FROM JAPATOJAPADA: EXPLORING THE GROWING TREND OF JAPASYNDROME AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS AND THE POTENTIAL OF "BRAIN-DRAIN" TRANSLATING TO "BRAIN-GAIN"

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Abstract

Research Problem: *The increasing mass emigration of Nigerian youths and highly skilled professionals, popularly referred to as the "Japa syndrome," has resulted in significant loss of human capital and negatively affected critical sectors of Nigeria's economy. Despite growing scholarly attention on migration, insufficient emphasis has been placed on examining how this phenomenon can be strategically managed to promote sustainable development and facilitate a transition from brain drain to brain gain.*
Methods/Theory: *The study adopted the historical research method, drawing on both primary and secondary sources of data. The Push and Pull Migration Theory was employed as the theoretical framework to explain the factors influencing the emigration of Nigerian youths and professionals.*
Results: *Findings reveal that the Japa syndrome is driven by a combination of socio-economic, political, and environmental factors, including insecurity, economic instability, high unemployment rates, poor working conditions, bad governance, leadership failure, poverty, and infrastructural deficits. The study further establishes that the continued emigration of skilled Nigerians has intensified brain drain and weakened key sectors such as healthcare and education.*
Conclusion: *The study concludes that while the Japa syndrome offers*

individual migrants prospects for improved living standards, its cumulative effect poses serious developmental challenges for Nigeria. Without deliberate policy intervention, the trend will continue to undermine national growth and institutional stability.

Key Contribution to Knowledge: *This study contributes to existing literature by extending the discourse on the Japa syndrome beyond its causes and consequences to examine the potential for converting brain drain into brain gain through strategic engagement of the Nigerian diaspora and return migration (Japada).*

Recommendation: *The study recommends a decisive revitalisation of the healthcare and education sectors, improved employment opportunities, enhanced working conditions, and the creation of a secure and enabling environment that promotes innovation, productivity, and sustainable development in Nigeria.*

Introduction

Nigeria is witnessing an unprecedented wave of youth and professional emigration that has gradually evolved into a national crisis with profound socio-economic consequences. The continuous departure of educated and skilled citizens from critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and information technology has raised serious concerns about the country's capacity for sustainable development and human capital retention. This growing trend, now deeply embedded in popular discourse, reflects widespread dissatisfaction with prevailing living and working conditions within the country.

Migration has long been a fundamental aspect of human society and a recurring feature of African history. Across the continent, population movements have been shaped by a combination of economic hardship, political instability, and structural inequalities inherited from colonial and post-colonial experiences. Existing studies on African migration largely attribute contemporary emigration trends to factors such as poverty, unemployment, weak economies, and limited opportunities for social mobility (Ogbu, 2019; Okunade&Awosusi, 2023). While these explanations remain relevant, they often frame migration as a rational survival strategy without sufficiently interrogating its long-term implications for national development.

In Nigeria, the scale and intensity of emigration in the twenty-first century have distinguished the phenomenon from earlier migration patterns. The country has consistently recorded a negative migration balance, indicating that more citizens are leaving than entering. This reality has been reinforced by worsening economic conditions, insecurity, poor governance, and declining public infrastructure. Within this context, the term *"Japa,"* derived from the Yoruba language and meaning "to flee or run for dear life," has gained prominence as a social expression capturing the desperation and urgency associated with emigration among Nigerians (Agbaje*et al.*, 2024). The concept has since evolved into what is now described as the *Japa syndrome*, denoting the large-scale movement of youths and skilled professionals to developed countries in search of improved living standards, security, and professional fulfilment.

Although a growing body of literature has examined the causes and patterns of the *Japa*syndrome, much of the existing scholarship has focused predominantly on push factors and migration motivations.

Comparatively little attention has been given to the broader developmental consequences of this trend or the possibility of leveraging migration outcomes for national benefit. This limitation in the literature creates a need for a more nuanced interrogation of *Japa*beyond emigration narratives, particularly in relation to brain drain, brain gain, and return migration (*Japada*). It is within this scholarly gap that this study situates its analysis, seeking to contribute to ongoing debates by examining not only why Nigerians leave, but how migration can be strategically managed to support sustainable development.

Research Problem

The persistent mass emigration of Nigerian youths and highly skilled professionals, commonly referred to as the "*Japa* syndrome," has created a severe human capital deficit that continues to undermine Nigeria's socio-economic development. Although existing studies have examined the causes and patterns of migration from Nigeria, much of the literature has concentrated on the push factors driving emigration, with limited scholarly attention given to the long-term developmental implications and the prospects of transforming brain drain into brain gain.

