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## THE SURGE OF BRAIN DRAIN EMIGRATION IN NIGERIA

### Abstract

The paper answers the puzzle of the protracted surge of brain drain emigration over the years despite interventions through policies and reforms by the Nigerian government. Brain drain has affected the country both politically and economically as well as socio-culturally. Skilled professionals are the powerhouse of any country, as they are the determinants of growth and development. Nigeria has suffered from a pandemic of a highly skilled labour force seeking better opportunities abroad, which – in turn – drains the progress of the country. The study identifies the less-explored structural drivers that have a stronger influence on the surge of emigration in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper investigates the deeply rooted systemic and structural factors that influence the persistent increase in the emigration of skilled professionals, causing brain drain in Nigeria. To achieve this, it adopts case study methods, which delve into an in-depth study to uncover structural or systemic drivers and their impacts on the Nigerian milieu. The approach evaluates the effectiveness of the policies and reforms in reducing brain drain emigration over the years, observing the periods they were implemented and their remarkable impact, utilising published statistics. The data is sourced from secondary materials such as government publications, reports, survey results, websites, books, journal articles, newsletters and dissertations. The emphasis on Nigeria, among other African countries, is critical because Nigeria is known to be one of the African countries with a very high number of emigrants to Europe and North America.

Keywords: brain drain, emigration, Nigeria, policies

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## INTRODUCTION

Emigration is part of human existence, as people leave their homes or countries for several reasons. These reasons may stem from the need for security of lives and property, improved living conditions, marital purposes and tourism (Ogbu, 2019). A nation cannot overlook the surge of brain drain emigration, as losing its skilled nationals stagnates the country's growth and development. The essence of this paper is to assess the brain drain situation using Nigeria as a case study. Over the years, Nigeria has implemented several policies to reduce the remarkable increase in brain drain emigration. The problem is that brain drain emigration continues to surge as the years go by. The present Nigerian administration has implemented a national healthcare policy for the last three years (Olowojalu, 2025). Still, statistics have shown that the emigration of healthcare workers has not reduced, even after the judicious implementation of national healthcare policies. This has led to a shortage of health workers in hospitals, and healthcare workers are overwhelmed with attending to numerous patients. Akinwale et al. (2023) pointed out the surge in emigration of the best brains in the healthcare sector, depriving patients of accessing quality healthcare services. Undoubtedly, the emigration of skilled professionals has deeply affected the country's labour population, contributing to diminished institutional trust and lower retention intentions. They are always conscious of accessing better living conditions when they emigrate. Many of the professionals who are not emigrating do not have sufficient funds to do so; they would not hesitate if they had the chance (Adikhari et al., 2021). The tertiary institutions invest time and resources in training high-skilled graduates, but these skilled graduates most often do not stay in Nigeria to contribute their quota to the development of the country. This is not a good outlook for a nation that wants to pursue a brain retention policy (Anetoh & Vincent, 2020). It not only affects the labour force, as studies show that youths who emigrate for further studies abroad are not interested in returning and investing in Nigeria. They prefer to stay abroad, even if they are sometimes promised jobs back home. In a country where even citizens who are believed to be comfortable still find a way to relocate abroad, we must understand that the driving factors may be beyond the surface level that has been popularised. There are still unseen factors that provide new insight into the subject of study, especially skilled personnel who leave their countries. This brain drain emigration in Nigeria cannot be

ignored due to the significant socio-economic impact it has on the country. The problem statement highlights the protracted emigration of highly skilled professionals. It delves into the deeper influences that cause this ongoing surge and its inalienable sectoral impact(s) in Nigeria. It reveals the prevalence of intermittent and poorly implemented policies in Nigeria.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

The paper intends to explore why, despite the interventions and reforms of the Nigerian government in addressing the surge of brain drain emigration, there is still a remarkable increase in brain drain emigration year on year. The problem stems from the persistent surge of brain drain emigration despite the efforts of national and international bodies to mitigate the issue. This ongoing challenge might not necessarily be solely attributed to poverty or inadequate living conditions. It can involve a combination of political, economic, social and psychological factors that underlie the commonly cited driving factors. The most effective way to uproot a plant is from the root; if one focuses on the stem or branches, the objective of removing the plant will be unsuccessful because it will regrow in a few days. Therefore, a thorough diagnosis of the deeply rooted driving factors is vital to addressing the escalating increase in brain drain emigration, and this is the central research problem.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why has the surge in brain drain emigration in Nigeria lingered on?
2. How has the protracted surge in brain drain emigration affected Nigeria in political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions?
3. To what extent have Nigerian policies, reforms and interventions affected skilled emigration, and through which mechanisms?

## SIGNIFICANCE

Policies born from evidence-based research are effective in addressing social problems in a society. This paper is important for providing another

perspective on driving factors that have not been wholly addressed by the intervention of the Nigerian government. Viewing the issue from another angle can offer revelations to policymakers and interested researchers on how to effectively address the ongoing brain drain emigration in Nigeria. It also serves as an addition to the body of literature tackling the surge in emigration in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. This review contributes to public policy and emigration studies by synthesising evidence on Nigeria's governance and implementation constraints as proximal determinants of skilled emigration, thereby informing realistic, evidence-based retention strategies.

