural and aquacultural practices towards sustainability. A good environmental adaptation strategy can enhance the region's appeal to the younger generation, encouraging them to stay in their homeland.

Nevertheless, due to time and resource constraints in this study, cultural, healthcare, and educational factors were not analyzed in relation to the labor migration intentions of university students. Therefore, future research should incorporate these factors to further refine the research model and provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the intentions and decisions regarding labor migration among young people, especially university students in the Mekong Delta region.

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