Nigeria has experienced significant losses in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and technology, resulting in weakened institutional capacity and reduced national productivity. Despite the growing scale of this phenomenon, there remains a noticeable gap in conceptual and empirical analyses that explore how Nigeria can strategically leverage migration outcomes, diaspora engagement, and return migration (*Japada*) for sustainable development. This study therefore addresses this gap by examining the causes and consequences of the *Japa* syndrome while also interrogating the potential pathways through which brain drain can be redirected towards brain gain in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to critically examine the phenomenon of the *Japa* syndrome in Nigeria and its implications for sustainable national development.

The specific objectives are to:

i. Examine the socio-economic, political, and environmental factors responsible for the mass emigration of Nigerian youths and skilled professionals;

ii. Analyze the consequences of the *Japa* syndrome on critical sectors of Nigeria's economy, especially healthcare and education;

iii. Explore the potential for transforming brain drain into brain gain through diaspora engagement and return migration (*Japada*).

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design based on the historical research method. The choice of this method was informed by the nature of the study, which seeks to examine the emergence, causes, and consequences of the *Japa* syndrome in Nigeria within a historical and socio-political context. The historical method is appropriate for analyzing social phenomena over time by systematically examining documented evidence, trends, and existing scholarly works.Data for the study were derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included official policy documents, government reports, and institutional records relevant to migration trends in Nigeria. Secondary sources consisted of academic journal articles, books, conference papers, and reputable newspaper publications that addressed issues related to migration, brain

drain, and youth emigration in Nigeria. These materials were critically analysed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and perspectives relevant to the objectives of the study. Emphasis was placed on critical content analysis and interpretive evaluation of existing literature to generate insights into the dynamics of the *Japa*syndrome and its implications for national development.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of *Japa syndrome* has emerged in contemporary Nigerian discourse to describe the increasing desire and actual movement of youths and skilled professionals out of the country in search of better socio-economic opportunities abroad. Beyond its literal meaning of "running away," *Japa*syndrome represents a collective response to systemic failures such as economic instability, insecurity, weak institutions, and declining public services. In this context, *Japa* is not merely an individual decision but a structural phenomenon shaped by national conditions and global inequalities.

Brain drain refers to the large-scale emigration of educated and highly skilled individuals from a country, resulting in the depletion of human capital needed for development. In Nigeria, brain drain manifests in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and technology, where the departure of professionals weakens institutional capacity and service delivery. However, the concept should not be viewed solely as a loss, as migration also creates transnational networks that can potentially benefit the home country.

Brain gain describes a situation in which the negative effects of brain drain are offset through the return of skilled migrants, diaspora investments, remittances, knowledge transfer, and international exposure. In this study, brain gain is conceptualised not only as physical return migration but also as the strategic utilisation of skills, capital, and expertise acquired abroad to stimulate national development.

The notion of *Japada* represents the reverse migration of Nigerians who return home after periods abroad, either voluntarily or due to unfavourable conditions in destination countries. *Japada* introduces a critical dimension to the migration discourse by highlighting the challenges of reintegration and the potential contributions of returnees to national development. By examining *Japa*and *Japada* together, this study advances a balanced conceptual understanding of migration as both a challenge and an opportunity for Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework: The Push and Pull Theory

This study is anchored on the Push and Pull Theory of migration as developed by Everett S. Lee (1966), but it extends the theory beyond its traditional application to explain emigration by incorporating the emerging phenomenon of return migration (*Japada*) within Nigeria. While the theory has been widely used to analyse why individuals move from one location to another, this study applies it dynamically to examine both outward migration (*Japa*) and return migration, thereby addressing a gap in its conventional usage.

Traditionally, the Push and Pull Theory explains migration as a response to negative conditions in the country of origin (push factors) and attractive conditions in the destination country (pull factors). In the Nigerian, push factors such as economic instability, unemployment, insecurity, poor governance, and deteriorating public infrastructure compel youths and professionals to leave the country. Correspondingly, pull factors including better working conditions, political stability, higher wages, quality education, and improved living standards in developed countries attract Nigerian migrants

abroad.However, this study departs from the mechanical application of the theory by interrogating how changing global conditions and unmet expectations in destination countries can reverse the migration process. Factors such as racial discrimination, restrictive immigration policies, high cost of living, job insecurity, cultural alienation, and deportation pressures function as *reverse push factors* that influence return migration (*Japada*). Simultaneously, improving domestic opportunities, diaspora engagement initiatives, and policy reforms in Nigeria may serve as *reverse pull factors* that encourage skilled Nigerians to return home.

