

## **EFFECTS OF BRAIN DRAIN IN NATION BUILDING: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

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### **Abstract**

*The brain drain phenomenon in Nigeria has attracted significant attention and concern among Nigerian scholars across various platforms. Empirical evidence confirms the existence of this problem, yet practical and workable solutions to mitigate its impact remain elusive in Nigeria. Regrettably, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has not accorded it the necessary attention as a serious issue with potentially detrimental effects on the nation's future human development. This dangerous trend predominantly affects skilled professionals in Nigeria. The consequences of this brain drain pose a formidable challenge to the nation's human capital development and material resources, although it is not an isolated problem limited to Nigeria alone, but rather prevalent in many developing countries of the world. Furthermore, developed nations exacerbate the situation by enticing and perpetuating underdevelopment through superior technological advancements, robust economies, and strategic political-cultural systems. The outcomes of such tactics include a distressing form of reverse slavery, continuous exploitation of raw materials, and enduring underdevelopment, as evidenced in Nigeria today. This research paper explored the theoretical background of brain drain, elucidating its causes and effects on the continuous migration of skilled professional youths from Nigeria to other countries. It also examines its broader consequences for the nation's growth. In light of its findings, the study presented recommendations to reduce the menace of brain drain in Nigeria, as it has severely impeded the nation's human capital development and material resources. By addressing this critical issue,*

*Nigeria as a nation can foster sustainable growth and development, ensuring the retention and utilization of its skilled workforce for the benefit of nation-building as a whole.*

**Keywords:** Brain Drain, Reverse Slavery, Nigeria, Africa

## **Introduction**

African nations have been under attack by the European countries that kept on exploiting them swiftly from political, economic, and cultural points of view, for ages till the present day. They divided the African nations without the consent of the Africans for their selfish interests in the name of developing the African nations. One has to agree with Mbefo (1996) that:

It was in Berlin that the masterplan and the implicit agreement about European intentions in Africa were decided and given active assistance....The result of the conference was that the ongoing “scramble for Africa” was organized systematically, according to agreed principles. While it is wrong to claim, as some have done, that Africa was carved up by European powers at this conference, it is right to affirm that it was there the European powers agreed on maintaining colonies in Africa. European powers agreed not to interfere but to respect the “areas of influence” acquired by any given power. Remarkably, no African was invited to a conference that decided the fate of Africa...the result of the Conference was the movement that issued forth in the division of Africa into states with known boundaries. It became a continent of so many countries, albeit under English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, or German rule. (pp. 28-29).

That is to show somehow the foundational problem of African nations which started from the divisions, with this situation above, these foreign countries today kept on exploiting and under-developing African nations through different ways that suit them. Recently, different kinds of African summits are being organized for Africans by these foreign nations in the name of helping to build and develop African nations. For instance, in August 2012, there was Rio Summit organized by United Nations (UN) for sustainable development in Africa, in 17 to 18 February 2022 European Union held the African Union Summit on sustainable and sustained economic development and prosperity, and the United States of America (US) on 19th December 2022 again held US-Africa

Summits where 49 African presidents attended the Summit. One may ask whose interests are these Summits being held, is it for African development or the continued domination of African nations in a disguised form? If the Summits are for the good of African nations why is Africa still highly underdeveloped? Excessive borrowings by African nations from these developed countries with dangerous agreements signed also allude to the fact that African nations are under the power, command, and influence of these developed nations. For example, Nigeria has borrowed much in the last 8 years of President Muhammad Buhari's administration that all income was used to service foreign debts.

Going further, the continent of Africa experienced many wars which ranges from tribal or ethnic to religious crises from time to time every year. Okafor (1997) reported that:

For the continent of Africa, the year 1994 was a year of disaster. Across the continent, there was lamentation and great suffering caused by genocidal and fratricidal wars. It was a year of ethnic plague. In Rwanda, east of Africa, the ethnic conflict between the Tutsis and Hutus was climaxed by the gruesome massacre of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. On the west coast of Africa, Liberia was being ravaged by an internecine war. Nigeria, on the other side, was on the brink of civil war following renewed crisis on the annulled 12 presidential election results. In the northern fringes of Ghana, a bloody ethnic confrontation had erupted leaving many people dead. Northwards, Somalia was bleeding as the two rival factions engaged themselves in bloody combat. In Sudan, too, military operations were mobilized against secessionist groups, killing many and rendering others homeless. Thus, the ill wind of ethno-religious conflicts blew across Africa leaving in its trail unprecedented human, economic, social, and ecological disasters. (p. vi).

