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MIGRATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NIGERIA AND THE “JAPA” SYNDROME

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Abstract

Since circa 2015, Nigeria has been witnessing a significant rise in the emigration of young, skilled and middle-class people, popularly called Japa (Yoruba for “to flee” or “to run away”). This article explores the impacts of Japa on Nigeria’s national development and compares it with other African migration contexts as well as prior phases of Nigeria’s emigration. Using a comparative qualitative methodology premised on systematic documentary review of recent empirical studies (2024–2026), policy documents and secondary sources, this paper critically brings into discussion push–pull approaches, the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM), Hirschman exit–voice approach and the aspirations-capabilities approach. This study finds that Japa is mainly induced by economic insecurity, weak institutional quality, insecurity and a perceived collapse of the social contract rather than by absolute poverty. Its developmental effects are mixed. On the cost side, the exodus has depleted critical human capital, most visibly in health care and higher education, and weakened the domestic “voice” constituency for reform. On the benefit side, remittances have become a major and relatively stable source of foreign exchange and household welfare, while the diaspora represents a potential channel for investment, skills and knowledge transfer. Comparatively, Nigeria’s migration differs from the survival-driven irregular migration seen in parts of East Africa and the Sahel: it is disproportionately regular, credentialed and middle-class, which magnifies both its human-capital losses and its remittance and diaspora potential. The article concludes that migration will only support national development if Nigeria pairs retention reforms (institutional quality, pay and working conditions, security) with policies that harness diaspora resources and manage circular migration, rather than attempting to restrict exit.

Keywords: *Japa syndrome; Migration–development nexus; Brain drain; Remittances; Diaspora; National development; Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Migration is mankind's oldest solution to scarcity, insecurity and aspiration, and it has emerged as the main theme of modern Africa's development. The contours of migration have transformed across Africa, in terms of numbers, destinations and demographics (Thomas & Mara 2024). In this context, Nigeria's surge of migration is unprecedented: for the last ten years, the most populous country in Africa has exported the largest number of young, degree-holding, experienced Africans, to destinations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Ireland, Germany and the Gulf states.

In Nigeria's popular lexicon, this migration is summarized in the Yoruba slang *Japa* 'run away fast'. The term has entered not only into policy conversations and academic writings but also into popular culture and Afrobeats music in particular, where stories of journeying and return and the double-edgedness of departure are common threads (Adekola, 2025). 'The syndrome', as some writers are already calling it, is increasingly named not a personal choice but a pervasive social expectation shaping young people's choices about schooling, employment and parenting (Guanah, 2025; Liu, 2024).

This extent of migration is also seen in destination-country figures. The Office for National Statistics [ONS] in the UK has found that Nigerians now constitute the second biggest non-EU country for long-term migrant flows to the UK, just behind Indians, with about 141,000 of these in 2023, an increase of about 127,000 on their immediate pre- and postindependence numbers in 2019 (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2024). Simultaneously, remittance flows into Nigeria, estimated at about US\$19.5 billion in 2023 by the World Bank, have now become a major source of foreign exchange for the country (Ratha et al., 2024).

1.2 Statement of the problem

The link between migration and national development is thus controversial. Thinking of skilled emigration as a 'brain drain', some literature sees skilled emigration as depriving poor countries of much-needed human capital, depressing public services and lowering long-term growth (Bashir & Oku, 2026; Salawu, 2025). Comparing the potential negative effects of emigration with the benefits, another stream points to the potential 'brain gain' which can occur with remittances, investment from the diaspora, return migration and higher incentive for education at home (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Fifen, 2025).

In Nigeria, both seem to be happening simultaneously: hospitals experience a crippling shortage of doctors, nurses and specialists (Essien et al., 2024; Orewa et al., 2025); remittances keep millions of households afloat, and contribute to floatation of the overall Balance of Payments (Oyadeyi et al. 2024). However, as noted above, most of the existing literature on Japa is either purely descriptive, focused on a singular sector, or penned as commentary. There are few that compare systematically the Nigerian experience with other African contexts of migration or contextualize the current Japa wave within Nigeria's own migration history. This does not enable policymakers to formulate responses that go beyond exiting and entry restrictions.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between migration and national development in Nigeria, with specific reference to the Japa syndrome. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the economic, political and social drivers of the Japa phenomenon;

2. assess the effects of Japa on key dimensions of national development, including human capital, health care, remittances and diaspora engagement;
3. compare the Nigerian migration experience with selected African contexts and with earlier phases of Nigerian emigration; and
4. propose policy options for converting migration into a driver of national development.