Several studies have analysed and provided empirical evidence of the "*Japa* syndrome" in Nigeria. Agbaje*et al*. (2024) explored the human capital aspect of *Japa* syndrome and its socioeconomic implications for Nigerians. In many of the studies, it is argue that *Japa*syndrome is an emerging issue in Nigeria, impacting various sectors, from corporate to informal sectors of the economy. The study revealed that married individuals seeking better living standards abroad inadvertently contribute to socio-economic crises, particularly by placing the responsibility of raising children solely on one parent. It also challenges the misconception that foreign countries offer abundant opportunities, pointing out the fierce competition faced by migrants. The studies generally recommended that the Nigerian government should as a matter of urgency come up with social and fiscal policies that will make life worth living in Nigeria, thereby limiting migration among youths.

The study by Okunade and Awosusi (2023) examined both endogamous and exogamous factors contributing to the *Japa* syndrome in Nigeria. Their argument suggests that Nigeria's current wave of out-migration is more influenced by the neoliberal structure and other social trends of the global north than by the country's unfavorable economic conditions and security concerns. They also argued that the rapid out-migration is having significant negative effects on both Nigeria and Africa as a whole. The study identified various push and pull factors driving the *Japa* syndrome among Nigerians migrating to the developed countries, including worsening economic conditions, career prospects, professional exhaustion, the desire for a secure future, migration delusion and obsession, ongoing security issues, easy access to jobs, and the pursuit of education as a means to an end.

The study by Yusuf *et al*. (2023) argued that the drivers of "*Japa*" are primarily environmental and socio-economic factors. These include violence, insurgency, insecurity, poor environmental conditions, the search for better opportunities, high unemployment rates, infrastructural deficits, human trafficking, bad governance, and poor working conditions, among others. The study further highlighted a significant difference in how male and female youths perceive the factors contributing to the "*Japa*" phenomenon. This supports the findings of Okunade and Awosusi (2023), which noted that males are generally more interested in migration and "*Japa*" than their female counterparts. Additionally, Yusuf *et al.* (2023) recommended that governments create more job opportunities for youths, foster an enabling environment for small and medium-scale enterprises, and implement policies that promote economic stability and poverty reduction.

The research by Olumoye and Abiri (2023) argued that the *Japa*movement goes beyond the mere desire for a better life. Many Nigerians are fleeing the country due to the failure and corruption of public institutions that are supposed to serve them. The authors contended that the effects of the *Japa* syndrome include brain drain and a lack of

expertise in various fields such as health, education, technology, and skilled trades. To address the challenges posed by the *Japa*syndrome, the study recommended that the government focus on improving the country's economic situation by creating more employment opportunities and encouraging entrepreneurship through low-interest loans for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Emedem (2024) examined the significant consequences of migration and explores strategies to address its current socio-economic impacts. The author argued that the influx of migrants into the country can be substantially reduced by eliminating poverty, improving infrastructure for citizens' welfare, creating employment opportunities, and, most importantly, ensuring national security. Mpigi (2023) noted that the *Japa* syndrome has become a major concern for Nigerian society. This phenomenon reflects the growing desire among young professionals and skilled individuals to leave Nigeria in search of better opportunities. The paper equally identified factors such as hunger, lack of jobs for graduates, and insecurity as key drivers of this rush to leave Nigeria at all cost.

Liu (2023) explored the socio-economic factors driving migration among Nigerian youths, including economic dissatisfaction, distrust in government institutions, and the devaluation of the Nigerian currency. As a result, the author suggested that Nigerian youths embrace the "*Japa*" phenomenon and its associated imagery of "fleeing" as a way to express their desire to escape environments where individual efforts are continually undermined.

While many studies focus on the socio-economic, political, and structural factors driving migration, there is limited research on its consequences, particularly for those who leave Nigeria in search of a better life. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the Nigerian experience and exploring strategies that could turn brain drain into brain gain for the country. Additionally, the study seeks to explore how Nigerian youths perceive the potential benefits of returning (*Japada*), if they choose to do so, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of migration on both individuals and Nigerian society.

A Historical Background of Nigerian Migration Trends

Long before the contemporary emigration wave became popularly labelled as *"Japa,"* migration had already formed a significant part of Nigeria's socio-economic history. What is now described as the *Japa* movement represents not an entirely new phenomenon, but rather an intensification of earlier migration patterns shaped by structural and political transformations. As Nwobodo (2024) observes, Nigerian emigration predates the current discourse and can be traced to periods of deep national uncertainty, particularly during times of economic decline and political instability. This perspective situates *Japa* within a broader historical continuum rather than as an isolated or spontaneous development.