So, one can from this angle or perspective understand the reason why developing countries or source nations especially Nigeria and Africa in general are undergoing brain drain in great numbers and less brain gain. The above situation of ethnic crisis has kept Nigeria undeveloped since independence, coupled with the fact that the political and economic growth largely hinged on corrupt practices and mono-economy. The skilled professionals hence opt for greener pastures outside the shores of the country. Sasu (2023) reported that in the 1970s, Nigeria attracted many foreigners because of the oil boom but in the 1980s, the number of Nigerians leaving the country increased as a consequence of the economic downturn, political instability, and corrupt practices in all dimensions.

Corruption again played and continues to play a major role in the problem of brain drain in Nigeria, corruption is seen as an abuse of public power for personal ends which has grown both in geopolitical spheres and in great magnitude. Most skilled citizens of Nigeria believe that one has to bribe their way before getting what he/she wants or applied for, hence the need to migrate to other countries of the world. According to Anowai (2011), corruption has been identified as a major obstacle to the promotion of effective governance in Nigeria, sustained economic growth, and national development. Corruption practices were believed to have marred the 2023 general elections which led many skilled youths to have left the country immediately after the election because it was believed that Nigeria has been hijacked again. From the above scenario, one can truly see why brain drain is on the increase in Nigeria.

### **The Concept of Brain Drain**

The emergence of the globalized economy with the information explosion, social networking, and technological advancement has brought a variety of opportunities in trade and investment, which in turn resulted in the acceleration of brain drain from source countries to developed countries of the world. This situation increased the desire of the host countries or developed countries of the world to improve their living standard of life and to attract more foreigners especially skilled labourers from developing countries to work for them, hence increasing their human resources which is vital for capital development. Most developed countries of the world, put in place good policies associated with reforms relating to good democratization in society, transparency in building their economy, infrastructure, and formidable independent institutions that build up good governance in their nations (Clemens, 2009). Hence, Hashish and Ashour (2020) defined brain drain as a migration of employees or professionals in their quest for an improved level of living conditions, better earnings, access to advanced technology, and secure political conditions in diverse places worldwide. This is an ongoing phenomenon that impacts the quality and quantity of the working force which affects the quality of human capital development.

Again, the concept of brain drain from various scholars tends to mean the gradual disappearance of something and providing nothing in return for exchange. So, the term according to Koser and Salt (1997) is synonymous with the movement of talented people where the outflow of expertise is strongly in one direction. However, with time the concept changed to the migration of highly qualified persons from developing countries

to developed countries. This drainage of human resources from source countries becomes a brain gain to the host countries in human and material resources in terms of critical infrastructural developments. This of course stimulates many government policies around the world either for or against brain drain as the case may be either for source or receiving countries. Furthermore, brain drain has become more pronounced these days due to rapid globalization taking place in the world, which necessitated great changes in political, economic, cultural, and social domains (Bhagwati, 2011).

Olumide and Wilfred (2012) defined brain drain as a movement that occurs or happens when skilled professionals from a country (mostly poor countries migrate to other countries mostly richer countries) to practice their profession and benefit these countries economically, socially, and even culturally. One will immediately ask why will professionals move to other countries of the world rather than stay in their own countries to work or practice their profession. This is why most scholars agreed that many different factors cause the migration of professionals to other countries of the world. Some of these factors include among others economic, social-political, personal decisions, and crises/wars. It should be noted that brain drain cost a lot of resources and time to the sending countries to train these professionals who eventually migrate to other countries of the world. This is a huge loss to the source country and a huge gain to the receiving countries, hence many countries of the world are making policies to reduce such migrations because it reduces the human capital of any country. Nigeria recently mandated their medical doctors to serve for some years before migrating to other developed countries of the world that may pay them better for their services.

