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Rethinking Migration and Development: The Socioeconomic Implications of Post- Brexit UK Immigration Policies for Nigeria

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Abstract

Migration has long shaped Nigeria's relations with the international community, influenced by colonial history, economic ties, and global mobility. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (Brexit) restructured its immigration system, prioritising skilled labour in sectors such as healthcare and education. For Nigeria's young and mobile population, these reforms present both opportunities and challenges. This study, therefore, investigates the effects of post-Brexit UK immigration reforms on Nigerian migration and development. Using a qualitative case study approach, it draws on interviews with Nigerians in the UK and policymakers in Nigeria, selected through purposive sampling, alongside secondary data analysed thematically. Findings indicate that while the new system has opened legal pathways for skilled migration, promoted remittances, and encouraged diaspora participation, it has also exacerbated brain drain and reduced local capacity in key sectors, including health, IT, and education in Nigeria. The study highlights that while Nigerian migrants play an important role through remittances, the benefits are unevenly distributed. The study recommends that Nigeria invest in key sectors to address push factors and negotiate development-oriented migration agreements, while the UK should promote development-focused migration policies that balance its domestic needs with partnership goals.

Keywords: Post-Brexit, Migration, Brain Drain, Remittances, Development.

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Introduction

The departure of skilled Nigerians to the United Kingdom over the years has demonstrated more than just the search for better living conditions. It has become a reflection of global inequalities and the realities of Nigeria's own development challenges. Migration today extends beyond personal ambition; it shapes how societies evolve, how economies transform, and how countries interact with one another. For Nigeria, with its young and educated population, this growing wave of migration reveals the tension between people's aspirations and the limited opportunities available at home. It shows how weak institutions, unemployment, and poor public investment continue to push talent outward, while global demand for skilled labour pulls them abroad. The UK immigration changes following Brexit have intensified this trend; thus, there are now more opportunities for Nigerians to study and work in the UK. However, at the same time, it is revealing how difficult it is for Nigeria to retain and utilise its skilled workforce.

The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union was a major turning point for Europe. It has not only changed the economic and political relations, but also the way people move globally. By stopping the free movement of EU citizens and establishing a points-based immigration system, the UK altered the process for entering and participating in the labour market within the country (McKinney, Sturge & Gower, 2022). This system now places greater emphasis on skills, qualifications, and economic contributions rather than on nationality, indicating a shift from open mobility to controlled selectivity. The effects of such a decision are far-reaching, as they affect migration patterns and labour relations in non-EU countries that provide the workforce to replace the vacancies caused by the Europeans who have left. Nigeria has become one of the major sources of skilled migrants under this system. Data from the Office of National Statistics (2022) indicate that the decline in migration to the EU has been offset by an increase in the number of migrants coming from outside the EU. In addition, the report notes that a major proportion of new employees in the healthcare, technology, and education sectors are from countries such as India and Nigeria. This reflects both the UK's increasing demand for skilled labour and Nigeria's internal socioeconomic pressures that drive emigration. For the UK, this inflow supports workforce sustainability; for Nigeria, however, it presents a dual reality. While migration has led to increased remittances, diaspora investment, and knowledge transfer (Mbachu, Agwu, Obi & Onwujekwe, 2024), it has also intensified the outflow of highly trained professionals, deepening the challenge of brain drain (Osigbesan, 2021).

Nigeria's healthcare and education systems, already under strain due to inadequate infrastructure and limited funding, continue to lose skilled personnel to better opportunities abroad (Adenipekun, 2023). The resulting human capital deficits raise critical concerns about the sustainability of Nigeria's development strategies. While the post-Brexit policy has generated extensive scholarly discussion, much of the existing literature focuses on its implications for the UK, concentrating on domestic labour supply, border control, and political realignment (Salaudeen, 2020; Portes, 2022; Pazzona, Filauri, & Gökçeli, 2023; Sumption & Walsh, 2023). Less attention has been paid to how these reforms reshape the developmental realities of sending countries such as Nigeria. This gap is critical because migration in the post-Brexit era is not merely a question of mobility but a matter of national development strategy. The Nigerian case thus exposes a paradox: migration offers immediate individual and macroeconomic benefits through remittances and diaspora linkages, yet simultaneously drains the human resources

essential for national growth. This study, therefore, investigates the implications of post-Brexit UK immigration reforms for Nigeria's socioeconomic development.

