

# Migration and Brain Drain in the Developing Countries

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## Abstract

*International migration and its consequence effects in developing countries has become an integral global issue. In every day, more people are migrating from the developing to developed countries of the world due to the socio-economic inequality that exist between these two spaces, to the advantage of the developed countries. As the labour markets in the developing countries offer lesser opportunities, increase in the movement of skilled and professional skilled labour to developed countries becomes highly intensified. This paper focuses on migration and its implications on brain drain in developing countries. The paper was anchored on push-pull theory of migration. Data used in this paper were obtained from books, journal articles, government records/statistics, news letter, and internet websites and were analysed using content analysis. The paper explored the causes of skilled and professional skilled labour migration in developing countries. It also examined socio-economic impacts of brain drain on immigrants and sending countries' economies. In conclusion, it highlights a few policy recommendations for better working conditions and pay of skilled and professional skilled labour in developing countries.*

**Keywords:** migration, brain, drain, countries

## Introduction

International migration and its consequence effect on brain drain in Africa and other developing countries in general has become an integral global issue. In every day, people are migrating from the developing to developed countries of the world, as a result of the socio-economic inequality that exist between these two spaces, to the advantage of the developed countries. Unequal opportunities and the varying level of development among nations remains a major driver of international migration. This movement has persisted among skilled and professional skilled labours as quest for greater socio-economic opportunities such as employment, better salary/wages, career advancement, security and other job prospects lacking in developing countries which are readily available in the developed countries.

The inequalities that exist between the two spheres have intensified the rate at which people migrate to the developed countries. Docquier (2014) stated that database of global

bilateral migration of 2011 shows that in 2000 migrants from developing countries dominated the global migrant stock. According to him, out of 72.6 million recorded migrants globally, developing countries constitute about 45% of international migration and migration from developing to developed countries was 55 million which was 34% of all migrants while the migration in developed countries was 8 million or 17%.

Literature has shown that human capital flight in developing countries has become subject of attention since 1960's when 27,000 educated Africans migrated to the West. In Africa, migration became more pronounced during the mid-1980s when those who had travelled abroad for the sole purpose of furthering their education, did not return back to their home countries. During this period the migration of the skilled and professional skilled labours from Africa to Europe was as high as 80,000 persons (El-Khawas (2004)). In the late 1980s, about thirty percent of educated Africans had migrated to Europe and Sudan which contributed to loss of 17 percent of doctors and dentists, 20 percent of university teaching staff, 30 percent of engineers and 45 percent of surveyors. Is no surprise to say that 60 percent of Ghanaian doctors trained in the early 80s are now abroad (El-Khawas (2004)). Nunn (2007) assert that "among the 100,000 African professionals reported to be in the United States, 21,000 are estimated to be Nigerian physicians. There are more Sierra-Leonean medical doctors working in the Chicago area than in Sierra-Leone itself".

Kaba (2011) asserted that "between 1986 and 1996, almost half (44%) of Africans who completed their Ph.D abroad made the decision to remain abroad". According to World Bank (2006a), between 1999 and 2001 African accounted for 1,515 (4.4%) out of 34,649 non U.S. citizen doctorate recipients in the United States. Grant (2006) asserted that Witwatersrand medical school in South Africa, so far has lost up to 45% of its graduates to migration since 1975. In the space of three years (1999-2002), the University of South Africa lost a staggering total of 100,000 professionals including doctors, engineers, scientists, academics and accountants courtesy of brain drain (El-Khawas, 2004). El-Khawas (2004) also stated that during this period, many Nigerian women who immigrated to Canada in pursuit of occupational and educational opportunities have established themselves successfully and occupied influential positions. Recently in the year 2015, African-trained International Medical Graduates (IMGs) who migrated to United States alone was 13,584 which is 27.1 percent increase from 2005. This brings the percentage of African-educated physicians working in US to 86.0 percent and they were trained in Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa (MO, 2018).