In Nigeria, brain drain syndrome is popularly known or nicknamed *japa* (a Yoruba word which means to run or to flee) according to Nnoruga and Osigwe (2023):

it is the exodus of middle-class and highly skilled Nigerians to other countries of the world. This trend started in the late 1980s for some professionals but as of today, it has become free for all with the introduction of visa programs and the offer of lucrative jobs from various countries of the world for all skilled individuals. Hence, as of today in Nigeria, migration or movement out of the country is in waves because both the skilled and unskilled migrate out of the country, even with or without valid visas go through the sea or desert. (p. 26).

Recently, some young men and women want to travel out of Nigeria for one reason or the other, it is no more for professionals only as indicated above. Some scholars estimated

that seven out of ten Nigerians are always willing to leave Nigerian territory for other countries of the world from the number of visas being applied for daily by Nigerian citizens. Most of them travel with their nuclear families in most cases, where one member of the family travels alone he/she comes back to take his/her family members along with him/her later.

Going further, Watanabe (1969) enumerated three different kinds of brain drain which normally take place or are found among the countries of the world, first is seen among the developed countries of the world. Here the citizens of the developed countries of the world travel within developed countries to establish, research, or improve themselves in one field or the other. It is not mainly for job seeking, to improve economic conditions or to run away from crises or wars. Sometimes it is for brief holidays done for relaxation and research. The second type of brain drain is seen among the citizens of developing countries of the world to developed countries of the world. Here Nigeria as a country falls heavily in this category, where citizens travel to other developed countries to pick jobs to improve their living conditions. The professionals of the source countries migrate in numbers to find jobs and run away from crises, artisans migrate to do menial jobs to improve themselves, and research and education are done here in the receiving countries. Nigerians pay heavily here to educate their children in these developed countries and go for medical check-ups, Nigerian politicians are mainly involved here. The developed countries mostly travel to developing countries for raw materials and lucrative businesses which favour them most times and where they evade taxes easily. Young professionals in different types of sports travel to improve themselves and gain world recognition.

Thirdly is among the developing countries of the world where the citizens interact or travel to other developing countries to improve each other in the area the developing countries are found to be expert or performing well. Most Nigerians travel to Sudan or South Africa for education and other possible business transactions. However, these travels or migrations are reducing with the advancement of information communication technology (ICT) which allows citizens in any part of the world to work or be hired from any part of the world to deliver its services.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Brain Drain**

There is a need to establish a theoretical basis for brain drain to understand the reasons or factors that necessitate the issue of brain drain syndrome in many countries of the world.

Since brain drain has become a global phenomenon taking place all over the world. Nnoruga and Osigwe (2023) confirmed the above:

Some theoretical projections have been made as a form of a background to the brain drain taking its toll in the source countries of the world. These theories are used to investigate the conditions which contribute to the cause of brain drain and its consequent implications on international migrations of professionals and loss of human capital. (p. 26).

Firstly, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) established by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) argues that beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviour form a causal chain, so beliefs lead to attitudes, and attitudes lead to intentions and behaviour. It went further to explain that people evaluate the economic and social environment as satisfying, hopeless or frustrating as the case may be and this affects whether one stays back or migrates to another environment. It further alludes that the behavioural attitude or intention is caused by two factors: one's attitude and subjective norms (belief). Again, it explains the relationship between attitude and other variables. Here the concept of variables refers to behaviours that are consistently favourable or unfavourable to a person in an environment.

In the theory of reasoned action, beliefs refer to a person's evaluation of a place or an object in the context of what he/she expects from the object or the place. In summary, it explains why people react differently or against any situation in an environment which leads to decision taking for migration or change of environment for better living, hence this is the reason behind most brain drain taking place in many parts of the world Nigeria inclusive. However, one of the weaknesses of this theory (TRA) is that it does not specifically name some factors directly involved in brain drain but only relies on unquantifiable variables which cannot be measured in any way.