## RATIONALE FOR FOCUSING ON NIGERIA

Nigeria has the highest percentage of emigration from Africa, particularly due to economic emigration (Adhikari et al., 2021). Isbell and Ojewale (2018) reported that 35% of Nigerian emigrants are emigrating for job opportunities, 31% are leaving to escape poverty and financial hardship and 10% intend to pursue better business opportunities. Supporting this, the findings also indicate that over 5.8 million men and women have emigrated to Europe, primarily to Italy, Spain and other Western European countries (Adibe et al., 2023). Adegbam and Osungboye (2024) raised concerns about the number of academic lecturers resigning from their positions in Nigeria and seeking opportunities abroad. Most of their destinations have been other countries in Africa, North America and Europe, where they are offered better pay. Adhikari et al. (2021) recorded the increase in Nigerian emigrants from 450,000 in 1990 to 1.4 million in 2019. There has been a significant increase of 31% in Europe and 22% in North America since 1990 (Adhikari et al., 2021). Nigeria remitted US\$25 billion from the diaspora through foreign direct investment and structured development initiatives (Adhikari et al., 2021). Nigeria has one of the highest population figures in Africa and the world, and a significant percentage of its labour force is employed. With this, it can be predicted that there will be an exponential increase in emigration if there are no structural changes to a system that retains skilled professionals.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A critical investigation of the literature focused on the surge of emigration in Nigeria. The first aim is to assess the factors that have been documented as the causes of brain drain emigration in Nigeria. The second part delves into the interventions by the Nigerian government to curb the increase in brain drain emigration. The objective is to identify the changes that the reforms and interventions have created and to ascertain if there is a significant change. This observation will lead us to new insights on the drivers of emigration, the effects and the policy challenges in Nigeria that have been least explored. Adegbogun et al. (2024) have attributed the cause of the brain drain emigration syndrome to the government's failure to invest in human capital. They posited that the chances of human capital flight are high when there is no assured investment, and when human capital flight is high, it dwindles the economy. This position is supported by Adegbami and Osungboye (2024), who identified the rising unemployment rate in Nigeria as a significant factor driving emigration. They noted that 60% of Nigerian youths are dissatisfied with their living conditions and are eager to seek better opportunities abroad. Furthermore, they emphasised the poor living conditions, with many Nigerians unable to afford basic necessities and lacking access to adequate healthcare services. This deficiency in healthcare is not solely due to inadequate facilities; a survey conducted by Yarhey and Adeboye (2023) at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, revealed that a shortage of healthcare workers is a major issue. The study found that 57.4% of doctors expressed intentions to emigrate. In a study conducted at Ekiti State Teaching Hospital in Nigeria, it was found that 79.5% of the interns and 70.6% of the resident doctors expressed an intention to emigrate (Yarhere and Adeboye, 2023). Njogwani (2023), while reporting the effect of brain drain in the health sector, stated that the ratio of a Nigerian doctor to patients is 1:4,000–5,000. This is below the standard of the World Health Organization (WHO), which is one doctor to 600 patients. Esan (2023) outlined the reasons for brain drain emigration in the health sector, attributed to low allocation of funds to the healthcare sector from the Nigerian budget, low pay and outdated facilities in the hospitals. They emphasised the need for healthcare workers to be protected from health and safety risks, which the Nigerian government is meeting with the expectation. The healthcare workforce is highly essential to any country's growth and should be protected at all costs. When this sector suffers from

brain drain, the mortality rate surges, which is not a good outlook for a nation. As noted earlier, the Nigerian government has come up with policies to mitigate brain drain emigration, especially in essential sectors like the healthcare sector, the educational sector and the food industries. This review includes exploring those policies. According to Olowojalu et al. (2025), Nigeria increased its funding allocations, particularly to the healthcare sector, to enhance healthcare services, purchase modern, equipped health facilities and invest in the training of healthcare workers. Olaniyi Olaleye (2023) notes that between 2019 and 2021, Nigeria raised its federal annual budget allocation to the health sector from 434 billion naira in 2018 to 1.02 trillion naira in 2023. Eneh (2022) pointed out that Nigeria witnessed the highest allocation of budget in 2020 and 2019; the percentage of allocation to the healthcare sector was 4.16% and 4.18%, respectively, compared to 2018, which was 3.73% of the federal budget. In 2020, the federal allocation to the healthcare sector reached a peak of 441 billion naira, comprising 381.1 billion naira for recurrent expenditure and 59.9 billion naira for capital expenditure, marking a significant milestone for the sector (Eneh, 2022). According to Obianagwa and Ejiofor (2025), they observed the exodus of medical doctors from 2020 to 2024. In 2020, the number of medical doctors was relatively small, at 1,242, compared to 2021 and 2022, which peaked at 2,607 and 2,900, respectively. The number of medical doctors declined to 1,417 in 2023, which was attributed to stringent immigration policies in the United Kingdom and Canada. In 2024, the highest number was recorded, with 3,979 medical doctors relocating abroad. We can observe that despite the interventions of the Nigerian government through its policies, it did not affect significant change in the number of medical doctors leaving Nigeria. According to Madueke and Faith (2024), there was no significant change in the emigration of workers even after the implementation of a new minimum wage, which was a 50% increase. This review of the change in minimum wage has been done concurrently over the last five years. During this period, the emigration of skilled professionals, particularly health workers, has increased significantly (Madueke and Faith, 2024). Onah et al. (2021) accounted for the marginal increase of 51% from 2017 to 2021 in the number of Nigerian-trained nurses who emigrated to the United Kingdom. It is important to note that within this period, the Nigerian government reviewed its minimum wage and enacted an increase in minimum wages along with other economic policy reviews. Most urban centres in Nigeria, such as Lagos, Abuja, Rivers, Anambra