1.4 Research questions

1. What factors drive the Japa phenomenon in Nigeria?
2. How does Japa affect Nigeria's national development?
3. How does Nigeria's current migration pattern compare with other African migration contexts and with earlier waves of Nigerian emigration?
4. What policy measures can harness migration for Nigeria's development?

1.5 Significance and scope

This paper is a useful addition to the migration–development literature, integrating recent empirical evidence on Japa into a comparative and theoretical framework. The study is useful for policy makers on health, education, labour and finance issues; the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission; and researchers interested in African mobility. The study addresses literature 20152025, by authors published mainly 20242026, assessing the period 20152025.

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1 Migration

Migration is movement of a person or group of people across borders that is, across an administrative or national boundary to settle, temporarily or permanently, in a country other than that in which they are usually resident. International migration may be regular (via legal visa, study, work or family routes, for instance) or irregular, through smuggling or other unauthorized means. However, this distinction has implications for development: irregular routes impose high costs on migrants and their households, both financially and in human terms (Friebel et al., 2024), whilst people using regular routes are more likely to be skilled, credentialed migrants. Migration is also increasingly viewed a process that is influenced by previous mobility the fact that internal migrants are more likely than non-migrants or return migrants to aspire to international mobility (Velseboer et al., 2026).

2.2 National development

In the following, national development is defined as multidimensional processes of continuous economic growth; Human capital development (health and education); the state of institution and public good; and increases in the capabilities and the well-being of citizens. This broad scope of the definition makes it possible to consider migration impacts not only on the GDP but on health systems, skills, governance and household benefits (Mofoluwawo et al., 2025; Yao & Kouakou, 2025)

2.3 The Japa syndrome

Japa describes the large-scale, often rushed, emigration of Nigerians, especially young, middle-class and skilled people, in search of better economic prospects, security and quality of life abroad. Liu (2024) characterizes Japa as a form of middle-class “survival migration”: its participants are not the poorest Nigerians, but they perceive that their livelihoods, aspirations and futures cannot be secured at home. Oguejiofor and Onwuasoigwe (2024) situate it within the political economy of Nigeria's economic stagnation, linking it to unemployment, inflation and governance failures. The term “syndrome” signals that Japa has become a socially contagious aspiration, reinforced by social media, peer networks and popular culture (Adekola, 2025; Guanah, 2025).

2.4 Brain drain, brain gain and brain circulation

Brain drain refers to the loss of skilled workers through emigration, reducing the stock of human capital in the origin country (Salawu, 2025). *Brain gain* describes the offsetting benefits that may

follow: remittances, diaspora investment, the transfer of knowledge and technology, and the incentive effect whereby the prospect of emigration encourages more people to invest in education, some of whom never leave (Beine et al., 2001; Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). *Brain circulation* captures the reality that many migrants move back and forth, maintaining professional and economic ties with their origin country. Fifen (2025) argues that whether Africa experiences drain or gain depends largely on the policies of origin states, not on migration itself.

2.5 Remittances and diaspora

Remittances are financial transfers from migrants to individuals or households in their country of origin. They are a direct link between migration and development, affecting household consumption, investment in education and health, entrepreneurship and national foreign-exchange reserves (Adow, 2025; Alhassan et al., 2026). The *diaspora* refers to communities of migrants and their descendants who maintain social, economic and political connections with their homeland. Nnabuihe et al. (2024) frame the Nigerian diaspora as a population that has exercised “exit” but may still exercise “voice” in national development.

3. Theoretical Framework

No single theory can account for both factors of driver for Nigerians migration, and the meaning of migration for development. Thus, this study will be using a complementary framework that rests on four perspectives:

3.1 Push–pull theory

Accordingly, Lee (1966) put forward the push-pull model which explains that migration is driven by a combination of forces at the origin (push), pull of the destination, intervening obstacles and personal factors. For Nigeria, push factors are unemployment, inflation, depreciation of currency, insecurity and weak provision of public goods and services, whereas pull factors are relatively high wages, stable institutions, quality of education and migration policy initiatives, for instance, the Health and Care Worker visa introduced by the UK government. Adelakun et al. (2025) furthered this development by showing that institutional quality mediates the influence of economic and geopolitical push factors on the dispersion of migration tendencies. The limitations of the model are that it zeroes in on individual response to external effect and ignores the development consequences.

