

Exploring the Push and Pull Factors of Skilled Youth Emigration in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores the key push and pull factors influencing the emigration of skilled youth from Nigeria, with a specific focus on migration flows to the United Kingdom. Employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design, the study integrates quantitative data obtained from surveys and qualitative insights gathered through key informant interviews with policymakers, and sector experts. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations and underlying drivers behind the increasing trend of skilled youth migration from Nigeria in recent years. The findings reveal that the foremost push factors compelling young professionals to seek opportunities abroad include high rates of unemployment, pervasive economic instability, and widespread underemployment that limit career growth and financial security within the country. The study identifies political instability, escalating concerns over national security, and inadequate infrastructure—such as poor healthcare facilities, unreliable power supply, and deficient educational resources—as significant contributors to the decision to emigrate. These challenges create an environment perceived as inimical for professional advancement and personal wellbeing. On the contrary, pull factors in the United Kingdom, such as better employment prospects, higher wages, advanced educational opportunities, and improved living conditions, significantly motivate Nigerian skilled youth. The research highlights an alarming rise in the rate of skilled youth emigration over the past decade, resulting in notable brain drain that adversely affects critical sectors like healthcare, education, engineering, and information technology in Nigeria. This exodus undermines national development and exacerbates existing skill shortages in essential fields. By offering empirical evidence on the complex and multifaceted nature of youth emigration from Nigeria, this study adds to the existing migration literature and emphasizes the urgent need for policy interventions. It advocates for comprehensive strategies aimed at creating sustainable employment, improving political stability, bolstering security, and enhancing infrastructure to retain skilled youth and mitigate the negative impacts of brain drain on Nigeria's development prospects.

Keywords: Brain drain, Economic factors, Mixed-methods research Skilled migration, Youth emigration.

1. Introduction

Labor migration is a key dimension of human civilization, involving the movement of people across international

borders in search of better employment opportunities and improved living standards (International Labour Organization, 2024). Globally, migration

flows reflect complex socio-economic dynamics that shape labor markets and development outcomes. African migration, in particular, exhibits significant patterns of skilled and unskilled labor mobility, influenced by diverse push and pull factors related to economic conditions, governance, and security.

Within Africa, Nigeria stands out both as a major source and a growing destination of migrants. It currently hosts one of the continent's largest labor forces, while simultaneously experiencing substantial outward migration. As of 2024, Nigeria has the largest African diaspora population worldwide, with around 17 million Nigerians living abroad. This diaspora disperses predominantly across North America, Europe, Asia, and other parts of Africa, making Nigeria the African country with the most extensive global diaspora presence (International Organization for Migration, 2024). The Nigerian diaspora contributes significantly to the home economy, with remittances reaching over \$20 billion in 2024, surpassing foreign direct investment and acting as a vital economic lifeline (Nigerians in Diaspora Commission, 2024).

Despite these contributions, Nigeria faces an acute challenge related to the emigration of skilled youth. An estimated 70,000 skilled African professionals emigrate annually, and a large share of Nigeria's diaspora comprises young, skilled workers moving mainly for education and employment (African Union, 2024). This migration trend has shifted Nigeria's role from a regional migration destination to a predominant source of skilled labor migrants globally (Duru, 2021). Key sectors affected include healthcare, education, and technology, where the loss of skilled professionals undermines national development prospects.

This escalating outflow is driven by a complex interplay of persistent unemployment, economic instability, political insecurity, and the quest for better career and life opportunities abroad. Such factors constitute significant push forces that compel young Nigerians to emigrate, resulting in what is often characterized as a "brain drain" phenomenon. Understanding the patterns and drivers of skilled youth emigration is critical to addressing its socio-economic impacts and formulating effective policies.

This study seeks to fill a vital gap in the literature by providing comprehensive empirical insight into the trends and determinants of skilled youth emigration from Nigeria. While existing research has focused on remittances and broad economic impacts, there is a paucity of detailed analysis on the systematic factors influencing this phenomenon and their implications for Nigeria's development trajectory. The guiding research question is: What are the current trends and patterns of skilled youth emigration from Nigeria, and what are the underlying factors contributing to this critical socio-economic issue?