and Port Harcourt, produce the bulk of skilled Nigerian emigrants, many of whom are believed to possess tertiary educational certificates (Migration Control Info, 2023). These urban centres have a higher percentage of skilled workers with significant income and wages. In fact, in comparison to other states and cities in Nigeria, they have a higher minimum wage and revenue generation in a year. From these reviews, it appears that the educated and the wealthy have higher chances of relocating abroad than the other categories of Nigerians. This is supported by the statistics presented earlier. It is possible that addressing these factors may not be sufficient to reduce brain drain emigration. This review has provided valuable insights into the persistent factors influencing Nigerian emigration.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The factors behind Nigerian emigration reflect the push-pull theory. Saraswati et al. (2025) conceptualised the push-pull theory more simply. Some factors push individuals to leave one state for another and create dissatisfaction, including the notion of wanting better living conditions. Ezemenaka (2013). Social conditions have influenced Nigeria's unregulated migration pool. The push-pull theory clearly explains the inherent motives of both national and international migration. If the social conditions are not addressed, the conditions will remain a logical reason for Nigeria's loss of human capital and its ongoing decline. This theory clearly shows why the economic emigration pool in Nigeria increases with time; the country has not been able to address the unfavourable conditions, causing people to leave in search of favourable conditions elsewhere. This assertion is further buttressed by Ojiugo et al. (2021) push and pull factors, which give us insight into how being in a disadvantaged place can lead to higher chances of emigration. As Osuoka (1999) notes, Nigeria's economic posture is characterised by an extractive outlook, which has resulted in stunted growth. When the institutions are influenced by extractive political institutions, there is an absence of inclusiveness and localisation, which is antithetical to growth and development. The migration pathway has been highly one-sided, from underdeveloped/developing countries to the developed ones, and a major part of it has been attributed to globalisation (Obi Ani et al., 2020). People interpret the standard of living in Europe as a source of fulfilment, leading them to strive for a fulfilling "standard of living". This theory

is applicable and relevant in exploring the driving factors of migration, as the trend has always been more pronounced from the Global South to the Global North. Therefore, Nigerians often migrate due to both push and pull factors. A second theory that illuminates the reality of Nigerian emigration is the brain drain theory. This theory classifies migration as the emigration of highly skilled workers from developing countries to developed countries (Ogbenika, 2019). This theory reflects the nature of Nigerian emigration, as over the decades, a large pool of highly talented and educated migrants has been drawn from critical sectors like healthcare, education and technology. Therefore, this kind of emigration has crippled Nigeria's economy and led to stunted national growth. In this, brain drain is only peculiar to the sending countries, while the destinations enjoy brain gain. Brain drain emigration refers to the exodus of skilled and highly qualified professionals in the fields of medicine, technology, entertainment, arts and culture from one geographical location to another. This concept is majorly studied in economics and political literature, as the rise of economic emigration has been a resultant effect of brain drain, most especially felt by the developing nations. The idea behind brain drain is that there must be a system that pulls people from certain countries, cities and towns to another place – or, on the other hand, a situation that has perpetually led to the mobility of human capital.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts the case study method, which launches the study into an in-depth analysis of the driving factors that cause the emigration of skilled professionals abroad. Secondary materials such as government publications, reports, survey results, websites, books, journal articles, newsletters and dissertations were utilised. The paper observed patterns, relationships and statistics to uncover how Nigerian policies, reforms and interventions have been able to mitigate the surge of emigration. The aim is to validate the presumption that factors influencing emigration are rather unseen but have an undeniable influence on brain drain emigration. The case study approach was important in explaining why the major Nigerian reforms and policies have not been able to reduce the surge in brain emigration from Nigeria. It examined the post-period of Nigerian policy initiatives to ascertain whether the reforms have had an impact on the reduction