3.2 The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM)

NELM moves the focus of analysis away from the individual towards the household (Stark & Bloom, 1985). Migration is reconstructed as a household response to a seek-sell context in which there is an absence of credit and insurance markets, and a perceived need to spread risk. Remittances are thus integral rather than incidental to migration. It accounts for why pluralistic families fund the education or work of one member away from home, or why remittances are invested in housing, education, and small business (Alhassan et al., 2026; Megersa & Tafesse, 2024).

3.3 Exit, voice and loyalty

Hirschman’s (1970) paradigm suggests that dissatisfied members of a group or state have two choices; they can quit (exit) or raise their concerns (voice). Similar to this paradigm is the notion of vested interest; where those who lack vested interests (‘voice’) are most likely to sustain their membership by voicing their concerns while those with vested interests (‘exit’) are more likely to exit the organisation. This is the case with Nigeria where we see mass exit, or Japa, by precisely those middle-class educated Nigerians whose majority should be demanding institutional reforms and changes to the system through voice, the exact contradiction to the leap of faith conclusion (2014, 16). However, Nnabuihe et al. (2024) comment that diaspora communities are also able to voice themselves through remittances, lobbying and investment as well as political participation, so exit and voice are not mutually exclusive.

3.4 Aspirations–capabilities approach

De Haas (2021) argues that migration is a function of both aspirations (the desire to move) and capabilities (the resources and freedom to move). Development initially tends to increase emigration because it raises both aspirations and the capacity to act on them. This helps explain why Japa is concentrated among the relatively educated and middle-class: the poorest Nigerians may aspire to leave but lack the means, while the middle class has both the aspiration and the capability (Liu, 2024; Velseboer et al., 2026).

3.5 Synthesis

Together, these perspectives provide the analytical lens for this study. Push–pull theory and the aspirations–capabilities approach explain *who leaves and why*. NELM explains *how migration feeds back into households* through remittances. The exit–voice framework explains *what mass departure means for the political economy of reform*. This integrated view aligns with de Haas’s (2010) argument that the developmental effect of migration is not fixed but depends on the wider development context of the origin country, a position echoed in recent place-based reassessments of the migration–development nexus (Kaşlı & Winters, 2025; Rapoport, 2024).

4. Methodology

Qualitative comparative research design through analysis of documents (secondary data) was used in this study. Such a design was adopted because as the Japa phenomenon is new, cross-disciplinary and multidimensional, easy synthesis over one primary survey is what required.

Sources. The research was based on peer-reviewed journal articles published mostly in 2024–26 and supported by key theoretical texts and primary data on remittances and migration from the World Bank and the Office for National Statistics, UK. The sources used are those most pertinent to the question of Nigerian emigration, Africa more broadly and the linkage between migration and development.

Comparative strategy. The comparison operates along two axes:

1. **Cross-national (spatial) comparison.** Migration trends for Nigeria are set against different African experiences outlined in the literature, these include: irregular migrations flow from Ethiopia to South Africa (Megersa & Tafesse, 2024), remittance-growth nexus in East Africa (Adow, 2025), West African remittance flows (Egenti & Dinbabo, 2025) and broader Sub-Saharan Africa (Yao & Kouakou, 2025).
2. **Temporal (historical) comparison.** The current Japa wave (2015–2025) is comparison with earlier stages in Nigerian emigration, especially the brain-drain wave succeeding the economic crisis and Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s and 1990s.

Analysis. Content and thematic analysis were applied to various findings in order to synthesize them into four themes aligning with the RQs. These were: drivers, developmental impacts, comparison of patterns and policy responses. The findings were then read through the integrated theoretical framework in section 3.

Limitations. This research is constrained by the available secondary data. Emigration data are in touch, as Nigeria does not have a robust exit-recording system, but the data mostly derived from destination countries. Remittance data are not full, as still unofficial flows are not incorporated.

5. Drivers of the Japa Syndrome in Nigeria

The literature demonstrates that Japa is motivated by a combination of mutually reinforcing factors rather than poverty alone. Five broad categories emerge.