2. Literature Review

Historical Context of Nigerian Labor Migration

The history of labor migration in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the colonial era, influenced by economic, political, and social forces that shaped migration patterns across the region. During the colonial period, Nigeria was a hub for labor movements both inward and outward, driven primarily by the demands of the British colonial administration. Nigeria attracted numerous labor migrants from neighboring West African countries such as Ghana, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, brought in to meet labor needs in mining, plantations, public administration, and infrastructure projects, particularly

after the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in 1956 (Abba, 1993; Udo, 1975; Dunn, 2008). The colonial labor system was characterized by enforced labor policies, wage labor dominance in urban centers, and the adaptation of International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions into local labor regulations, which began to shape labor relations from the 1930s onward (Austin 1988; Bolt & Gardner 2021).

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, labor migration dynamics shifted significantly. The post-independence era initially witnessed continued inward migration and rural-to-urban migration driven by the oil boom of the 1970s, which created temporary employment opportunities in cities like Lagos (Ajaero&Onokala, 2013). However, political instability, marked notably by the Biafra civil war (1967–1970), disrupted migration flows and led to regional displacements that affected labor distribution and economic activities (Ikwuyatum, 2016). The conflict, together with the post-war economic downturn, weakened Nigeria's appeal as a migration destination and contributed to increased out-migration.

The economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s, exacerbated by poor governance, political turmoil, and the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in 1986, propelled a significant rise in emigration. During this period, many educated Nigerians sought asylum and employment in Western countries, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, in search of better prospects (Duru, 2021; Mberu&Pongou, 2010). Migration patterns became increasingly complex, featuring both voluntary labor migration and forced movements due to political and economic insecurity (Odii et al., 2022).

Contemporary labor migration from Nigeria is multifaceted, driven by persistent unemployment, poverty, and

insecurity within the country. Domestic rural-to-urban migration continues to affect agricultural productivity negatively due to the loss of labor in rural areas, while international migration is characterized by skilled youth seeking education and employment abroad, contributing to brain drain in critical sectors such as health, technology, and education (Aworemi et al., 2011; Afolayan et al., 2008).

Overall, Nigeria's labor migration history reflects a transition from a colonial labor supplier and migration destination to a major source of skilled and unskilled labor migrants globally. The historical context underscores the influence of colonial legacies, post-independence political upheavals, and economic challenges as key drivers shaping Nigeria's migration landscape over time.

Contemporary Migration Patterns

Recent studies highlight the increasing significance of labor migration as a socio-economic phenomenon in Nigeria, driven by unemployment, economic instability, and the desire for better prospects elsewhere (Afolayan, 2020). The country has transformed from being a popular West African migration destination to becoming a significant source of both professional and unskilled labor migrants globally. This transformation reflects broader economic and political challenges that have reshaped Nigeria's position in regional and global migration systems.

The brain drain phenomenon has become particularly pronounced, with skilled professionals in healthcare, education, and technology sectors migrating to developed countries in unprecedented numbers (Madubuko&Nwaka, 2024). This exodus not only jeopardizes Nigeria's socio-economic progress but also impacts critical sectors vital for national development. The healthcare sector has been particularly affected, with significant shortages of qualified medical personnel

reported across the country (Chukwuma, 2023).

Economic Drivers of Migration

Economic factors constitute the primary drivers of contemporary Nigerian migration patterns. The duality of Nigeria's labor market, characterized by insufficient job opportunities in high-skilled sectors and economic mismanagement, pushes educated Nigerians toward emigration (Chukwuma, 2023). High unemployment rates, particularly among youth, create conditions where migration becomes a rational economic choice for individuals seeking to maximize their human capital returns.

The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reported youth unemployment rates exceeding 40%, creating a substantial population of educated but unemployed young people who view emigration as their primary avenue for economic advancement. This situation is compounded by underemployment among those who do find work, with many professionals earning inadequate wages that fail to match their qualifications and expectations.