of emigration from Nigeria over the years. The purpose of the document review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the least explored drivers and impacts while also identifying the limitations of Nigerian policies. The scope of the literature review was streamlined to focus on brain drain in Nigeria; the selection methods involved using keywords such as brain drain, emigration of highly skilled professionals to the Global North (the US, UK, Canada and Europe). In terms of duration, the statistics on emigration were limited to the period 2015–2025, when major Nigerian policy reforms took place. The inclusion strategy includes peer-reviewed journals and official reports examining drivers, sectoral impacts and policy interventions associated with brain drain emigration in Nigeria. Exclusion criteria include illegal migration and forced migration, as well as migration due to tourism, entertainment and sports during this period. It was essentially exploratory and explanatory, as the review provided new insights into the issues of brain drain emigration and ways to mitigate them. This is made possible through careful examination of the recurrent themes of systemic/structural factors that trigger brain drain emigration, their impacts on the country and the effectiveness of Nigerian reforms and policies. The limitation of the study is its limited generalisability of the findings, as it only focuses on brain drain emigration in Nigeria; it cannot be widely applicable when addressing other forms of emigration, like illegal emigration, emigration based on family reunification, tourism and entertainment in Nigeria.

## RESULTS

The results indicate why reforms and interventions are not effective in stopping the lingering surge in emigration. The study has given us new insights stemming from deeply rooted systemic and structural factors and influences that have an undeniable impact on the outcome of brain drain emigration. While the push and pull theoretical framework is still relevant in understanding the surge of brain drain emigration in Nigeria, the result shows a deviation from the popularised driving factors; these deeply rooted structural traits hold a stronger influence on the outcome of brain drain emigration in Nigeria. These push and pull factors have significantly crippled Nigeria's human capital retention capacity, factors that are rooted in the political system and the nature of policymakers in Nigeria. The results also reveal the inefficiency of the Nigerian government's interventions and

policies to reduce brain drain emigration in Nigeria due to some inalienable forces and factors that will be later discussed.

## DISCUSSION

### PUSH FACTORS

#### BAD LEADERSHIP

A nation is a reflection of its leadership, its ideas and its character. Nigerian leaders, in this light, have failed to meet the expectations of their citizens over time. The leaders have lost the trust of the citizens. The lack of trust, especially from the highly skilled professionals, has been a product of betrayals over the years by public office. Citizens believe that a Nigerian leader does not have the interest of the people at heart and, therefore, promulgates policies that serve the interests of a few rather than the interests of the people. In a country where diligent labour is not being rewarded with incentives and national recognition, people have access to incentives and privileges based on political and cultural affiliations. According to Omonijo et al. (2011), bad leadership is synonymous with a failed state. A failed state has the attributes of a country with the worst living conditions, including political instability, abuse of civil and human rights and an inability to access basic public goods like healthcare facilities, education, good housing schemes, quality food and job opportunities. This illustration indicates that poor living conditions are rooted in ineffective leadership. It has been noted by the review that when people experience stagnation in growth and development, they often seek opportunities to emigrate for better prospects. The elite group in Nigeria, which often forms the political class that governs, has successfully monopolised resources that are intended for public goods. The importance of leadership in any given country cannot be overstated. A nation that thrives in the global arena is evidence of good and strategic leadership (Omonijo et al., 2011). Ighosemu and Ogidiagba (2022) described how Buhari's leadership style led to Nigerians leaving the country. The Buhari leadership system was characterised as lacking the capacity and ability to govern the diverse cultural, religious and intellectual communities; this reign birthed insecurity, poverty, unemployment, political and economic instability and human rights abuses. Since

the return of a democratic government, Nigeria has not experienced a sustained political system, which is deeply rooted in poor governance. The political leadership style has involved an exchange of loyalty for political appointments, even for the unqualified, resulting in weak institutions and ineffective public policies. The 26 years of the democratic regime have witnessed a surge in the migration of skilled professionals to North America, Europe and some parts of Africa for better opportunities. If the leadership is not effective, it does not matter how many resources are invested in addressing a social problem – it is like using a basket to fetch water.

#### LACK OF NATIONAL SPIRIT

As noted initially, Nigerians have lost belief in their country; many have written off the possibility of the country competing with the developed nations of the world. The lack of patriotism has, over time, germinated in the hearts of Nigerians, and this is not solely attributed to bad leadership. Nigerian identity has been evaluated through the lens of loyalty and patriotism, but it is questionable due to historical traces of ethnic tensions, religious violence, political violence, oppression and deprivation. Many of the segregated and deprived groups are sceptical about having a sense of belonging to the Nigerian identity. Nigerians have opted for emigration as an escape route and a means of liberation from national bondage; they have lost hope in Nigeria having a promising future (Ezenwa and Orji, 2024). Ebomoyi and Omoruyi (2021) conducted a survey to ascertain the views of Nigerian youths on their patriotism in the southern part of Nigeria, specifically in Edo State. Edo State is one of the states with the highest number of emigrants in Nigeria (Ebomoyi and Omoruyi, 2021). The results show that 32.47% of the sampled population are ready to renounce their national citizenship in favour of a foreign country if required. In a survey carried out in the southern part of Nigeria, 24.56% of the sampled population do not see Nigeria becoming a developed nation in the foreseeable future and have lost faith in the country. Akirinola (2021) has emphasised that the push and pull factors will not be adequately addressed if the narratives about the sending country are not changed, especially by its citizens and the media. There is an urgency for a paradigm shift from “patriotism nurturing emigration” entrenched in the minds of aspiring travellers to “patriotism nurturing identity” as a transformative tool that can change the hearts of Nigerians aspiring to travel.