Literature Review

The concept of international migration refers to the movement of individuals from one country to another, encompassing both spatial and temporal dimensions. It involves a change in location from one place to another, as well as a specific time period (Tsegay, 2023). Castles & Miller (2009) argue that while aspects such as the nature (e.g. forced or voluntary, regular or irregular) and the reasons (e.g. family formation or employment) for migration are important, they are secondary to the fundamental factors that define international migration, which include the movement of individuals across borders, the policies governing such movements, and the socioeconomic and political contexts that shape migration patterns. According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2021), international migration refers to all movements that result in a change of country of residence (a subset of international mobility) within a given year. Tsegay (2023) explains international migration as the movement of a person from one country to another, regardless of the motivation or circumstances of the relocation. In his explanation, anyone who crosses an international border or moves to a different place within a country other than their habitual residence is considered a migrant. Such a description is applicable without regard to the legality of the move, whether the change is done voluntarily or by force, the motives behind it, or the length of the stay. In this regard, Tataru (2019) stated that globalisation has been the primary factor driving international migration, which has increased significantly in the last few decades, especially to developed countries. Such a flow of people is generally driven by the desire of individuals to stay beyond short visits or temporary stays, as well as their primary economic and social motivators. People generally look for new opportunities, management of conditions they are burdened with, or seek incredible experiences. People moving from one country to another can be categorised into different kinds based on the reasons for crossing borders. Wimalaratana and Wickramasinghe (2017) outline several types of international migration corresponding to these factors that influence global movement.

Labour migration: Labour migration is the process by which people cross international borders in search of employment. The concept of migration includes workers with diverse skills, ranging from top-level professionals to those employed in low-paid or temporary roles. Consumer demand is a major driver of growth and development, not only in the economies of the home countries but also those of host countries. The re-energising of the labour force capacity, the support of the sustainability of traditional industries, the popularisation of entrepreneurial activity, and the facilitation of skills demand in contemporary, developed economies are some of the positive effects of labour migration on both the home and host countries (Bell, Alves, de Oliveira & Zuin, 2010).

Economic migration: People choose to move from their country to another on their own volition, in search of better living standards, is the main idea behind such migration. The primary motivation for such a movement is the desire to secure a better paid job, access high quality healthcare facilities, enjoy career progression, and benefit from improved infrastructure. Traditional labour migration is very similar to this; the only difference is that it focuses solely on the migration of workers. In economic migration, more emphasis is placed on large-scale economic incentives, such as wage increases, economic stability,

and the overall quality of life. Nevertheless, migrants tend to seek places that are economically better off, both in terms of personal income and access to social benefits (Tataru, 2019).

Chain migration: This refers to the movement of people who relocate to a different country to establish or reunite with their families. Chain migration is a process in which the first migrants relocate to a new location and then other members of the same community assist them in moving there as well. This migration may be based on ethnic or family ties, with primary wage earners migrating first and then secondary or non-wage earners (Zetter, 2015).

Forced migration: This refers to the relocation of people or groups who are compelled to leave their homes due to external pressure or threat, and is not a result of their voluntary decision to migrate. Such a move may be caused by factors such as persecution, human rights violations, conflict, repression, or natural or man-made disasters. The term refers to refugees, displaced people, and those who are compelled to emigrate. Although most people who move around do so to escape dangerous situations, authorities or rebel factions are increasingly using migration to expel people from an area (Tataru, 2019).

Remittances

The subject of remittances has been the centre of extensive academic debates, where different scholars have provided diverse accounts of its significance in migration studies. In line with the International Organisation for Migration (2006), remittances are funds transferred by migrants or immigrants living in another country to their family members or dependents in their country of origin. Kihangire and Katarikawe (2008) describe remittances as the money that migrants remit home while they are working overseas. These transfers often represent a share of their earnings and can come in the form of money or material gifts sent to support their families or communities. According to Solari (2019), the money that is sent back to the home country by migrants or expatriates, known as remittances, can be categorised into two groups: one is the monetary remittances, which essentially means money transfer, and the other is the social remittances, which implies the transfer of ideas, skills, and cultural practices. In describing the link between migration and remittance, Solari highlights that individuals generally move from their place of residence either to escape poverty or to seek better opportunities and a better lifestyle. Using Ukraine as an example, she observed that many migrants leave either to avoid hardship or because they are drawn to the values and opportunities associated with life in Europe. Vargas-Lundius, Villarreal, Lanly, and Osorio (2008) argue that the record increase in remittance flows over the last years cannot be solely explained by the rise in international migration, but should also consider other factors. These factors include increasing competition among money transfer services, a decrease in the cost of sending money, better utilisation of formal channels by migrants, and improved tracking and reporting systems in many developing countries. Consequently, remittances have become the second-largest source of external financial inflows into developing countries, after foreign direct investment (FDI), and have even surpassed the total volume of official development assistance.