5.1 Economic insecurity

Persistent unemployment and underemployment among graduates, high inflation, and the sharp depreciation of the naira have eroded real incomes and the purchasing power of salaried professionals (Mofoluwawo et al., 2025; Oguejiofor & Onwuasoigwe, 2024). For health workers and academics, the gap between domestic and foreign pay has widened to the point where emigration offers multiples of local earnings. Bashir and Oku (2026) link these conditions directly to human-capital flight and its drag on Nigeria's economic growth.

5.2 Weak institutional quality and governance

Adelakun et al. (2025) find that institutional quality plays an intervening role in the relationship between economic and geopolitical push factors and migration tendencies: where institutions are weak, citizens are more likely to respond to hardship by leaving. Corruption, policy inconsistency and a perceived absence of meritocracy undermine confidence that personal effort will be rewarded at home. In Hirschman's (1970) terms, low trust in institutions makes "voice" appear futile and "exit" rational.

5.3 Insecurity

Insecurity (through banditry, kidnapping, North-East insurgency and interethnic clashes) have been identified as a prominent reason for migration (including among occupational groups such as doctors posted to rural areas who are exposed to danger) (Adelakun et al., 2025; Salawu, 2025).

5.4 Deteriorating working conditions in key sectors

In health care the drivers include poor pay, excessive workload, lack of equipment, little access to specialist training or career progression. A recent national survey of early career psychiatrists in the UK showed an extremely high intention to emigrate, due to pay, conditions and professional development. (Essien et al., 2006). Orewa et al (2007) systematic review of the African health care brain drain shows common causes across the continent with Nigeria being one of the most affected (Rafique et al 2008). In higher education the closure of universities due to strikes, chronic underfunding and suppressed salaries have resulted in academics taking to flight (Kanyesigye 2008).

5.5 Social aspirations, networks and destination-country pull

Secondly, Japa remains a social phenomenon. Images of abroad success are reproduced via social media, while long-standing diaspora networks reduce migrants' information and settlement costs (Guanah, 2025; Liu, 2024). Popular music constructs migration as successful while expanding aspirations to include the costs (Adekola, 2025). On the pull side, immigration destinations lobbied for skilled workers in this period. UK visa pathways for health and care workers and international students, plus supportive dependant policies until 2024, meant that regular migration was relatively easy for qualified Nigerians.

5.6 Summary of drivers

Table 1: Summary of the drivers of Japa

Category	Main drivers	Key sources
Economic	Unemployment, inflation, naira depreciation, low real wages	Bashir & Oku (2026); Oguejiofor & Onwuasoigwe (2024)
Institutional	Corruption, weak institutions, low trust in government	Adelakun et al. (2025)
Security	Banditry, kidnapping, insurgency	Adelakun et al. (2025); Salawu (2025)
Sectoral	Poor pay, workload, training gaps in health and education	Essien et al. (2024); Orewa et al. (2025); Kanyesigye (2026)
Social and external	Social media, diaspora networks, destination recruitment	Liu (2024); Guanah (2025); ONS (2024)

6. Effects of Japa on National Development

The developmental implications of Japa are mixed: while considerable human-capital and institutional costs are balanced by large financial and potential diaspora benefits.

6.1 Human capital depletion and the health sector

Health care costs are the most obvious and, though, the most visible. Pretending the direct and indirect costs are higher than for other sectors for instance because the health sector is highly labour intensive and that from earlier waves. So, the costs of losing its trained people can be higher (Of course others including those for health workers, of course, are also significant). The most visible of the direct costs was health care (Rupiny, 2005). Even before the current wave, Nigeria's ratios of doctors and nurses to population were well below suggested levels. And emigration has aggravated shortages, particularly of specialists and specialist trainer (Orewa et al., 2025). Also, Essien. et al. (2024) report how early-career psychiatrists' emigration aggravates an already stretched mental health workforce. The effects of such shortages can be longer waits, increased stress (emigration, thus, means more work for remaining mental health workers, which in turn increases emigration, and less ability to cope with health emergencies).

Policy responses by the government have also been challenged. In 2023, a bill was submitted requiring medical and dental graduates to work in Nigeria for five years before full licensing was granted, which led to significant outcry from the public. Analysis of public discourses led by Ajoseh et al. (2024) of this bill indicates that most Nigerians felt the bill was blaming health workers for failures to resolve their own issues.