Policy Responses and Frameworks for Labor Migration in Nigeria

The Nigerian government has established several policy frameworks to effectively manage labor migration, aiming to maximize developmental benefits and minimize risks such as exploitation and irregular migration. At the core of these efforts is the National Policy on Labour Migration (NPLM), initially adopted in 2014 and significantly revised in 2020. The revised policy serves as the key governance instrument for labor migration in Nigeria, reflecting global and regional commitments as well as national priorities. The NPLM aims to: Regulate labor migration processes in a transparent and orderly manner.; Protect the rights

and welfare of Nigerian migrant workers; Optimize the developmental benefits of migration, including remittances, skills transfer, and investments; Combat irregular migration, forced labor, human trafficking, and other exploitative practices; Aligned with international labor standards set by the International Labour Organization (ILO), The NPLM integrates principles of gender responsiveness, protection of vulnerable groups including youth, and stakeholder participation in policy implementation. It also supports Nigeria's commitments under the Abidjan Declaration on labor migration and the Decent Work Agenda across Africa. The policy is structured around three main pillars: Promotion of Good Governance in Labor Migration: Establishment of transparent regulatory frameworks, fostering stakeholder dialogue, and ensuring adherence to international labor standards.

Protection of Migrant Workers and Promotion of Their Welfare: Guaranteeing the rights, fair treatment, and social protections for Nigerians working abroad. Maximizing Migration Benefits for National Development: Leveraging migration for economic growth through remittances, skill acquisition, and investment opportunities.

Key Regulatory Agencies and Institutional Framework

Several agencies play critical roles in the implementation and regulation of labor migration policies in Nigeria: Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment (FMLE): The primary government body responsible for formulating, reviewing, and implementing the NPLM. It oversees policies concerning labor migration governance, worker protection, and migration-related welfare services. International Labour Migration Desk (ILMD): A specialized unit within the FMLE tasked with regulating private employment agencies, protecting migrant workers' rights, managing migration data

systems such as the National Electronic Labour Exchange (NELEX), and operating Migrants Resource Centres that provide pre-departure counseling and support services. Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM): Coordinates diaspora relations and seeks to harness the diaspora's contributions to national development, including investment and skills transfer. National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP): Focuses on combating human trafficking, forced labor, and smuggling, providing protection and rehabilitation for victims. Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS): Responsible for border control and migration management, including monitoring migration routes and enforcing immigration laws. National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI): Coordinates voluntary return, readmission, and reintegration programs for Nigerian returnees, working in collaboration with international partners like the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Implementation and International Collaboration

The revised NPLM was approved by the Federal Executive Council in October 2022 and launched publicly in 2023, with technical and financial support from the ILO and development partners. It emphasizes a multi-stakeholder approach involving government entities, labor unions (such as Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress), employers' associations, and civil society. The NPLM also incorporates commitments to the ratification of key ILO Conventions on migrant workers' rights and decent work conditions. By promoting safe, fair, and well-regulated labor migration, Nigeria's policy framework aims to harness migration as a strategic national development tool while safeguarding migrants from exploitation and irregular migration risks.

Empirical Review on Skilled Youth Emigration in Nigeria

The phenomenon of skilled youth emigration, often referred to as "brain drain," has been a persistent challenge for Nigeria, with numerous studies examining the push and pull factors influencing this trend. The push factors predominantly include economic instability, lack of employment opportunities, inadequate infrastructural facilities, and insecurity, while pull factors often involve better educational opportunities, higher salaries, and superior living conditions abroad (Akanle, 2022; Okafor & Iwuamadi, 2021).

A recent mixed-method study by Akanle (2022) focusing on Nigerian youth aged 18-35 found that economic factors, particularly unemployment and underemployment, significantly influenced their intentions to emigrate. This supports earlier findings by Alubo et al. (2020), who emphasized the role of precarious labor markets in Nigeria as a major push factor, especially among skilled graduates.

On the pull side, Okafor and Iwuamadi (2021) explored motivations behind Nigerian youth's desire to migrate to the UK. Their study identified advanced educational opportunities, access to scholarships, and professional development prospects as significant draws. The Federal Scholarship Board data in this study reflects the importance of scholarships in forming migration intentions, which aligns with these observations.

Security concerns related to insurgency and regional violence were highlighted in a survey by Ezeani and Ude (2023), noting that youths from volatile regions are more likely to seek migration as a coping strategy. This aspect is less emphasized in older research but increasingly recognized in emerging studies, signaling a shift in the

multidimensional nature of migration drivers.