Another theory of brain drain is the Change Theory commonly known as the Push-Pull theory, which was formulated by Lewin. Lewin (1947) states that behavioural intention is a result of the struggle between satisfaction and frustration in the social environment. This theory enumerates two factors that influence a situation which are forces (push factors) and helping (pull factors) that drive and lead movements toward a goal. However, the push and pull theory by Lee (1966) states that there is a relationship between push factors within the country of origin and the pull factors in the destination country. These factors generally are contrary to each other, and a combination of them usually leads to a net outflow of professionals from source countries of the world especially from the



African continent (Hashish and Ashour, 2020). Based on this, Miller (1976) argued earlier that people's participation depends on the degree of fulfilment or unfulfillment between their needs, perceived pain or pleasure in the economic and social environments that influence their decision-making concerning their situation at a particular moment.

The push factor is seen as a primary and fundamental cause of action people take when they face problems regarding their self-fulfilment. Hence, they make or take decisions and as a consequence, the pull factors lead them to react and respond to the situation in a new behaviour which they found out in the course of action already taking (Baruch, 1995). These push factors refer to national conditions within one's country or source country which exist in every human environment and these factors force professionals to migrate to another environment. These push factors come in the form of crisis, violence, poverty, insecurity, kidnapping, unemployment, bribery and corruption, and so on.

The pull factors display characteristics in beneficiary countries that attract different professionals, and it is a combination of social, family factors, career, professional development, job security, higher wages, and other associated benefits. These pull factors also influence people's actions or attitudes toward making decisions of migrating to another place for a higher standard of living. Among the countries in the African continent, Nigeria is seen as one of the countries her citizens travel or migrate to different countries of the world like Canada, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and so on. So, the host countries provide for the migrants with all the factors or conditions not found in their country of origin for proper development. This explains the wave of brain drain commonly going on in Nigeria which the Nigerian government is yet to stop or control. The weakness of the above theory is that it ignored some factors like economic policy, and migration policy that may not be favourable to the individuals from source countries. Alejandro and Adrienne (2013) again argued that change theory cannot adequately explain the migration patterns of highly skilled immigrants to middle-earning countries and developing countries of the world.

## **Causes and Effects of Brain Drain on Human Capital Development in Nigeria**

Brain drain has its merits and demerits, but often one hears of brain drain more than brain gain, because of the adverse effects of the brain drain which is a global phenomenon. The brain gain also known as reverse brain drain, happens more in developed countries than the developing countries. Brain gain among other things means an increase in the number



of highly trained, foreign-born professionals entering a country to live and work, where greater opportunities are offered to people. This international movement of skilled workers positively brings an increase in trade, remittances, knowledge, and capital flows both human and material and it raises welfare and growth in the country's capital. Nigeria as a country gains minimally from her citizens from foreign remittances but apart from that it has been a huge loss to Nigeria as a nation, hence efforts are made to control the migration of professionals. Recently it was known that Nigeria National House of Assemble on April 6, 2023, pushed a bill banning fresh doctors from Nigeria universities from travelling abroad to practice or further their education until they have put in five years of compulsory service in Nigeria's health sector. This of course did not go down well with the medical doctors who reacted negatively to the above situation. Iremeka (2023) remarked that:

Over the years, medical doctors in the country have complained about poor condition of service, lack of equipment to work with, and poor state of the country's medical facilities, among others. The situation, which persists, has continued to be the cause of their increased strike....But it appears their demands for better conditions of service and provision of necessary tools usually fall on deaf ears as the government continued to treat the issues with kid gloves, making the doctors seek employment with higher remuneration and better condition of service abroad. (no p).

The gradual departure of skilled and unskilled professionals from the source countries accounts for non-development and dilapidation of facilities, quack professionals in many fields of life, and the laws of the country not being enforced nor right laws being promulgated. Ike (1997) observed that in Nigeria no one will doubt that the ideal of human rights remains at the present times a fantasy, for they are the non-tangible assets that promote peace and stability of any nation. Many economic policies are made but not implemented, only to be kicked out by the next or another incoming administration, with this stability is not assured or guaranteed for any sustainable development.