The roots of large-scale emigration are closely linked to the socio-political climate of the 1980s, a period marked by military interventions, policy instability, and economic downturns. During this era, migration functioned primarily as a survival and coping strategy. Olayinka (2023) explains that political repression and limited economic prospects significantly shaped migration decisions in the late twentieth century, particularly when coupled with external opportunities such as visa lottery programmes. This phase of migration, popularly referred to as *"checking out,"* illustrates that contemporary emigration trends are historically embedded responses to governance failures rather than sudden cultural shifts.

Internal migration patterns further reinforce this argument. Prior to large-scale international emigration, many Nigerians initially migrated from rural areas to urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt in search of employment and improved living conditions. This wave of urbanisation reflected aspirations for socio-economic advancement within national borders. However, as Nwobodo (2024) implies, the inability of urban centres to absorb the growing labour force and provide sustainable opportunities gradually redirected migration outward, transforming domestic mobility into international emigration.Beyond structural conditions, cultural factors have also played a role in shaping contemporary migration discourse. The widespread popularisation of the term *"Japa"* through music and digital culture illustrates how migration has moved from a private survival strategy to a publicly celebrated aspiration. Olayinka (2023) highlights how Naira Marley's 2018 song *Japa* contributed to embedding the term in everyday language, particularly among youths. While the song employs metaphor and artistic expression, its resonance reflects a deeper social reality in which emigration is normalised as a desirable response to socio-economic frustration.

Empirical migration data further substantiates these historical and cultural explanations. Nigeria's Net Migration Rate reveals a clear structural shift over time. During the oil boom era between 1974 and 1980, Nigeria recorded a positive net migration rate, indicating that the country functioned as a destination rather than a source of migrants. However, from 1981 onwards, the trend reversed and has remained consistently negative. Olayinka (2023) documents this sustained decline, with figures such as -0.303 in 2019 and -0.295 in 2020, underscoring the persistence of outward migration. Projections by the United Nations World Population Reports, as cited in Otelemate (2024), further confirm that this pattern is unlikely to reverse in the short term without significant structural reforms.Conteporary*Japa* is best understood as the culmination of prolonged political, economic, and institutional challenges rather than a sudden generational impulse. This study provides a critical foundation for understanding its present dynamics and long-term developmental implications.

Causes of *Japa*Syndrome: The Nigerian Experience

The *Japa*syndrome is not driven by a single factor but by the cumulative failure of Nigeria's socio-economic, political, and institutional systems to provide conditions conducive to human development. While existing studies identify multiple push factors, a critical synthesis of the literature reveals that these factors operate interactively rather than independently, reinforcing the urgency of emigration among both skilled professionals and the youth population.

Infrastructural Deficits

One of the most persistent structural drivers of emigration in Nigeria is the chronic failure of public infrastructure. Beyond inconveniencing citizens, infrastructural decay fundamentally undermines quality of life and professional fulfilment. Ray (2023) documents the severe deterioration of healthcare infrastructure, highlighting shortages of equipment, unreliable electricity, and inadequate medical supplies. These conditions do not merely reflect institutional weakness; they actively constrain professional competence and ethical practice, particularly among healthcare workers who are unable to deliver standard care.

The implication of this infrastructural failure is significant. As Ogbu (2019) argues, migration decisions are increasingly influenced not only by income differentials but by the broader living and working environment. When professionals are unable to

function effectively within their home institutions, emigration becomes a rational response to systemic neglect rather than personal ambition. Thus, infrastructural decay operates as a powerful push factor that erodes both professional dignity and national capacity.

Volatile and Unpredictable Economy

Nigeria's unstable economic environment further compounds migration pressures. Persistent inflation, currency depreciation, and widening income inequality have weakened citizens' confidence in long-term economic security. Ogbu (2019) observes that economic volatility discourages investment in personal and professional futures, particularly among young Nigerians who face diminishing prospects for social mobility.

Rather than viewing migration solely as a search for higher wages, the literature suggests that *Japa* represents an escape from economic uncertainty. The inability to plan, save, or achieve financial stability transforms emigration into a survival strategy. This reveals that economic instability functions less as a temporary hardship and more as a structural condition driving sustained outward migration.

High Unemployment Rate

Unemployment remains one of the most visible manifestations of Nigeria's economic crisis. Yusuf *et al.* (2023) highlight the paradox of widespread unemployment in a resource-rich country, underscoring the failure of policy frameworks to translate growth potential into employment opportunities. Statistical evidence presented by Ogungbile (2023) further illustrates the severity of the crisis, with millions of employable youths excluded from the labour market.However, beyond the figures lies a deeper issue. Olumoye and Abiri (2023) argue that prolonged unemployment erodes morale, professional identity, and national loyalty. For many youths, the absence of meaningful employment signals a lack of future within the country. Consequently, *Japa* emerges not merely as an economic choice but as a response to systemic exclusion from productive life.