The problem with this phenomenon is that developing nations are being deprived of their talented human capital needed most. This ever-growing rate of skilled and professional skilled migration to the West has posed significant challenges to developing nations and their economies. Some of the challenges include continuous decrease in size of skilled manpower, exploitation, low productivity and loss of revenue. This movement has become a perseverance loss of fortitude in developing countries. As a result, a number of questions are been ask: What motivate the skilled and professional skilled labour in developing countries to migrate to the developed countries? What impact does this type of migration have on developing countries? How can it be reduce or eradicate? Finding answers to these questions has become the crux of this paper.

## **Method**

This paper made use of secondary data collection. They were sourced from textbooks, journal articles, government statistic/official records, news letter, and internet websites. Content analysis technique was used for data analysis.

## **Conceptual Consideration**

### ***Migration***

Migration has enjoyed a lot of definitions from different standpoints based on; time, space and process. However, a more clear definition of migration was advanced by the

International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2004). The IOM defined migration "as the movement of person or group of persons, either across international border or within a state. Migration can be define as the movement of a large number of people from one region to the other, within administrative states in a country or/and between contiguous countries or nation states for a period not less than twelve months and for different purposes such as education, trade, employment, security and others. It is also clearly conveyed from this definition that migration is been prompt by circumstance which inspired to shape the mind of the migrants to move from their place of origin to a new location where they do not belong by identity as at the time of decision to move.

### **Brain Drain**

The concept of brain drain simply means the migration of the skilled manpower such as engineers, physicians, scientists, and other trained professionals from their countries of origin usually developing nations to the developed economics for the purpose of work or termed as "greener pasture". The Cambridge Dictionary defined "brain drain as the situation in which large numbers of educated and very skilled people leave their own country to live and work in another country where pay and conditions are better". Docquier (2014) opined that the term brain drain denotes international transfer of human capital resources, and it applies mainly to the migration of highly educated individuals from developing to developed countries. So, brain drain in this context is the movement of skilled and professional skilled persons from developing to develop for employment opportunities better than their home countries.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Push-Pull theory is considered most appropriate in exploring the nexus between migration and brain drain in developing countries. The theory is traced to Ravenstein of England in the 19th century. It stated that "people migrate because of factors that push them out of their existing nation and factors that pull them in to another"(Hugh, 1922). The theory states that the decisions of migrants are influenced by two major factors the "push and the pull factors".

The theory argued that, the push factors are found in migrants 'home countries. Such factors include; high unemployment rates, low wages, poor working condition, insecurity and pull factors are; low unemployment, high wages, a better working condition and security, which predisposes people to leave their countries of origin. Therefore, the push-pull theory argues that brain drain is caused by the perceived negative socio-economic conditions in the developing country which discourage (push) brains in taking decision to travel to developed nations in pursuit of better job opportunities that are available in those countries. Thus, in view of this paper, brain drain remains a consequence of perpetual inequality between the developed and developing countries.

### **Causes of Brain Drain**

The causes of brain drain in developing countries include:

#### **(i) High Unemployment Rate**

The dearth of employment opportunities is among the major challenges facing the developing countries. The investment on education and the economy in general is low. This has brought negative outcomes in the labor market. The developing countries lack reliable labour markets to absorb the ever increasing working population. For instance, African Economic Outlook (2018) projected population trend reports showed that developing countries have the highest population growth and the working-age population in growth in the world especially African region.