Brain drain in Nigeria affects tangible assets and non-tangible assets as noted earlier, culturally the meaning and originality of things are lost gradually by the people because they are abandoned to be lost and new meaning is introduced in the course of seeking a new standard of living. The erroneous opinions being sold to Africa and Nigeria in the past due to migrations or brain drain still control them because it formed a kind of mental

slavery in the minds and heads of average Nigerians and Africa as a whole. Nwadinigwe (1999) relates that:

The African continent has not contributed to civilization because its people are backward and low in intelligence and culture. The erroneous opinion about the Black people has seriously injured them through the centuries up to modern times in which it appears to have reached a climax in the history of human relations. (p. 14).

This of course has led the black people in Nigeria inclusive into abandoning, and selling their valued cultures and artifacts, some stolen by the same white men that condemned the cultural values and objects. The same idea was expressed earlier by Uzukwu (1996) that:

The Africans were treated as having neither culture nor religion nor social, economic, or political values worth preserving. The change of identity of the African person meant, in practice, the abandonment of the indigenous culture, values, and religion to embrace those of the West. (p. 4).

Confirming the above erroneous ideological stand that was geared towards the shattering of the primitive symbolic mindset and its cultural forms and modes, Ekwuru (1999) relates that:

Through this type of ideological framework, the colonized were psychologically conditioned to believe the fact that they embodied a human nature that was racially and culturally deficient. For which reason then, all the elements of their cultural civilization were condemned and discredited...in which case then, the only way toward cultural salvation was to wash themselves clean of every bit of their “low” and “inferior” cultural givens, to imbibe the perks of a “higher” and “superior” culture from the hands of the colonizer. (p. 40).

This is why there is a clarion call over Africa and Nigeria for cultural revival which will give confidence to Nigerians and the people of Africa a sense of value towards their culture in general. This will help in the development and promote real trust in the affairs being conducted in Nigeria, patronizing the goods made in Nigeria and possibly taking them for export to other countries of the world. This way brain drain monsters will be ameliorated for the growth of the country.

Economically, the mono-economy being operated by the Nigerian government since the discovery of oil in large quantity, it underdeveloped the Nigerian economy and increased brain drain outflow. The regional economy should be reactivated; this will help to diversify the economy of Nigeria. On the benefit of the regional economy for sustainable development in Nigeria Njoku (2009) expressed:

The Igbo traditional economy stood on a sectoral tripod that embedded agriculture, manufacturing and trade. These sectors had an interdependent relationship; the health of one sector impacted that of the others. With specific reference to manufacture and trade, it should be stressed that manufacture, provided the context for trade, that is, the distribution of goods from areas of plenty (low marginal utility) to those of deficiency (high marginal utility). At the same time, trade stimulated manufacturing by providing a vent for the disposal of surplus production, thus moving the economy away from subsistence to market orientation. (p. 47).

When this kind of economic situation is created in each region or state of the federation, certainly it will create enough jobs that will stimulate economic activities and drastically reduce the migrations of professionals. Diversifying the Nigerian economy has been a problem for different administrations coming into power since independence. Rather, what is noticed is the stealing of Nigerian oil and sharing of the dividends among the few politicians. Siollun (2009) remarked that:

Nigeria exports more than one million barrels of crude oil a day to the United States (representing nearly 50% of Nigeria's daily crude oil production), and it is projected that by 2015, Nigeria will provide 25% of the United States oil supply. With the United States frequently strained relations with Arab countries, Nigeria is increasingly viewed in Washington as an alternate dependable crude oil supplier. (p. 1).

As of today, what is the economic situation of Nigeria, the opposite is the case with the welfare of her citizens in terms of economic growth and oil production, poverty has been the order of the day hence the occurrence of brain drain in the country.

Another fatal blow to the Nigerian nation is the degree of bribery and corruption taking place in all its ramifications and every sector of her national life, corruption has been the bane of Nigeria's development. It grows or increases with the birth of new administrations, no government has decisively fought corruption. President Buhari was

elected in 2015 to fight bribery and corruption but the mismanagement was greatly seen in the eight years of his administration, borrowing of funds and diversion of the same fund were the order of the day. Umechukwu (2011) clearly stated that:

With corruption, there can be no sustainable development or political stability. By breeding and feeding on inefficiency, corruption invariably strangles the system of social organization. Corruption is the antithesis of development and progress...Corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten into the fabric of our society at every level. It has caused decay and dereliction within the infrastructure of government and society in physical, social, and human terms. (p. 96).