Insecurity and Political Instability

The escalation of insecurity across Nigeria has intensified emigration pressures. Yusuf (2023) links rising violence to growing fear and uncertainty, particularly among skilled individuals whose mobility allows them to seek safety elsewhere. Ogungbile (2023) further notes that the absence of accountability and effective state response deepens citizens' sense of vulnerability.

Political instability and governance failures amplify these concerns. Nwobodo (2025) argues that corruption, policy inconsistency, and leadership failure have undermined public trust in state institutions. For young Nigerians, especially those within the 18–35 age bracket, this disillusionment translates into a belief that national systems are incapable of reform. Emigration thus becomes both a personal and political statement - a withdrawal from a system perceived as unresponsive and unjust.

Major Consequences of *Japa* Syndrome in Nigeria

The *Japa*syndrome has emerged as one of the most consequential socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria, with far-reaching implications for national development. Beyond individual migration experiences, the sustained emigration of youths and skilled professionals has resulted in significant human capital depletion, institutional weakening, and economic losses. This pattern has intensified brain drain and undermined the capacity of critical sectors to function effectively.Available evidence suggests that emigration intentions are now deeply entrenched across Nigerian society.

Surveys indicating that a majority of Nigerians express a desire to leave the country reveal more than personal aspirations; they point to a collective loss of confidence in the nation's socio-economic and governance structures. The fact that professionals, entrepreneurs, and students alike seek opportunities abroad suggests that *Japa* has evolved into a systemic response to persistent unemployment, insecurity, and declining public services. Consequently, the phenomenon has shifted from being a marginal survival strategy to a mainstream coping mechanism for large segments of the population.

The growing inclination of students to pursue education abroad further reinforces this trend. Substantial financial resources have been expended on foreign education, with billions of dollars leaving the Nigerian economy over the past decade. These expenditures reflect not only the perceived superiority of foreign institutions but also declining trust in the stability, quality, and global competitiveness of Nigeria's education system. When nearly nine out of ten youths express a preference for studying abroad, it signals a long-term threat to national human capital formation and future workforce sustainability.

The Healthcare Sector

The healthcare sector represents one of the most severely affected areas of *Japa*-induced brain drain. The persistent migration of medical professionals has significantly weakened Nigeria's healthcare delivery system and exacerbated existing public health challenges. Reports indicating that nearly half of Nigeria's doctors have emigrated underscore the magnitude of this crisis. The resignation of hundreds of clinical staff from major teaching hospitals further illustrates how institutional capacity has been steadily eroded.The implications of this trend are profound. A doctor-to-patient ratio of approximately 1:8,000 highlights the severe strain placed on the remaining workforce and raises concerns about service quality, accessibility, and patient safety. While migration is often explained through push and pull factors such as poor remuneration and limited career advancement, the cumulative effect is a structural healthcare crisis. The continued departure of trained professionals reduces institutional memory, weakens mentoring systems, and increases reliance on an overstretched workforce, thereby reinforcing the cycle of decline within the sector.

The Education Sector

The education sector has similarly experienced significant disruption as a result of the *Japa* syndrome. The persistent emigration of academic staff has negatively affected teaching quality, research output, and institutional stability within Nigerian universities. Long-standing issues such as poor remuneration, excessive workload, unpaid entitlements, and recurrent industrial actions have contributed to widespread dissatisfaction among academics.Historical and contemporary evidence suggests that intellectual migration is not a new challenge; however, its scale and intensity have increased markedly in recent years. Reports of widespread lecturer shortages across federal and state universities reveal a system struggling to retain its most skilled personnel. The loss of experienced academics has created staffing gaps that are difficult to fill, particularly given bureaucratic constraints and slow recruitment processes. As a result, departments are increasingly understaffed, mentoring structures are weakened, and academic continuity is disrupted, thereby compromising the overall quality of higher education.

Loss of Tax Revenue and Financial Resources

Beyond sectoral impacts, the *Japa* syndrome has resulted in significant economic losses through reduced tax revenue and capital flight. With millions of Nigerians residing in the diaspora, a substantial proportion of the working-age population now contributes economically to foreign countries rather than to Nigeria's domestic economy. This loss of potential tax revenue constrains government capacity to fund public services and invest in national development.

Also, large sums of money are expended annually on migration-related processes, including foreign education, visa applications, and language proficiency examinations. The billions of dollars spent on foreign education within a short period illustrate how *Japa* facilitates the outward transfer of financial resources that could otherwise strengthen local institutions. These financial outflows not only deepen economic dependency but also reinforce the structural conditions that motivate further emigration.