A major gap identified in the literature relates to the limited effectiveness of government institutions in curbing the brain drain. Despite existing policies from ministries such as the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development and the Nigerian Immigration Service, implementation is often weak due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of coordination (Chukwu, 2023). Public policy scholars suggest integrating diaspora engagement policies as a means to mitigate skill loss and encourage return migration (Okonkwo & Adeniyi, 2022).

Notably, the role of Nigerian diaspora networks in facilitating emigration and supporting subsequent migrants has garnered attention. Studies show that diaspora networks serve as both pull factors and support systems that ease the transition for young migrants (Adewale & Martins, 2024). This dimension is often underexplored in institutional data but is crucial for comprehensive migration policy formulation.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Aspiration Capacity Theory (ACT) (Carling & Schewel, 2018) to examine skilled youth emigration from Nigeria. ACT explains migration decisions by focusing on how individuals form future aspirations and their capacity to achieve them in their home environment. The theory's three major components are:

Aspirations: Personal goals and desires, such as professional success, economic advancement, and enhanced living standards. **Capacity:** The means and opportunities available to realize these aspirations, shaped by internal factors (skills, education) and external conditions (job markets, political stability). **Aspirations-Capacity Gap:** The discrepancy when aspirations exceed available capacity, spurring frustration

and motivating migration as a strategy to realize goals elsewhere.

In the Nigerian context, young skilled professionals develop high aspirations shaped by social and economic ambitions. However, these aspirations clash with constrained capacities due to factors such as inadequate job opportunities, poor infrastructure, political instability, and weak governance (Afolayan, 2020; Duru, 2021). This gap motivates many to migrate to countries like the United Kingdom, perceived as offering greater alignment between their aspirations and available capacities.

ACT's framework elucidates the decision-making of Nigerian youth emigrants, highlighting the psychological tension between hopes for advancement and practical limitations at home. It underscores that migration is not solely driven by economic hardship but also by the failure of local environments to meet individuals' realistic aspirations. Addressing the aspiration-capacity gap through policy reforms, improved infrastructure, and enhanced job prospects could reduce emigration pressures and retain skilled talent.

This aligns with mixed-methods data collected showing that challenges within Nigeria's labor market and political climate significantly push youth towards emigration, supported by institutional actors across government ministries and diaspora organizations (see attached study sample population and interview clusters).

3. Methodology

This study adopts a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, allowing for concurrent and independent collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This approach enhances findings depth and richness while enabling triangulation of results from different data sources, ensuring robust understanding of

migration governance in Nigeria (Tashakkori& Teddlie, 2010).

The quantitative component includes structured surveys targeting a broad demographic of stakeholders, while the qualitative aspect leverages in-depth interviews with key informants involved in migration policymaking and management. This combination provides comprehensive insights into both the statistical patterns of migration and the robust experiences and perspectives of relevant stakeholders.

The study used stratified sampling to include 400 stakeholders from diverse demographics, collecting quantitative data via a structured survey with closed-ended questions on demographics, migration experiences, policy awareness, migration

challenges, and stakeholder expectations. Surveys were administered both online and on paper to accommodate varying digital literacy levels. The instrument was pilot-tested to ensure reliability and validity. Sample size was determined using the Yamane formula ($n = N / [1 + N * e^2]$, with $e = 0.05$), resulting in 399.65. Approximately 400 questionnaires were then proportionally distributed across clusters based on population sizes to ensure broad and representative coverage. The 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed across the identified clusters in proportion of their populations. Below is a table showing numbers of copies of questionnaire allotted to each of the above identified clusters:

Table 1: Table Showing, Allotment of Copies of Questionnaire to Each Cluster

S/N	CLUSTER	Population	Copies of Questionnaire
1	Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (U.K. Division Nigeria)	540	57
2	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons	425	45
3	Federal Scholarship Board	258	27
4	Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development	335	35
5	Nigerian Immigration Service [Passport Office]	465	49
6	Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment	521	56
7	Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (Nigeria-UK Division)	152	16
8	U.K. Embassy in Nigeria	86	9
9	Legislature (House Committee on International Relations)	360	38
10	NANS (National Executives) across the six geopolitical zones	320	34
11	National Association of Nigeria Travel Agencies	145	16
12	Nigerians in Diaspora (U.K. Division)	168	18
TOTAL STUDY POPULATION		3,775	400

Source: Researchers field Work (2024)

The 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to potential respondents with

374 copies ultimately returned, which represents a return rate of 94.5% .