## INFLATION

Low wages or salaries are not the major reason why skilled professionals leave; rather, it is the persistent rise in the price of goods and services (Manabette, 2022). The rise in inflation diminishes the economic value of professionals in Nigeria. High inflation has been persistent, even with reaffirmed economic policies. This factor has depreciated the value of the naira, making the cost of living, including higher food prices, healthcare and education fees, more expensive. Lagos is the commercial hub in Nigeria, where professionals are paid significantly higher salaries and wages than in other states. Still, reports show that the number of visas issued since 2019 has quadrupled (Okeke-Ihejirika & Odumegwu, 2022). This is a testament to the fact that inflation, if not controlled, can push people abroad in search of a stable economy. The mental stress Nigerians endure due to the fear of uncontrollable price increases, which can rise by an unimaginable percentage in a day, is worrisome. Household budget surveys suggest that high expenditure shares are utilised on essentials, limiting savings capacity.

## PULL FACTORS

### RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Global North has been a safe home for people who have been outspoken about the respect for human rights. These voices have been silenced in Nigeria due to its social and cultural exclusion strategy. Europe has become an attractive destination, especially for the elites and academia, where there is respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech and the dignity of human labour. Monda-Anumihe (2013) posited in her work that Nigerian women see Europe as a paradise. She explained that many Nigerian women consider Europe a beacon of hope, where they can be free from the unfavourable environment dominated by patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. During the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria in 2020, many youths faced all kinds of suppression and human rights abuses by the security forces who were meant to protect their lives. The African Polling Institute (2022) reported that Nigerians aged 18 to 35 were ready to leave the country, with a remarkable increase of 39% from 2019. One of the main reasons was the brutality that the youths experienced during the #EndSARS campaign in 2020. It was reported that the number of passports

issued and renewed during this period increased from about 1 million in 2021 to 1.9 million in 2022. The argument often posed by the youths as a reason to emigrate is that their values and perspectives are not being duly represented and respected by the Nigerian government. Many youths were traumatised by this tragic event, as they witnessed their counterparts die during a planned peaceful protest. Young people lost their lives, and many were unjustly detained without immediate access to lawyers. There were other human rights offences, but the #EndSARS protest was the last straw that the youths could endure, as they lost faith in Nigerian democracy. They were disappointed that their voices could not be heard by people who, by law, are meant to protect them. One of the celebrities, Obianuju Catherine Udeh, popularly known as DJ Switch, was at the scene where the Nigerian army shot unarmed protesters. Judging from her exact words reported by the Time newsletter (2024), "At that moment, I believed we would all die... [and] I thought, let me put this online, let people see what's happening, and let them see where we died." She narrated her ordeal of human rights abuse against her fellow compatriots. She and other well-meaning Nigerians who actively participated in the protests have relocated since 2020 due to safety concerns and have been included on the Nigerian government watchlist. Europe and America have been seen by activists, celebrities and highly professional youths as a blueprint for the advocated democracy, where every voice is heard and represented. This reason alone has led to a surge in emigration; many celebrities who have used their craft to speak out against the injustices of the Nigerian government now live in America and Europe, as they are assured of safety for themselves and their families.

#### WAGE DISPARITIES

This has been a major economic factor, acting as a powerful magnet that attracts skilled professionals abroad. There is a significant disparity between the wages of Nigerian professionals in Nigeria and those in similar positions overseas. This has been a crucial factor; even professionals with high-paying jobs are often dissatisfied, as they compare their salaries with those of their counterparts abroad. Dataphyte (2023) reports show that medical doctors at the entry level receive \$5,911.94 per annum compared to the annual salaries in the UK, US, Canada and Germany, respectively (\$138,000, \$316,000, \$194,000, \$183,000). The margin between

Nigeria and emigrant doctors in recipient countries is enough reason to pull them. Arguably, it will take Nigerian doctors an unthinkable period in Nigeria to catch up with their counterparts abroad in terms of financial security. A survey by Akinwale et al. (2023) showed that a professor's salary is within the range of 332,000 to 350,000 naira (\$221.18–\$233.17), while an entry-level position, which is an assistant lecturer, takes home (after tax) between 119,000 and 130,000 naira (\$79.28–\$86.61). Nwokocha (2015) compared the salaries of professors in Nigeria and other African countries, revealing a significant margin. The basic salary of a professor in South Africa annually is \$50,000, while the average professor's salary in America is within the range of \$117,683 to \$129,395 (Univstats, 2024). If care is not taken, Nigeria might as well train professionals to service the sectors of other countries that offer better salary packages.