Negative Portrayal of Nigeria in the International Community

Beyond its domestic implications, the *Japa* syndrome has contributed to the erosion of Nigeria's image in the international community, with significant consequences for diplomacy, foreign investment, and global partnerships. The persistent outflow of skilled professionals reinforces external perceptions of Nigeria as a country unable to provide security, opportunity, or stability for its citizens. As Nwobodo (2024) suggests, such perceptions shape international attitudes toward Nigeria, often translating into scepticism about the country's economic and institutional reliability.

This negative portrayal has tangible consequences. The decision by the United Arab Emirates to restrict Nigerian entry in 2022 illustrates how migration-related concerns can strain bilateral relations. While official narratives often frame such policies as security measures, they also reflect broader reputational challenges associated with emigration patterns and diaspora conduct. These developments indicate that *Japa*is not merely a domestic labour issue but a phenomenon with diplomatic and economic repercussions. Consequently, addressing emigration requires not only internal reforms but also deliberate efforts at perception management and international engagement.

Impact on Families and Social Relationships

At the micro-social level, the *Japa* syndrome has profoundly altered family structures and interpersonal relationships. Migration, by its nature, restructures social bonds; however, the secrecy and urgency surrounding contemporary emigration plans have intensified emotional strain within Nigerian families. Mpigi (2023) observes that *Japa*has introduced new forms of mistrust and emotional distance among relatives and friends, as migration decisions are often concealed until departure becomes inevitable.

This secrecy produces lasting social consequences. The sudden departure of a family member can generate feelings of betrayal among those left behind, weakening kinship ties and eroding communal solidarity. Liu (2023) further notes that migration frequently compresses extended family networks into fragmented nuclear units, reducing traditional support systems. In many cases, families invest substantial financial resources to facilitate the migration of one member, often at the expense of the education and welfare of siblings who remain behind (Agbaje*et al.*, 2024). When emigrants struggle abroad or fail to meet family expectations, the emotional and economic costs become even more pronounced.

The social disruption is particularly acute in cases involving spousal separation. Reports of so-called "contract marriages" entered into for immigration purposes reveal unintended consequences, including abandonment and family disintegration. Such outcomes suggest that the social costs of *Japa* extend beyond economic loss to include long-term damage to family stability, child development, and social values.

Departure of Multinational Corporations and Foreign Investments

The human capital flight associated with *Japa*has been accompanied by the exit of multinational corporations and declining foreign direct investment. While corporate withdrawal is influenced by multiple factors, the erosion of skilled labour, regulatory complexity, and economic uncertainty collectively create an unfavourable business climate. Olanipekun (2024) links the departure of multinational firms to broader systemic challenges, including rising operational costs and policy inconsistencies.

Evidence from the oil and gas sector demonstrates how regulatory pressures and increasing levies have compounded investor concerns. As Uzoho (2023) reports, indigenous producers have expressed alarm over the withdrawal of major international service companies, citing escalating compliance costs. The exit of firms such as Unilever, Guinness Nigeria, Shell Petroleum, and Procter & Gamble signals more than corporate restructuring; it reflects declining confidence in Nigeria's long-term economic environment. The loss of thousands of jobs following these exits further deepens unemployment and reinforces the conditions that drive emigration, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of decline.

Economic Gains for Receiving Countries

While Nigeria bears the costs of emigration, receiving countries often reap significant economic benefits. The inflow of skilled migrants enhances productivity, innovation, and economic output in host nations. Although Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is shaped by multiple variables, the absorption of trained professionals from developing countries provides advanced economies with human capital acquired at minimal training cost.

The implication for Nigeria is twofold. First, the country loses the productive capacity of its skilled workforce. Second, it incurs additional costs when replacing emigrants with expatriates, often at significantly higher expense. This dynamic reinforces economic dependency and weakens domestic capacity-building efforts. Thus, the *Japa* syndrome indirectly contributes to uneven global development, where sending countries experience stagnation while receiving countries consolidate growth advantages.

Diaspora Remittances and Their Limits

Despite its many negative consequences, the *Japa* syndrome has generated some economic benefits through diaspora remittances. Nigeria's position as one of Africa's largest recipients of remittance inflows underscores the financial significance of its diaspora. These funds have played a critical role in alleviating household poverty, supporting consumption, and financing small-scale investments.However, while remittances provide short-term economic relief, they do not fully offset the structural damage caused by human capital loss. Dependence on remittances may even obscure deeper developmental challenges by masking unemployment and institutional failure. Although remittances contribute to foreign exchange inflows and GDP growth, they

cannot substitute for a robust domestic economy driven by skilled labour, innovation, and productive investment.