**Table 1. Projected population trends, 2013-2063 (millions, expect where indicated otherwise)**

Region	Total population Millions			Average annual percentage change	Working-age population millions			Average annual percentage change
	2013	2063	Change		2013	2063	Change	
Asia	4,331	5,244	913	0.4	2,939	3,243	304	0.2
Europe	740	693	-47	-0.1	498	390	-108	-0.5
Latin America and the Caribbean	619	787	168	0.5	411	473	62	0.3
Northern America	351	456	105	0.5	234	268	34	0.3
Oceania	38	62	24	1.0	25	38	13	0.8
Africa	1,135	3,095	1,960	2.0	627	1,969	1,342	2.3
World	7,213	10,338	3,124	0.7	4,734	6,381	1,671	0.6
Sub-Saharan share of world population (%)	15.7	29.9	62.8		13.2	30.8	81.4	

**Source:** AFDB calculations based on the UN medium variant Projections. Adapted from African Economic Outlook (2018)

According to this Table, Africa will become the most populous continent in the next few decades. The projected population implies that it's labour force which was 620 million in 2013 and will increase to about 2 billion in 2063, a merger trend that has spurred hope of accelerated growth at relatively constant wage rates. Undoubtedly, this is a significant reason for the increasing rate of unemployment in developing countries which prompt migration of the brains to developed countries in search of better job of opportunities. Comparatively, African Economic Outlook (2018) showed that a region like Europe population growth rate is low -47 percent and working-age population growth rate of -0.5 percent. This could be seen as an important pulling factor for migrants to Europe since it has promising employment opportunities. Moreover, African Economic Outlook (2013b) asserted that youth unemployment rate has an increasing trend in South Africa in 2013 where youth unemployment rose to 48%.

It is also noted that universities in developing countries produce more graduates than they can absorb in the labour market. Okere and Fanimu (2012) opined that Nigerian universities produce over four million graduates annually with less than 200,000 of them getting jobs which make Nigerian graduates suffer from unemployment.

**Table 2. Comparative analysis of unemployment rate in some selected developing and developed countries for a period of five years (2006 – 2010)**

S/N	Countries	2006 %	2007 %	2008 %	2009 %	2010 %
1	Brazil	9.6	9.3	7.9	8.1	7
2	China	4.1	4	4.2	4.3	4.1
3	Germany	10.2	8.8	7.6	7.7	7.1
S/N	Countries	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
4	Ghana	1.6	0.8	4.7	8.2	10.4
5	Malaysia	3.6	3.5	3.1	3.6	3.5
6	Nigeria	12.29	13.70	14.90	19.70	21.40
S/N	Countries	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
7	Singapore	2.7	4.2	4.4	4.3	2.5

8	Saudi Arabia	13	13	11.8	10.5	10.8
S/N	Countries	2003	2004	2005	2008	2009
9	United Arab Emirate	10	11.8	12.8	13.9	14
10	United State	4.4	5.0	7.3	9.9	9.4

**Source:** Oviasuyi, P. O. Arowoshegbe, A. O. and Isiraoje, L. (2014). Graduates/Youths Unemployment Question in Nigeria: A Case Study of Edo State. *Anthropologist*, 14(2): 177-184

Table 2 comparatively showed that unemployment rate in Nigeria was the highest; 2.40 percent in 2010 compared to Brazil, China, Germany, Ghana, Malaysia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirate and United State between 1996-2010 with higher unemployment rate of 9.6 percent, in 2006, 4.3 percent 2009, 10.2 percent 2006, 8.2 percent in 2009, 3.6 percent 1996 and 2009, 4.4 percent in 2003, 11.8 in 2003, 13.9 percent in 2009 and 9.9 percent in 2008 respectively as shown in Table 2. Concertedly, it is no doubt that unemployment in the developing countries is among the leading push factors to brain drain.

### **(II) Demand for Higher Education**

In the early late 1970s and early 1980s the numbers of universities in many of the developing countries were few and were unable to accommodate the number of students that are demanding for university education (Azelama, 2005). More so, Nunn (2005) asserted that universities in developing countries specifically Africa admit less than 15% of the students that applied. As a result there was increasing trend in number of student's seeking for the opportunities to further their education by traveling to some western countries like United States of America, United Kingdom, France, Germany and other countries in the West.