#### NIGERIANS' NARRATIVES FOR EMIGRATION

There is a particular narrative popularised in Nigeria and throughout Africa that emigrating to the Global North automatically translates to wealth. These narratives are further depicted through the entertainment industry (music and films) with Nigerian roots, suggesting that Europe is like a paradise where everyone should wish to be. Such narratives have been popularised by the media, entertainment and film industries, portraying Europe and North America as places where fortune can be found and where one can live their best life. This factor cannot be overlooked because, even if everything is put in place to retain brains, perception and narratives sold to the public can be a compelling force. Okunade and Bakare (2020) emphasised the powerful impact social media has on Nigerian youth, which has popularised propaganda, misleading them to opt for emigration. They explained how social media influence has negatively promoted the youth-out emigration narrative. They argued that most social media users often make posts, comments and bios about their lifestyles abroad, which might not necessarily represent their reality.

#### IMPACT(S) OF BRAIN DRAIN EMIGRATION ON NIGERIA

The magnitude of the economic consequence is higher when a country experiences a high percentage of skilled emigration than any other kind of emigration. The likelihood of the country experiencing an economic decline is predictable. Skilled workers, such as doctors, lawyers, researchers,

academics and journalists, have been consistently leaving the country for a while and never returning; this trend is no doubt causing the economy of Nigeria to crumble. Most of our brilliant minds are also more productive in other countries due to the comfortable environment in which to thrive. The greatest misery that can befall a nation is losing talent; another easier route is through education. Nigerians often go abroad to study and do not wish to return to give back to society – as a result, Nigeria as a nation is likely to bear the brunt of criticism due to the availability of better social living conditions abroad. This section will explore the pros and cons of brain drain emigration in Nigeria. Nigeria has been at the mercy of brain drain emigration, and it is reflected in multi-dimensional ways (Ogbu, 2019). This paper delves into the political, economic and sociocultural effects.

## NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF BRAIN DRAIN EMIGRATION

### POLITICAL

It is a deficiency for the political stability of the country, as the great minds who are supposed to be important contributors to the political advancement of the nation leave. First of all, most Nigerian political activists have left the country due to intimidation and human rights violations. Over the years, the country has demotivated civic vibrancy in the hearts of its citizens, leading to a rise in political apathy. One of the core reasons for this is that individuals who uphold leadership and charismatic admiration have left the country. The political climate has not been favourable for activists to express themselves. Communities and civil groups have lost their political models to political asylum. These role models were voices for the voiceless, speaking out against the suppression of rights. The exodus of educated individuals can deplete the country's potential to produce competent leaders in the future, capable of driving sustainable and quality leadership (Freiyo, 2025). Educated Nigerians have made remarkable contributions as agents of transformation in other parts of the world. The likes of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Chimamanda Adichie have been significant contributors in their respective fields. According to *Premium Times* reports on November 9, 2022, eight Nigerian Americans were elected to top political positions. They were elected in the US midterm elections and serve as representatives in Georgia, Washington D.C. and Minnesota, respectively.

Nigerians are contributing to national development in other parts of the world at the expense of their own country.

#### ECONOMIC

It is no news that Nigeria loses human capital daily due to brain drain emigration. Foreign investors have been discouraged from investing in the labour force of Nigeria. Many of the high-skilled professionals who drive the economy and attract foreign investors have emigrated for better opportunities. The advantages outweigh the disadvantages when knowledge and skills are exported abroad. This is highlighted by a study conducted by Adebogun (2024) on the effects of brain drain emigration in Lagos State. The results show that a surge in emigration leads to stagnation in essential sectors such as healthcare and education.

#### SOCIO-CULTURAL

Brain drain has brought about a number of disadvantages for Nigeria. It has weakened family support networks and social bonds. Many children are separated from their parents, while parents spend long periods apart from their children; husbands and wives are often divided as well. This situation generates social tension within families, communities and cultural groups (Giwa, 2024). Emigration has also disrupted the transmission of cultural beliefs and traditions from one generation to the next. In Nigeria, experienced individuals have traditionally borne the responsibility of passing on knowledge to the younger generation. However, emigration has become a major obstacle, creating a barrier to the transfer of cultural knowledge.