Brain Drain

Skilled migration is an outflow of intellect, also known as brain drain, in which the qualified professionals move away from their native country to foreign lands with the hope of advancing their careers internationally (Tharenou & Kulik, 2020). The concept of brain drain was initially introduced by the British Royal Society to explain the movement of the talented workforce from European countries to the United States and Canada in the 1950s and early 1960s. According to Goga (2020), brain drain refers to

the departure of the most skilled workers from developing countries to developed ones. These individuals are often drawn to the destination countries by factors that are more attractive or better aligned with their personal and professional goals. Dell'Amore (2011) states that humans started leaving Africa over 20,000 years ago in the middle of the Ice Age, when the climate was warmer. The change in climate likely allowed a route for the first known human migration. According to Adi (2012), brain drain used to be a historically involuntary process in the past. One of the earliest instances might be the transatlantic slave trade in the middle of the 15th century, when the first Africans were taken to Europe. After the Americas were discovered, by 1518, enslaved people were being taken straight from the areas in West Africa which are now called Benin, Nigeria, and Cameroon to the Americas. Whatley and Gillezeau (2011) stated that, notwithstanding the richness of Africa in natural resources, the continent went through a steep decline, a downfall that is still determining the harsh period of Africa today.

Grenier (2011) and Jenkins (2016) further asserted that brain drain can also occur voluntarily. Recently, numerous skilled workers have decided to leave their underdeveloped countries and migrate to richer countries due to issues in their home countries, including low wages, poor working conditions, limited resources, and weak governance. According to Osigbesan (2021), the presence of skilled migrants is one of the main reasons for the economic growth of the destination countries. They are usually the ones to fill the gaps of the local markets, especially in situations where the sectors call for skills, knowledge, and experience. However, at the time when these skilled workers relocate to foreign lands, it is a consequence of a vacuum in a substantial number of professional and intellectual talents in the home countries, which could slow down the process of development there. Khan (2021) noted that the migration of skilled individuals from their home country can result in a loss that hinders national progress and reduces income opportunities for the broader population, ultimately contributing to increased inequality. In a different study, Radwan and Sakr (2018) explored the concept of brain circulation as a strategic approach to mitigate brain drain in Africa and enhance EU–Africa cooperation in science and technology. Their study provided a comprehensive review of national and regional policies aimed at facilitating the circulation of skilled expertise within the African continent. Emphasising the importance of research networks and collaborative initiatives such as the African Union Network of Sciences and various EU-funded programs, they argue that effective brain circulation depends on the establishment of a supportive ecosystem that fosters knowledge exchange, capacity development, and active diaspora engagement. Their analysis indicates that leveraging the expertise of the African diaspora through structured cooperation can significantly contribute to accelerating socioeconomic and technological progress.

Migration and development have remained central issues in the global political economy, particularly in the aftermath of major geopolitical shifts such as Brexit. Across regions, the movement of skilled and unskilled labour continues to shape national economies, diplomatic relations, and global inequality. (Igbini, Oluka & Oharisi, 2020; Salaudeen, 2020). Ellington (2022) asserted that the UK's withdrawal from the European Union marked a turning point in its migration governance, shifting from the principle of free movement to a skills-based system designed to attract high value labour and reduce low skilled migration. This recalibration of immigration priorities not only redefined Britain's internal labour dynamics but also restructured its global engagements, especially with countries in the Global South (Aerssen & Spital, 2023). Peryton (2019) observed that Brexit represented a reassertion of migration sovereignty, as the UK sought to reduce dependence on EU labour and regain control over its borders. The tightening of borders after Brexit prompted competing strategies of labour replacement and foreign talent recruitment. Germany and France have strengthened intra-EU labour frameworks. Southern European countries, such as Spain and Italy, experienced the return of citizens who had worked in the

UK prior to Brexit, raising domestic concerns about employment absorption and reintegration (Portes, 2023). Ireland, however, has maintained a unique position, preserving the Common Travel Area with the UK and using this flexibility to sustain trade and cross-border movement (European Commission, 2024). According to Pazzona, Filauri, and Gökçeli (2023), for the United Kingdom, Brexit was more than a withdrawal from the European Union; it marked a turning point in how the country defined its identity and role in the world.