6.2 Education and knowledge production

The brain drain of lecturers and researchers affects negatively the quality of university teaching and research activities and also deprives postgraduate students from supervision, representing a compromised future professional pool (Kanyesigye 2026, Salawu 2025). The export of students to foreign institutions results in an outflow of foreign institutionalized tuition expenditure, but may at the same time lead to the creation of a pool of foreign trained Nigerians that may contribute to future development.

6.3 Economic growth and productivity

Bashir and Oku (2026) show that human-capital flight imposes costs on Nigeria's economic growth, by draining away young, educated and skilled workers and depressing the returns to public investments in education. Since most of the professional training is publicly subsidized, this amounts to an export of costs of such training to the destination economy.

6.4 Remittances

Remittances thus represent the most obvious benefits of development. Nigeria received by far the highest remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa, with inflows estimated at around US\$19.5 billion in 2023 (Ratha et al., 2024), whereas central bank of Nigeria and the business press estimates considered by Moses-Ashike (2025), suggested personal remittances of around US\$20.9 billion. Itak & Oyadeyi et al. shows a substantial role of remittances on macroeconomic performance in the top donor countries (Oyadeyi et al. 2024), though regional studies also find positive relationship of remittances with growth in West Africa (Egenti & Dinbabo, 2025), East Africa (Adow, 2025), and Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole (Yao & Kouakou, 2025).

Remittances at the household level also finance consumption, school fees, health care and housing; helping finance entrepreneurship. Alhassan et al. (2026) also demonstrate how the entrepreneurial effects of remittances are contingent on financial development: in situations where financial systems are shallow, recipients are more inclined to consume than invest remittances. Remittances also form

private transfers, which do not necessarily have to provide for public good expenditures and can lead to dependency and reduced labour-market participation of recipients.

6.5 Diaspora engagement and the exit–voice dilemma

The Nigerian diaspora represents a source of investment, skills transfer, philanthropy and political pressure (Nnabuihe et al., 2024). Using modern communication methods, the Nigerian diaspora is able to promote the exchange of doctors, academics and entrepreneurs through telemedicine, visiting professorships, investment and mentorship and such relations often invigorate brain circulation (Fifen, 2025). However, the exodus of the majority of the educated middle class also depletes the domestic constituency of reform. It may be precisely those individuals who are most capable and ready to mobilise, advocate and supervise government activities that leave the country and this may impact negatively upon institutional reform efforts.

6.6 Social effects and irregular migration

There are also additional costs in Japa on a social level (family separation, the need to finance an expensive migration project, and risk of exposure to exploitation and fraud). Guanah (2025) observes both positive and negative outcomes in South-South Nigeria, where campaigns informing of the risks of illegal migration sit alongside dominant social pressures to emigrate. Unconventional migration pathways are costly and perilous: Friebel et al. (2024) reveal that the cost of smuggling cheaper than Africa-to-Europe routes is substantial, and responsive to enforcement, placing families under tremendous strain.

6.7 Summary of developmental effects

Table 2: Summary of the developmental effects of Japa

Dimension	Negative effects	Positive or potential effects
Health	Shortages of doctors, nurses and specialists; higher workloads	Telemedicine, diaspora medical missions, skills transfer
Education	Loss of lecturers and researchers; weaker supervision	Foreign-trained returnees; academic collaboration
Economy	Lower productivity; loss of publicly funded training	Remittances; foreign exchange; diaspora investment
Households	Family separation; migration debts	Income, education and health spending; entrepreneurship
Governance	Weaker domestic voice for reform	Diaspora advocacy and political engagement

7. Comparative Analysis

Nigeria’s Japa wave is distinctive in Africa because it is predominantly regular, credentialed and middle-class, and it is larger and more skill-intensive than Nigeria’s earlier emigration waves.

7.1 Nigeria compared with other African migration contexts

Ethiopia (irregular, household-driven migration). Megersa and Tafesse (2024) show that irregular migration from Ethiopia’s Kembata-Tembaro zone to South Africa is largely a household decision, financed collectively and undertaken through smuggling networks by relatively low-skilled young men. This closely matches NELM’s household-strategy logic. Nigerian Japa shares the household-financing element, since families often pool savings for visas, tuition and travel, but differs sharply in skill profile and legal channel. Japa migrants typically travel on study, work or family visas to high-income countries.