The population of 35 for the key informant interviews was determined by purposively selecting clusters with relevant expertise and seniority, ensuring participants had access to sensitive information critical for the study. A multistage sampling technique was employed, using Probability Proportionate to Population (PPP) to allocate interviewees across clusters. The sample

size decision was informed by Kumar (1989), who recommends a range of 15 to 35 for key informant interviews, and Ibeh (2018), who suggests 15 to 25. Ultimately, the study adopted the maximum sample size of 35 as proposed by Kumar (1989) to maximize data reliability while maintaining practical manageability (Kumar, 1989; Ibeh, 2018).

Table 2: Table Showing, Clusters, Population and Numbers of Interviewees

S/N	CLUSTER	Population	Number of Interviewees
1	Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (U.K. Division Nigeria)	540	7
2	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons	425	5
3	Federal Scholarship Board	258	3
4	Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development	335	4
5	Nigerian Immigration Service [Passport Office]	465	6
6	Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (Nigeria-UK Div.)	152	2
7	U.K. Embassy in Nigeria	86	1
8	Legislature (House Committee on International Relations)	360	5
9	National Association of Nigeria Travel Agencies	145	2
	POPULATION	2775	35

Source: Researchers field Work (2024)

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data from interviews complemented it. Data

triangulation was employed to validate findings across different data sources and enhance result credibility.

4. Result and Discussion

Patterns and Current Push and Pull factors of Youth Emigration

The questionnaire had 16 questions and the interview instrument with 4 questions addressing the objective. The table 3 below shows the responses gotten from the administered questionnaire.

		SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
1. Many Nigerian Youths are considering emigrating from Nigeria to the U.K.	Count	89	73	67	70	75	374
	%	23.8	19.5	17.9	18.7	20.1	100.0
2. Most of the Nigerian Youth are going to the U.K. based on qualitative education.	Count	81	72	72	77	72	374
	%	21.6	19.2	19.2	20.5	19.2	100.0
3. A high level of unemployment in	Count	95	70	69	73	67	374

		SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
Nigeria contributes to youth emigration to the U.K.	%	25.4	18.7	18.4	19.7	17.9	100.0
4. Often time, underemployment contributed to youth emigration to the U.K.	Count	81	75	74	70	74	374
	%	21.7	20.1	19.8	18.7	19.8	100.0
5. Nowadays, the rate at which Nigerian Youth emigrate to the U.K. is alarming and has significantly increased over the last ten years	Count	73	71	99	56	75	374
	%	19.5	19.0	26.5	15.0	20.1	100.0
6. In the last ten years, Nigerian Youth have been trooping out to the U.K.	Count	78	63	69	81	83	374
	%	20.9	16.8	18.4	21.7	22.2	100.0
7. Most of the time, family reunion influences Nigerian youth to relocate to the U.K.	Count	78	74	86	80	66	374
	%	20.3	19.3	22.4	20.8	17.2	100.0
8. Political instability propels Nigerian Youth to relocate to U.K.	Count	74	76	87	73	64	374
	%	19.8	20.3	23.3	19.5	17.1	100.0
9. The current economic situation has compelled Nigerian Youth to emigrate to the U.K.	Count	81	67	65	68	93	374
	%	21.7	17.9	17.4	18.2	24.9	100.0
10. Insecurity forces Nigerian Youth to emigrate to the U.K.	Count	67	80	57	78	92	374
	%	17.9	21.4	15.2	20.9	24.6	100.0
11. Violations of Fundamental Human Rights provoke the majority of Nigerian Youth to emigrate to the U.K.	Count	75	79	66	78	76	374
	%	20.1	21.1	17.6	20.9	20.3	100.0
12. Lack of good governance motivates Nigerian Youth emigration to the U.K.	Count	62	80	94	63	75	374
	%	16.6	21.4	25.1	16.8	20.1	100.0
13. Inadequate social infrastructural facilities contribute to Nigerian Youth emigration from Nigeria	Count	67	71	72	73	91	374
	%	17.9	19.0	19.3	19.5	24.3	100.0
14. Corruption in Nigeria propels the Youth to emigrate from Nigeria	Count	77	71	85	66	75	374
	%	20.6	19.0	22.7	17.6	20.1	100.0
15. Unhealthy political atmosphere informs emigration of Nigeria Youth	Count	80	85	64	84	61	374
	%	21.4	22.7	17.1	22.5	16.3	100.0
16. Poor healthcare triggers Nigeria Youth emigration	Count	82	62	77	84	69	374
	%	21.9	16.6	20.6	22.5	18.4	100.0