The above condition leaves no hope for the coming generation who now migrate to other countries of the world where life dreams will be met and potentials harnessed properly.

Another cause and consequence of brain drain in Nigeria is the political instability, this breeds a lot of crises which range from regional/ethnic war, religious crisis, kidnapping, banditry, herdsman clash with farmers, intimidation, and bad leadership. The aggregates of all these give rise to brain drain among the citizens of Nigeria. With the 25th February 2023 general, where all manner of injustices and malpractices took place during the election, many political parties went to court to prove that due process was not followed during the election. This brought a lack of trust or confidence between the ruling class and the citizens. Hence, most citizens of Nigeria left the country after the election because Nigeria is not yet ready to follow due process of law.

Religious war or crisis has been the order of the day since the second republic, here death tolls were much, innocent citizens were rendered homeless, properties were recklessly destroyed and all manner of killings took place. Abubakar (1997) reported that:

In May 1980, religious disturbances broke out in Zaria during which Christian churches and properties were destroyed. From 18 to 29 December 1980, riots by the Maitatsine sect at the Yan-Awaki Ward of Kano left about 4,177 people dead while property damage was put at millions of naira. On 29-30 October, Maitasine riots erupted in the Bulunkutu Ward of Maiduguri leaving 118 people dead. Also during the same period, Muslim demonstrators burnt down churches in Kano. This trend in religious violence and conflict in a plural society like Nigeria persists today. (p. 86).

These killings go on in Nigeria to the extent that some local governments are now being taken over by the banditry, Boko haram insurgents, and agitators. The security agencies seemed to be helpless over the situation, which contributes greatly to brain drain syndrome in Nigeria. Other numerous factors cause brain drain in Nigeria and which at the same time manifest their consequences on the standard of living in Nigeria.

## **Way-Forward and Conclusion**

Brain drain which is eating deep in most of the developing countries of the world like Nigeria must be controlled to close the gap of inequality, and deceit between the developed and developing countries. This will reduce the plight of exploitation by the first world countries going on in the form of Economic Summits being hosted by different world powers in the name of helping the third world countries, yet they are being dominated and exploited through international organizations instituted by developed countries and milking of raw materials in the third world countries.

Nigeria needs to invest heavily in the educational sector not giving loans that cannot be repaid easily but by giving grants to students from primary or secondary to tertiary institutions. The health sector needs to be revamped to reduce infant mortality and all manner of mortalities bedeviling the country. Nigerian politicians are known to access health care in foreign countries of the world leaving the common masses to die unattended through inadequate health care. This equally will reduce the migration of medical personnel in waves.

There is a need to instil in the citizens, discipline, patriotism, and loyalty and expose the youths to various works of life which will help them to share national experiences and encourage labour mobility. This way the young citizens will be molded to conduct affairs with greater sensitivity and concern for the national interest.

All the moribund industries in Nigeria ought to and should be revitalized, this will create many jobs for the fleeing citizens to earn a living and this will raise the gross domestic product (GDP) of Nigeria. Nigeria as of today is referred to as the capital poverty of the world, with our industries, refineries working, and regional agricultural schemes reactivated, Nigeria's GDP will increase tremendously.

The process of electing leadership in Nigeria is still a scam and full of intrigues despite the new 2023 Electoral Acts being introduced to guide the process of electing leaders. Recently, the European Union Observers of the 2023 general election in Nigeria reported that impunity and lack of transparency marred the 2023 general elections. Though the elections showed the commitment of Nigerians to democracy, it also exposed enduring systemic weaknesses and therefore signal a need for further legal and operational reforms to enhance transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability. The bad leadership which is commonly seen as the problem of Nigeria should be addressed through the review of the constitution and electoral laws. In this way, other issues will be addressed in the constitution for equity and harmonious existence.

Brain drain can only be controlled to a certain point but not expunged, hence there is a need in Nigeria to continue to reverse the trend through proper planning and implementation of policies for economic growth, to reverse millions of Nigeria being plunged recently into poverty in the last six months of 2023. And other policies, the security architecture should be raised to a digital security set-up than the usual pattern of road-check points and intelligence gathering.

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