East Africa (remittance-growth linkage). Adow (2025) finds that remittances contribute positively to economic growth in East Africa. Nigeria’s remittance inflows dwarf those of most African countries in absolute terms; Ghana, for example, received about US\$2.43 billion in 2023 (Moses-Ashike, 2025). Yet relative to the size of its economy and population, Nigeria’s remittances are more

modest, and their developmental impact is constrained by the same weak financial intermediation identified by Alhassan et al. (2026).

West Africa (regional remittance and mobility patterns). Egenti and Dinbabo (2025) find that migration and remittances are associated with economic growth among West African countries. Nigeria is both the region's largest origin of extra-continental skilled migration and a major destination for intra-regional migrants under ECOWAS free movement, making it simultaneously a sender and receiver.

Sub-Saharan Africa (continental patterns). Thomas and Mara (2024) observe that African migration is at a crossroads, with rising extra-continental movement, more diverse destinations and a growing share of educated migrants. Orewa et al. (2025) show that health-worker emigration affects countries such as Ghana, Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa, but Nigeria's absolute losses are among the largest because of the size of its workforce. Yao and Kouakou (2025) find that the sustainability benefits of remittances across Sub-Saharan Africa depend on institutional and policy conditions, a finding consistent with the Nigerian evidence.

Borderlands and place-based mobility. kaşlı and Winters (2025) warn not to generalise the migration–development nexus, as actors locally are likely to experience and benefit from mobile lives differently. For example, within Nigeria, the impact of Japa on development, persists differently in the urban South, where skilled emigration to destination countries is prevalent, than in the North and South-South regions, where irregular movements and trafficking are prevalent (Guanah, 2025).

7.2 Nigeria's Japa wave compared with earlier emigration

Experience of skilled emigration is not new to Nigeria. The economic crisis during the 1980s, the Structural Adjustment Programme and the political repression of military rule during the 1990s precipitated a bulk outflow of doctors, academics and professionals, both to other African countries and more generally to the United Kingdom and the United States. This current wave is different in several ways:

Table 3: Comparison of Nigeria's earlier emigration wave and the Japa wave

Feature	1980s–1990s wave	Japa wave (2015–2025)
Main triggers	Economic collapse, structural adjustment, military rule	Inflation, currency collapse, insecurity, weak institutions under civilian rule
Who leaves	Mainly senior professionals and academics	Young graduates, students, early-career professionals and families
Channels	Work, study and asylum; fewer structured routes	Structured study, health-care and skilled-worker visas; dependants
Scale	Significant but smaller	Much larger and more visible in destination data
Social meaning	Exile or elite mobility	Mass aspiration; popular culture and social media driven
Remittance and diaspora role	Limited formal channels	Large formal remittances; digital transfers; organised diaspora institutions

Secondly, the most noticeable difference is the fact that this wave started during civilian democratic rule. This implies that the transition back to civilian democracy in 1999 was not able to provide citizens with the improvements they need, namely in terms of public service, economic stability and institutional reliability. It backs Adelakun et al. (2025) who posit that institutional quality, not regime type, influences migration.

7.3 Summary of comparative findings

1. Nigerian emigration is more skill intensive and more frequent than migration from several other contexts in Africa; thus, enabling higher human-capital losses and remittance potential.
2. Household funding of migration is a common feature across Nigeria and elsewhere, including Ethiopia. This is consistent with NELM.

3. The developmental impact of remittances over the continent varies with financial development and the quality of institutions. Nigeria is not an exception.

In comparison with previous waves, it is younger, larger, more normalised and more representative of the ‘crisis of confidence’ that characterized the post-1999 democratic state.

8. Discussion

The results reaffirm the essence of the Japa syndrome as not of an isolated labour-market phenomenon, but of a comprehensive development and governance deficit. A few issues have to be taken note of:

First, Japa is a middle-class phenomena based on insecurity rather than poverty. As the aspirations–capabilities framework (de Haas, 2021) suggests, those who depart are people who have both the desire and the capacity to depart. Liu (2024) describes Japa as middle-class survival migration, which encapsulates a paradox: citizens who are relatively better off in a Nigerian context, feel the need to ‘vote with their feet’ because they see no better future. This threatens development strategies where a rise in education levels is expected to translate into retention of skilled citizens.

Second, the impact of brain drain versus brain gain is contingent on the balance. Empirical data aligns with de Haas (2010), that migration effects vary according to development context. In Nigeria, poor financial markets, insecure environment and weak institutions hinder the translation of remittances into private investments and provision of public goods (Alhassan et al., 2026; Adelakun et al., 2025). As conditions at origin improve, migration flows will yield increased circulation, return and investment (Fifen, 2025; Docquier and Rapoport, 2012).