Findings

Table 3 above reveals significant patterns in skilled youth emigration from Nigeria, with multiple interconnected factors driving young Nigerians' decisions to relocate abroad, particularly to the United Kingdom. Analysis of survey responses demonstrates the complex nature of migration decisions, influenced by

economic, social, and political considerations.

Unemployment emerges as the most critical factor driving youth emigration, with 95 respondents (25.4%) strongly agreeing that high unemployment levels in Nigeria contribute significantly to youth migration to the UK. This finding aligns with National Bureau of Statistics (2023) data indicating youth unemployment rates

exceeding 40%. The economic dimension is further reinforced by current economic conditions, with 81 respondents (21.7%) strongly agreeing that Nigeria's economic situation compels youth emigration. Underemployment represents another significant economic driver, with 81 respondents (21.7%) strongly agreeing that inadequate employment opportunities contribute to migration decisions. Interview data support these findings, with Participant 19 emphasizing that "the major issue is economic factors or socio-economic factors driving people to move... many people are seriously unemployed." Participant 16 highlighted professional underemployment, noting that "even professionals like doctors and engineers are inadequately remunerated. The economic crisis is compounded by inflation and currency devaluation, making it increasingly difficult for young professionals to maintain decent living standards. Participant 16 observed that "what they are earning as salary is not enough for them to get whatever they need from the market," illustrating the real-world impact of economic challenges on migration decisions. Political instability and security concerns constitute significant push factors in youth emigration decisions. The study found that 74 respondents (19.8%) strongly agreed that political instability propels Nigerian youth to relocate to the UK, while 67 respondents (17.9%) strongly agreed that insecurity forces youth emigration. Interview responses provide vivid illustrations of security concerns. Participant 13 described the pervasive fear experienced by many Nigerians, stating, "you can't sleep with your two eyes closed in your house because anything can happen." This sentiment reflects the broader security challenges affecting daily life and long-term planning for young Nigerians. Governance issues further compound these concerns, with poor governance motivating youth emigration

according to survey responses. The combination of political instability, security concerns, and governance failures creates an environment where young people perceive limited prospects for positive change, motivating them to seek stability elsewhere.

The study identifies several social and infrastructural factors contributing to youth emigration. Inadequate social infrastructural facilities contribute to emigration according to 67 respondents (17.9%), while poor healthcare triggers youth emigration according to 82 respondents (21.9%). These findings highlight the importance of basic service provision in migration decisions. Family reunion emerges as a notable pull factor, with 78 respondents (20.3%) strongly agreeing that family reunification influences Nigerian youth relocation to the UK. This finding suggests that migration often represents a continuation of existing family migration patterns rather than isolated individual decisions. Corruption represents another significant concern, with 77 respondents (20.6%) strongly agreeing that corruption in Nigeria propels youth emigration. The perception of systemic corruption undermines confidence in domestic institutions and reinforces the attractiveness of countries perceived as having more transparent governance systems.

Educational opportunities and professional development represent significant pull factors for Nigerian youth migration. Interview participants consistently highlighted the UK's educational system quality as a major attraction. Participant 16 noted that "the academic system of the UK" and "remuneration in terms of their jobs" serve as key attractions for many youth. The pursuit of quality education often transitions into long-term residency, as many students extend their visas to pursue employment opportunities. This pattern

reflects the aspiration-capacity gap identified in the theoretical framework, where young Nigerians perceive that their educational and professional aspirations can be better fulfilled abroad than domestically.