### POSITIVE EFFECTS OF BRAIN DRAIN EMIGRATION

#### POLITICAL

Nigerians abroad have continued to contribute their quota to the strengthening of democracy back home. There are two cases in which Nigerians came together to fortify democratic movements in Nigeria – firstly, the support of the Labour Party candidate Peter Obi by Nigerians in the Diaspora, who garnered backing through social media campaigns and financial assistance for his physical campaigns (Mokuye et al., 2023). These efforts



cemented Nigerians' relentless advocacy for a change of government. Secondly, a group called *Naija We Can* was a formidable force created in the United States, organising rallies, political campaigns and fundraising events. One of the fundraising actions involved creating a website to facilitate contributions to the campaign of the presidential candidate. In fact, a significant source of funding for the opposition party's campaign came from the purses of Nigerian diasporans. This diaspora movement was a significant and relentless step to solidify political consciousness among the elites and the masses, making leaders accountable and transparent in Nigeria. The Nigerians in diaspora also participated in the #EndSARS campaign; they amplified the voices of the suppressed by engaging in peaceful protests to promote human rights on the global stage (Mukuye et al., 2023). Solidarity demonstrations were organised in major cities around the world, such as Dublin, London, New York, Stuttgart and many others. A remarkable feat was the launch of a petition against the Nigerian government regarding the abuse of human rights, which garnered 220,000 signatures and persuaded the UK Parliament to debate the human rights violations committed by the Nigerian government.

## ECONOMIC

Nigerians have significantly remitted finances over the years, either through family responsibility or national loyalty. These finances have aided in driving national development. The Nigeria Diaspora Commission (2021) reported that in 2016 and 2017, Nigerians remitted between \$19.7 billion and \$22 billion, which is surprisingly higher than the oil exports during the same period, which were \$10.4 billion and \$13.4 billion. The report also showed that even during the economic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigerian diaspora remittances totalled \$17.208 billion. Ayman and Waleid (2025) investigated the economic impact of remittances in Nigeria; these remittances have been reflected in household income and expenditure, poverty reduction (with a reported reduction from 53.5% in 2009 to 40.1% in 2023, supported by proof of investment from remittances) and investment and entrepreneurship (with significant investment in small- and medium-sized enterprises, a large portion of which comes from remittances to household income). Remittances are also capital-intensive, sponsoring social impact projects to cater to marginalised and vulnerable groups in Nigeria. It is important to note that

Nigeria has been a magnet for immigrants, especially during the Fourth Republic. The Fourth Republic has engaged in economic liberalisation policies that attract both skilled and unskilled labour, particularly from other African countries (Nwozor, 2015).

#### SOCIO-CULTURAL

Nigerians have remained determined to promote their distinctive culture, which spans the arts, entertainment and emigration. They continue to build social and cultural networks both at home and abroad, creating platforms through cultural exchange that foster pride and a strong sense of identity among Nigerians. The Nollywood film industry has played a significant role in exporting Nigeria's cultural heritage across Africa and to the global stage. This has highlighted the richness and uniqueness of Nigerian culture worldwide. Similarly, Afrobeat – driven by the efforts of the entertainment industry – has become a global phenomenon, an influential genre that now competes with others for international recognition. Nigerian traditional celebrations and festivals have also been held for many years in the United States, including IgboFest in Minneapolis, the Nigerian Cultural Parade and Festival in Houston and the Eyo Festival in Atlanta (Okoro, 2014). These events showcase Nigerian cuisine, dance, fashion, music and other cultural expressions. In the field of education, departments of African Studies in various universities have introduced opportunities to learn Nigerian languages – an impressive achievement made possible through the benefits of emigration.

#### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NIGERIA'S POLICIES, REFORMS AND INTERVENTIONS

Policies cannot work in isolation; they need humans to make them effective. The reality indicates that Nigeria's policy interventions and reforms have not been successful in curbing or at least reducing the surge of brain drain emigration in the country. One of the core reasons for this is the significant gap between policy formulation and implementation; this is a well-known issue in Nigeria. Many policies are concisely and thoroughly drafted within an integrated national framework, but the implementation has fallen short. The fact that it involves the deliberate actions of individuals to

translate ideas into reality has been a contentious issue. This shortcoming has affected the smooth flow of implementation, creating a strain in the system that produces results and impacts the lives of the people.

The subsequent change of government is a cause of political instability. This is evident in many abandoned projects initiated by previous governments. While governments often overlook and overhaul policies for political reasons, this affects the coherence of national policies, which – in turn – impacts their productivity. Agbazuere (2020) commented on the challenges of policy formulation and execution in Nigeria by stating that both are highly politicised. He believed that a lack of consultation with beneficiaries prior to embarking on programmes and projects could lead to policy miscarriages, as evidence has shown the disconnect between policy formulation and the social problems they intend to mitigate. Eleagu (2019) observed in his analysis that between 1976 and 2001, there were no fewer than seven policies targeted at poverty eradication; the only differences were the names. Yet, these policies could not withstand the test of time due to ineffective leadership, political influences and a lack of monitoring and evaluation. Favour (2024) raised awareness about the mismanagement of resources linked to policy ineffectiveness. Apparently, leaders who are not transparent and accountable cannot judiciously implement projects to improve the lives of the people.