Third, remittances cannot take the place of human capital in terms of public services. They enable a household to buy private health and education; they cannot replace the doctors, nurses, and lecturers in the public services. Fears of a two-tier society, where a remittance-receiving household is able to buy a private good while public services decline even further for the rest of the population, are potential ramifications.

Fourth, restricting exist is unlikely to work. The public protests over the bill that would have forced medical graduates to serve (Ajoseh et al., 2024) show that command-and-control exit may not be effective if the reasons for emigration persist. Such a policy of frustrate escape may trigger further dissatisfaction or, as Friebe et al (2024) conclude for irregular routes, make migration more expensive but not less frequent.

Fifth, the comparison underlines policy leverage. Skilled Northern migrants to Nigeria have preserved robust formal relationships with the homeland their prof teams, digital banking facilities and diaspora associations unlike survival migrants who travel irregularly. More than many African nations, Nigeria can wield a range of incentives with its southwest emigrants’ diaspora bonds, skills-transfer schemes, dual-practice arrangements and negotiated knowledge transfer schemes of states of destination.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

9.1 Conclusion

Applying the case of Nigeria to illustrate the effect of migration on national development, this research revealed that Japa is fuelled by economic insecurity, institutional weakness, security concerns, unappealing job conditions in critical sectors, and social and external pull factors. The development effects of Japa are two-sided. It exacerbates human capital flight in the health and education sectors while buffering domestic pressure for political reforms, through bringing-in large remittance flows and creating a large-scale diaspora with huge development potentials.

In relation to other West African countries, the skill-breadth of Nigeria's emigration is higher, its frequency and social class characters are more middle class, and its overall size and social normalization more comparable to the country's own previous emigration flow. The basic finding of this chapter is that migration is not intrinsically negative, but also not intrinsically positive to Nigeria's development. Its overall contribution will depend on whether the Nigerian state can tackle the factors explaining out-migration, and develop the institutions to absorb diaspora contributions.

9.2 Recommendations

1. **Deal with push factors.** The government should focus on macro-economic stability, employment, security and anti-corruption reforms that restore public trust in the state. Raising institutional quality is the most potent instrument in easing push factors (Adelakun et al., 2025).
2. **Better the health sector.** Instead of stringent efforts to retain health professionals through measures such as compulsion tied to service, higher pay, adequate equipment, transparent career trajectories, and offer of sponsorship to training and research should be promoted for health workers and academics (Ajoseh et al., 2024; Essien et al., 2024).
3. **Engage in ethical recruitment and training partnerships.** Nigeria should negotiate targeted deals with key destination countries that include reciprocal investments in training, programs for training migration or return, and reimbursement for the cost of training health providers migrant destination countries (Orewa et al. 2025).
4. **Make remittances work for productive investment.** The Central Bank of Nigeria and financial institutions should reduce the cost of remittance transfers, expand formal remittance channels, promote financial inclusion, and develop remittance-linked savings, credit, and investment products such as diaspora bonds (Alhassan et al., 2026; Oyadeyi et al., 2024).
5. **Institutionalize engagement with those in the diaspora.** The Nigerians in Diaspora Commission and professional organizations should scale up explicit skills transfer programs, such as telemedicine, visiting faculty and mentorship, and support diaspora voting and policy dialogue (Nnabuihe et al., 2024).
6. **Circulate and bring back the brain.** 'Rewards like recognition of foreign qualifications, low tax on returnees, research grants and dual-practice industry-academy schemes can facilitates brain circulation' (Fifen, 2025).
7. **Minimize the potential of irregular migration.** Combine public awareness campaigns with legal immigration channels, anti-trafficking and assistance to at-risk youth (Guanah, 2025; Friebe et al., 2024).
8. **Enhance data on migration.** Nigeria should create a more robust system for quantifying emigration, diaspora skills and remittances to promote evidence-based policy.

9.3 Suggestions for further research

Further research should make use of primary data to measure the evolution of Japa migrants, the financial cost of training emigrant trained professionals, and the return migrants' developmental contribution. Cross-country quantitative comparison in Africa may further enable hypotheses to be formulated on the conditions under which brain drain becomes brain gain.

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