The study reveals alarming increases in youth emigration rates over the past decade. Survey responses indicate that 73 respondents (19.5%) strongly agreed that the rate of Nigerian youth emigration to the UK has become alarmingly high and has significantly increased over the past ten years. Interview data support this trend, with Participant 14 remarking that "the number of youths that are going out... has kept on increasing in the last 10 years. This increasing trend reflects the cumulative impact of various push and pull factors, suggesting that migration has become an increasingly attractive option for young Nigerians facing limited domestic opportunities. The trend also indicates that migration networks and information flows may be facilitating additional migration as successful migrants encourage others to follow similar paths.

Discussion

The findings support the Aspiration Capacity Theory, showing that migration among Nigerian youth is driven by a gap between their aspirations and local opportunities. Young Nigerians aspire to professional success and better living standards but face domestic limitations like limited jobs, poor infrastructure, and political instability. The UK is seen as a place where these aspirations can be realized through better employment, education, and stability, motivating migration when local conditions fall short. The study highlights that Nigeria's emigration of skilled youth leads to a significant loss of human capital, especially hurting key sectors like healthcare, education, and engineering, which affects overall economic development. However, remittances and

diaspora involvement offer important economic benefits, with Nigeria receiving over \$20 billion annually, supporting foreign exchange and household welfare, though these gains do not fully offset the brain drain impact

The findings indicate that current policies like the National Policy on Labour Migration face implementation challenges, as high emigration persists due to unresolved push factors. Simply managing migration benefits and risks is insufficient. Effective responses must target root causes by creating jobs, improving governance, security, infrastructure, and strengthening institutions to retain and support youth. Nigeria's skilled youth emigration mirrors trends in other sub-Saharan African countries like Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, driven by common factors such as economic difficulties, governance challenges, and limited professional opportunities. However, some countries have successfully implemented policies to retain skilled workers and encourage diaspora return, through investments in education, economic zones, and diaspora engagement programs—offering possible models for Nigeria to mitigate brain drain and leverage migrant networks for development.

Skilled youth emigration from Nigeria is expected to persist or increase without effective policy action addressing root causes. A growing youth labor force, ongoing economic and governance issues, climate change impacts on agriculture, and COVID-19–exposed healthcare weaknesses all contribute to sustained migration pressures.

Policy Recommendations

This section of the study offers immediate interventions, medium strategies and long-term transformations:

Immediate Intervention: Immediate interventions should stimulate economic growth by diversifying into youth-employment sectors like technology,

creative industries, and value-added agriculture, supported by infrastructure and skills development. Strengthening governance and security through democratic reforms is essential to create stability and lasting opportunities. Additionally, education reform focused on market-aligned curricula and expanded vocational training will better prepare youth with practical skills for local and global job markets.

Medium-term Strategies: Medium-term strategies focus on engaging the Nigerian diaspora through programs that encourage investment, knowledge transfer, and circular migration, benefiting both Nigeria and host countries. Enhancing regional integration via ECOWAS seeks to boost market access and job opportunities within Africa to reduce intercontinental migration pressure. Additionally, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship with support systems like financing, mentorship, and business incubation will empower youth to create sustainable jobs and drive economic growth.

Long-term Transformations: Long-term strategies emphasize building strong institutions by improving governance, reducing corruption, and enhancing public services. Key infrastructure investments in transport, energy, telecom, and healthcare will drive economic growth and quality of life. Developing world-class research and innovation centers will help retain talent, foster technological advancement, and support sustainable, advanced national development.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study reveals that skilled youth emigration from Nigeria is driven mainly by unemployment, political instability, security issues, and poor infrastructure. Using Aspiration Capacity Theory, it shows that young Nigerians migrate because they believe their goals for success and a better life are more

achievable abroad. The mixed-methods approach enables both statistical analysis of migration trends and robust understanding of individual experiences and motivations. The research combines statistical data and personal insights to deepen understanding of migration patterns and offers practical policy recommendations to address root causes. Future studies should assess the long-term effects on sectors and evaluate policies across African countries. While brain drain poses development risks, Nigeria's skilled diaspora also offers opportunities for knowledge transfer and investment, highlighting the need for policies that both reduce push factors and leverage migration's benefits.

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