Government Policy Measures to Curb the *Japa*Syndrome

In response to escalating emigration, the Nigerian government has introduced policy measures aimed at improving workforce retention, particularly within the healthcare sector. Recent reforms emphasise better remuneration, improved working conditions, and increased investment in infrastructure. Initiatives targeting electricity reliability in teaching hospitals and broader system revitalisation signal recognition of the structural drivers of emigration.

Beyond healthcare, the expansion of technology hubs and startup ecosystems, particularly in Lagos State, demonstrates how targeted investment can create alternatives to emigration. Programmes such as the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund and innovation centres like Co-Creation Hub reflect efforts to harness youth creativity and entrepreneurship. While these initiatives represent positive steps, their long-term effectiveness depends on sustained policy coherence, macroeconomic stability, and nationwide implementation. Without comprehensive reforms across sectors, isolated successes may remain insufficient to reverse the broader *Japa*trend.

From *Japa to Japada*: An Overview of Challenges Faced by Nigerian Emigrants

The Nigerian Immigration Service Migration Information Data Analysis System (cited by Adedira*net al.*, 2025) showed that about 2,115,139 people emigrated from Nigeria in 2022, while 1,574,357 left the country between January and September 30, 2023, bringing the total number of Nigerians who had left the country within two years to 3,679,496. However, some of these Nigerians are returning home to rebuild their lives. While much attention has been given to *Japa*, the mass emigration of Nigerians in search of greener pastures, increasing attention must now be paid to *Japada*, a growing phenomenon of mass return (Falola, 2023). *Japada*does not always imply that one has willingly decided to return to Nigeria, but rather that the individual was either forced to do so or fled due to discomfort. Nigerians can be found in almost every nation, but despite their widespread presence, they often face unfortunate situations and take on jobs that are less dignifying.

In Nigeria, where collectivism and a communistic social orientation help others grow, the social orientation in most destination countries is individualistic (Falola, 2023). It is a world of contracts, services, responsibilities, rights, and metro-police. Loneliness and depression have led many migrants to an early grave. Some migrants alleviate loneliness through consistent calls to people in their home countries. Cultural dissonance, including exposure to unfamiliar sexual norms, social etiquette, and lifestyle practices, threatens the cultural identity of Nigerians abroad, leaving many feeling lost and disconnected.

Also, Nigerians and other African immigrants tend to face racial and xenophobic abuse on a large scale (Falola, 2023; Adedira*net al.*, 2025; Afunugo, 2023; Kehinde, 2024). This is born out of ethnocentric mentalities as well as intolerance towards Africans due to their persistent will to compete. Attacks across Europe against Black people and people of African origin, including Nigerians, have structurally increased in recent times. Furthermore, the Nigerian governments past actions, along with the prevalence of cyber fraud and other types of fraud in the country, have created a hostile attitude towards Nigerians in other countries.

Another *Japa* incident is the increase in the rate of human trafficking across the globe. The

willingness of Nigerians to leave the country due to the state of the economy has led many to venture out, only to be turned into slaves, prostitutes, pawns, or objects of organ harvesting. Different routes have emerged in the effort to *Japa*, which has led to the creation of many slave camps or holding centers, particularly in Libya and other parts of the world (Falola, 2023). Upon returning, some Nigerians are left in various states, burdened with the trauma of slavery, rape, organ trafficking, involuntary prostitution, among others.

Furthermore, in light of the current global economic crunch, some destination countries, including Britain, may not rule out deportation as a measure to salvage their economy, which has been stretched to its limits by the influx of immigrants (Olanipekun, 2024). Currently, the United Kingdom is considering new immigration measures that could make it more difficult for citizens of Nigeria, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka to obtain visas, citing high rates of overstays and subsequent asylum claims (Habib, 2025). The new policies aim to target nationalities identified as having a greater likelihood of remaining in the country beyond the terms of their visas. Olanipekun (2024) cited that the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has reviewed the required proof of funds for student immigrants from $10,000 to $20,635. Thus, Canada's increase in its requirements for proof of funds for student immigrants serves as a move to control the influx of migrants. The greener pastures that young people seem to be seeking outside the shores of Nigeria are not truly green, as most Nigerians who abandon lucrative jobs at home for foreign lands are said to be making do with menial jobs just to survive. Therefore, the craze to succeed abroad has led some Nigerians to seek asylum in other countries, thereby leaving the motherland substandard and bereft of skilled labour.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that the *Japa*syndrome is driven by an interrelated combination of socio-economic, political, and environmental factors rather than individual ambition alone. While previous studies emphasise unemployment and economic hardship (Olayinka, 2023; Nwobodo, 2024), this study shows that many emigrants are already employed professionals whose decisions are shaped by poor working conditions, lack of career progression, insecurity, and declining institutional trust.