Barro and Lee, (2013) stated that "many of the universities in developing countries has the problem of doubling the specified years of their schooling due to underfunding, labour and student unrests and have discouraged students enrollment into the universities in developing countries for university education". Omoeva and Buckner (2015) also claimed that inequality in educational system in the developing countries have persisted over the past half century between ethnic, wealth, and gender groups, as such many prospective higher education candidates traveled to developed countries to bridge the gap. The implication is that many of them were absorbed in labourforce of the receiving countries because of the skills they obtained in school especially health professionals and engineers (Barro & Lee, 2013).

In addition, the cost of university education in the developing countries is outrageous and out of the reach of many students who want to further their education. According to MO, (2018), "on average, it cost each African country between \$21,000 and \$59,000 to train a medical doctor". As against this, people in developing countries saw it as opportunity to travel to developed countries for cheaper and quality education and some went on scholarships.

### **(III) Disparity in Salary/Wage**

It was found that salaries and wages paid to employees by their employers in the developing countries, does not reflect the needs of modern economy. There is dearth of employment in the developing nations, however, those who manage to find employment, and their wages are significantly lower than what they could be paid in abroad. For these reasons they preferred to move abroad where they are offered better salary and wages than remain poor. Adepoju (1991) opined that a trained nurse in Uganda earns \$US38 per month and a doctor US\$67 per month while their counterparts in the United States earn about US\$3,000 and US\$10,000 per month respectively. Kaba (2011) equally asserted that a medical doctor in the United Kingdom earns more than twelve times of salary a Ghanaian doctor would make (US\$ 200,000 versus US\$14,600). He further asserted that an academic professor in Singapore earns as much as five times the salary a similar graded professor in Europe or North America (Kaba, 2011).

More so, Foadi (2006) considered improvement of salaries and better career opportunities provided by employers in developed countries as an important component of pull

factors for brain. Although, Lui (2018) argued that "higher reimbursement is not the only factor to make a movement decision as working environment, team models, or other facilities also play a vital role in the decision of labour mobility". He observed that sometimes even those talents choose to take leave for better salary opportunities. For Healthy Economic Market as an example, there is 8-10% increment for job changing taking place every year as most of job-hoppers raise their salary faster by changing workplace than counting on the annual bonus. Thus, job hoping is becoming a noticeable source of brain drain in developing countries among the professional skilled workers who desire for a better remuneration from employers in developed countries.

#### **(IV) Political Instability**

*One of the greatest problems facing the economic growth and development of developing countries is political instability.* Political turmoil in the developing countries is characterized by corruption, poverty, rapid population growth, disease, illiteracy and environmental degradation. The violent produced by cocktail of insecurity results to war, civil strife, riots and other forms of violence which have led to the displacement of large numbers of people as migrants, refugees, or asylums to other countries. This phenomenon according Gordon (1998) has created avenue for both internal and regional conflicts, often based on religion and ethnicity that have precipitated unprecedented level of brain drain in Africa (Gordon, 1998).

Political instability creates loopholes for political corruption. All the years of military rule in African were characterized by misappropriation of public funds and it portrays array of corruption schemers that plague many African countries to underdevelopment. In Nigeria, over \$300million was recovered from Late General Abaca's loots in the 1990s by the Buhari's civilian administration on war against corruption. Similarly McFerson (2009) asserted that "approximately 25 percent of the annual \$1 billion oil revenue in Angola is swindled by politicians. Leaders of the Republic of Congo and their beneficiaries have enjoyed luxurious incomes from the annual \$1 billion oil revenues received, while the nation's "under-five mortality rate is 117 per 1000 live births and infant mortality 75 per 1000; malnutrition stands at 14%; immunization coverage remains at a low 52%; and maternal mortality remains at a high eight deaths per 1000 live births"(McFerson, 2009).