Despite the huge budget allocations, there seems to be manoeuvring in the policy process, causing inept service delivery in critical sectors. Policymakers are chosen based on political reasons, which is not an ideal situation if policies are meant to be effective. It is high time that actors engaged in policymaking and implementation are selected and appointed based on merit. Kanu et al. (2021), in their study, evaluated the effectiveness of the National Migration Policy and stated the following about its lapses: a lack of commitment and willingness on the part of the government and the policy actors charged with the responsibilities of actualising the objectives of the policy; inaccurate statistics upon which the policy document was built; and inadequate involvement and publicity of the document even to the target group. Kanu et al. (2019) raised doubts about the efficiency of the Labour Migration Policy in meeting its expectations due to a lack of updated data, and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment lacks the capacity to effectively implement the policy's tenets. Some of the points raised by Garuba and Aminu (2020) include a lack of a citizen-centred approach, as the policies are often not assessed for proven

effectiveness. There is also a perceived lack of teamwork among the relevant agencies, as these policies often require the collaboration of two or more agencies. Bureaucracy has been a bottleneck.

Policies at their intervention stage in Nigeria are rather reactive rather than proactive, which is why they serve short-term purposes and are not suitable for long-term objectives. An argument posed by Nwafor-Orizu et al. (2018) about policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria is that they are individualistic in nature, as they are targeted at meeting the interests of the elite group (politicians) rather than the general public. From all indications, it is clear that the deliberate exclusion of beneficiaries occurred during the formulation process. We can observe that it is deliberate because the motive behind the policy process is politicised and individualistic. As noted, policies do not work themselves; they need the input of human and material resources. The personnel are most often a round peg in a square hole, as they do not have the requisite skills to be efficient. The recruitment system, especially for public service, prioritises a quota system to portray a federal character outlook. This means that the criteria for employment and appointment are more focused on compensation and quotas rather than merit (Ugwanyi and Emma, 2013). This process of recruitment has undermined the effectiveness of policy outcomes in Nigeria. Nigeria's relevant ministries, departments and agencies responsible for policies, particularly those related to migration, lack a sufficient number of research and innovation teams. Odumu (2024) observed that a cause for policy implementation issues stems from the lack of an enforceable legal framework to support policies in Nigeria. Policies do not become consistent, which can be attributed to a lack of enforceable legal provisions. However, the Nigerian government, in a bid to strengthen healthcare policies, established the Nigerian Healthcare Act in 2014. This act has not been fully effective due to underfunding, lack of initiative and political will (Odumu, 2024).

Arguably, the relationship between effective policies and the reduction of brain drain emigration boils down to the system and the people who manage it. Change starts with the deliberate action of a group of individuals who are determined to see a difference. The system controls every other push factor of emigration that has been documented; if it is inept, there will not be a drastic fall in brain drain emigration. The system continues to sabotage the efforts of international bodies and the diaspora community investing their time and resources in brain drain retention in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings clearly indicate that the problem is rooted in the Nigerian political system, and a total overhaul of the system is necessary before a change can be effected in brain drain emigration. Despite the injection of 50 million euros by the European Union and other international bodies into Nigeria's healthcare sector, which is indirectly targeted at reducing brain drain emigration (Lawal et al., 2022), the healthcare sector still has not improved significantly. This paper uncovers the drivers of brain drain emigration from the standpoint of political and economic influences, providing an extended insight that is deeply rooted in the political nature of Nigeria. These are the major yardsticks for the uncontrollable increase in brain drain emigration, particularly in Nigeria. Holistic interventions and reforms are needed, recognising that the drivers of brain drain emigration in Nigeria are multidimensional. Restructuring in the system affects all other factors. Nigeria has not yet achieved the political and economic standards necessary to retain highly skilled workers. However, evidence-based policies are necessary to retain talented Nigerians. Stakeholder engagement is very important at the policy incubation stage; the bottom-up approach in emigration-related policies is pivotal to developing a long-term solution for mitigating the surge in emigration. This approach includes engaging stakeholders, investors, civil society and professional groups to provide their expert contributions based on their experiences. Adopting the bottom-up approach at the policy stage will, beyond doubt, provide relevant, sustainable and evidence-based interventions. Research-based policy is crucial, as it is a prerequisite for any innovation and invention. Government interventions have been devoid of strong empirical investigation and comprehensive needs assessment. Nigerian policy engagement is often a product of perception, which is not commendable in a modern policy context. The policies must be changed from reactive and fragmented to proactive and coordinated. Research has proven the relevance of well-thought-out policies that are effective in dealing with unforeseen and unplanned circumstances. Addressing skilled emigration requires more than episodic wage reviews; it demands credible institution-building reforms that improve implementation capacity, policy continuity and professional career incentives. Sequenced measures paired with transparent diaspora engagement offer a realistic path from chronic brain drain towards sustainable brain circulation. As noted by Osaretin and Eddy (2012), Nigerians in the diaspora

must actively participate in the country's development. One of these strategies is the "virtual participant" role – this is feasible through the government solidifying its relationship with Nigerians in the diaspora.

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