Politically, persistent governance failures, policy inconsistency, and widespread insecurity intensify migration pressures. Unlike earlier episodic migration waves, the contemporary *Japa* syndrome reflects a sustained loss of confidence in the Nigerian state's capacity to guarantee long-term stability and opportunity. These findings extend push–pull migration theory by demonstrating that it is the cumulative effect of structural dysfunctions, rather than isolated economic factors that explains the scale of current emigration.

The findings indicate that the *Japa* syndrome has severely weakened Nigeria's healthcare and education sectors through sustained brain drain. While existing studies acknowledge manpower losses (Falola, 2022; Kehinde, 2024), this study highlights a self-reinforcing cycle in which deteriorating working conditions prompt emigration, further degrading service delivery and institutional capacity.

In healthcare, staff shortages, poor doctor-to-patient ratios, and overstretched facilities have deepened systemic fragility. In education, the mass exit of academics has undermined teaching quality, research output, and institutional continuity. Beyond sectoral impacts, the findings reveal broader consequences, including loss of tax revenue,

reduced investor confidence, and reputational damage. Contrary to optimistic narratives, the study argues that diaspora remittances, though beneficial, do not offset the long-term erosion of human capital and institutional resilience.

Findings show that while the *Japa* syndrome has predominantly negative consequences, limited opportunities exist for transforming brain drain into brain gain through diaspora engagement and return migration. Although remittances contribute to household welfare and foreign exchange inflows (Anaesoronye, 2023), this study finds that they are insufficient for sustainable development without deliberate policy intervention.

Meaningful *Japada*is contingent on structural reforms, including improved governance, security, infrastructure, and merit-based institutions. This study therefore reframes brain gain not as an automatic outcome of migration but as a policy-dependent process, reinforcing the push - pull framework's emphasis on addressing domestic push factors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that the *Japa*syndrome in Nigeria is driven by a combination of economic instability, poor working conditions, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-political insecurity, which aligns with earlier studies highlighting emigration as a response to systemic dysfunction. Conceptually, this study underscores that the *Japa* syndrome is not merely an individual pursuit of better opportunities but a structural phenomenon reflecting the failure of governance and institutional frameworks to provide sustainable livelihood and professional growth. Theoretically, the findings support the **push-pull migration framework**, where "push" factors such as economic hardship, insecurity, and lack of social amenities compel individuals to leave, while "pull" factors such as perceived stability, better remuneration, and professional growth in foreign countries attract them (Adepoju, 2020).

Unlike some previous studies that primarily focused on economic factors as drivers of emigration, this research highlights a more holistic perspective: social, educational, and security-related concerns equally influence the decision to migrate. The study further finds that while personal aspirations for a better life align with prior research, the magnitude of asset liquidation and debt incurred to facilitate emigration reflects a deeper desperation than previously documented. Collectively, these findings emphasize that unless structural and systemic reforms are implemented, the brain drain resulting from the *Japa*syndrome will continue to weaken Nigeria's human capital potential.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following measures are recommended to address the *Japa*syndrome and its underlying causes:

1. **Revitalization of Key Sectors:** The government should prioritize reform in the healthcare and academic sectors by improving infrastructure, remuneration, and working conditions, addressing the push factors identified in this study.
2. **Employment Generation:** Targeted employment programs should be developed to absorb the growing youth population, mitigating the unemployment-driven emigration highlighted by the findings.
3. **Enhanced Security:** Since insecurity emerged as a critical factor in emigration decisions, the government

must adopt proactive security measures, modern intelligence techniques, and technological tools to create a safer environment.

4. **Promotion of Entrepreneurship:** Findings indicate that limited local opportunities push citizens abroad. Establishing supportive ecosystems, easing access to finance, and encouraging innovation hubs will retain talent domestically.
5. **Digital and Tele-services:** Leveraging telemedicine and digital platforms can reduce the professional migration of healthcare workers, a significant trend revealed in this study.
6. **National Sensitization:** Civic education and professional loyalty campaigns should be implemented to cultivate national consciousness and reduce the social drivers of emigration.
7. **Good Governance and Anti-Corruption:** Addressing systemic corruption and ensuring equitable policies are essential to restore public trust, a factor strongly associated with the decision to migrate.
8. **Mindset Development:** Citizens should be encouraged to embrace resilience, adaptability, and optimism, reflecting the study's finding that individual attitudes can mediate the impact of systemic challenges.

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