However, it is indisputable that the period of political instability experienced by African countries and some other developing countries was characterized by corruption and poor economic growth leading to low investment rate, poor infrastructural development, hunger, violent, insecurity and low human capital development. These phenomena are undoubtedly pull factors in developing countries that constituted the movement of brains to developed countries. A more evidence of this is shown in a study carried out by Elbargathi, and Al-Assaf (2019) on impact of political instability on economic growth of some Arab countries; Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia, during the period 1996 – 2016. They found that stabilized policy has a high degree of steady economic foundations and firms.

#### **The Consequences of brain drain**

**First**, the social returns to hired human capital are not likely commensurable to private returns to the employers or developed countries. Therefore brain drain is exploitative to the skilled and professional skilled labour as well as the sending countries. If the social returns equal to private returns, the developed countries will not hire labours from the developing countries. Thus, Karl Marx termed the surplus value made by the skilled and professional skilled workers from developing countries which employers or developed countries sees as gain of employing skilled and professional skilled from developing countries as deprivation (Igbafen, 2003).

**Second**, brain train leads to loss of tax revenue and social cost of human capital development to the sending countries. High-skilled emigrants do not pay taxes to their home countries while working in abroad. Education is a social service partly subsidized by the government, those skilled and professional skilled trained in developing countries particularly those who got their education in public institutions; never return their obligations to their countries. MO (2018)

noted that nine African countries- "Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have lost more than \$2.0 billion since 2010 from trained doctors who then migrated. One in ten doctors in UK comes from Africa, allowing the UK to save on average \$2.7 billion on training costs" (MO, 2018).

**Third**, brain drain creates shortage of human capital stock in the developing countries. One of the negative impacts of brain drain is that it causes shortage of skilled manpower in key sectors of the economy. It has been observed that doctors, nurses (health professionals), engineers and highly educated academics like doctors (Ph.D) and professors. Brain drain has puts an enormous strain on public health delivery in the developing continents like Africa, considering that there are not enough physicians to attend to patients in most African countries. According to WHO (2018), "between the period of 2012-2016, 26 African countries have an average of 0.45 physicians per 1,000 people. Recently, only three African countries have at least one physician per 1,000 people: Libya, Mauritius and Tunisia, with a physician-to-population of 2.09, 2.00 and 1.29, respectively" (WHO, 2018).

**Fourth**, brain drain heightens the technological gap between the developed and developing countries. Developed countries are interested in hiring the skilled and professional skilled labour to their countries and retaining them through incentives such as better salaries and wages, leave bonus, safety working environment, job security, etc. The end product of this phenomenon is concentration of expatriates in the developed countries.

## **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS**

The paper is anchored on push and pulls factors of migration. What motivates skilled and professional labours to migrate from developing to developed countries are intending benefits over there which are always weighed before migrating. This paper has discussed exhaustively some major push and pulls factors which induce brain drain.

However, it is argued that brain drain has positive impact on the migrants and the sending countries through remittance which some scholars claimed that it empowers families at home and are invested in the home country's economy and contribute to economic growth (Bollard, McKenzie, Morten, Rapoport. 2011; Straubhaar & Vadean, 2005; Gubert, 2005; Meyer and Brown, 1999) but this paper argued that that there exist unequal exchange between the brain draining and remittance. The overall implication is that the brains and the sending countries loss their gains to the employers or the developed countries through taxes, technological dependencies and imports.

The paper therefore recommends;

- i. Government of the developing countries should provide adequate employment opportunities, commensurate salary/ wage structures equivalent to western salary/wage structure as well as create satisfactory working environment to reduce international labour mobility of skilled and professional skilled workers in their countries.
- ii. Government of the developing countries should provide quantitative and qualitative higher education and subsidized the cost of higher education as well as also eradicate student unrest and incessant strikes in the higher institutions in their countries to reduce or eradicate the quest of higher education in abroad by their citizens.
- iii. Government of the developing countries should create policies capable of ensuring stable political environment and also eradicate corruptions in their countries. This can achieve through free and fair elections, avoid tribalism, nepotism, discrimination, and marginalization.

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