The introduction of the new points-based immigration system signalled a move away from prioritising European workers toward a more globally competitive framework. Instead of granting automatic entry to EU citizens, the UK began to attract skilled migrants from Commonwealth countries in regions such as Asia and Africa. This shift aligned with the Global Britain vision, which aimed to strengthen trade, education, and migration partnerships beyond Europe. Scholars such as Dias-Abey and Bales (2023) argue that this dynamic mirrors earlier post-colonial patterns where economic dependence and knowledge transfer were unevenly distributed. In Africa, Brexit encouraged a more careful yet strategic reassessment of relations with the United Kingdom. Many countries across the continent viewed it as an opportunity to establish more balanced partnerships and reduce their dependence on traditional aid-based ties. Nations such as Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa entered into new trade and visa agreements, although these initiatives were often narrowly focused. Countries in Africa, such as Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, have entered into new trade and visa agreements, although these initiatives were often narrowly focused. The UK, for its part, placed greater emphasis on development cooperation and migration management, prioritising return and readmission agreements over the creation of broader migration opportunities (Ngwu & Ojah, 2024). Nigeria, with its deep historical connection to Britain, has become a focal point in the post-Brexit period. Migration between the two countries extends from the colonial and post-independence eras to the present, encompassing education, professional mobility, and family reunification. The introduction of the points-based immigration system reshaped this relationship by rewarding skills and education areas where many Nigerians are competitive (Enayaba, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The push–pull theory, which emphasises the factors that regulate migration, was initially developed by Ravenstein (1889) and later refined by Lee (1966). In his work on the laws of migration, Ravenstein established the regularities of migratory patterns, which he derived from the behaviours of people's movement and the reasons for these movements. Among other things, he found that migration usually takes place over a relatively short distance and in stages, and is primarily financially motivated, and depends on the roles of men and women as well as on the availability of transport and technology. With his work, Lee (1966) created a more scientific account of the migration process by indicating that it is the interaction of push and pull factors that explains the movement of people from one region to another.

Lee's model categorises migration drivers into four analytical dimensions:

1. **Factors associated with the area of origin:** These are the negative situations that forced people to move from their homeland. They consist of a lack of jobs, low wages, bad infrastructure, political instability, corruption, and weak governance (Gibson & McKenzie, 2011).

2. **Factors associated with the area of destination:** These are the positive conditions that attract migrants to a new country, such as better job opportunities, higher wages, political stability, and access to quality social services. (Yanai et al., 2020).
3. **Intervening obstacles:** Lee (1966) pointed out that migration choices are influenced by barriers that may either delay or stop the movement of people. These hindrances may be physical (distance and natural features), legal (immigration laws and visa regulations), financial (such as relocation expenses), or personal (having to take care of the family). Klaus and Pachocka (2019) argued that such obstacles not only decide the selection of migrants but also affect the openness of migration routes.
4. **Personal factors:** Outside of the fundamental factors, the dreams of an individual, the degree of their risk tolerance, and considerations concerning their family will determine whether a person moves to a different place. According to Lee (1966), the choice of moving to a different place is heavily depended on the personal viewpoint of the individual, and is influenced by their perception of both the opportunities in a foreign country and the difficulties in their own country.

These dimensions of analysis provide a framework for understanding migration decisions. The theory suggests that migration occurs when the advantages of moving outweigh the disadvantages, considering both external conditions and personal circumstances. The push-pull theory helps explain how post-Brexit immigration policies in the UK have interacted with Nigeria's internal conditions to shape migration patterns. The reforms, introduced through a points-based system that prioritises skilled labour, have strengthened the pull factors by creating more accessible and attractive pathways for Nigerian migrants. At the same time, push factors in Nigeria, such as limited employment opportunities and poor working conditions, continue to drive skilled workers out of the country. The combination of these opposing forces provides a useful framework for analysing the dual outcomes of migration. The theory not only captures the structural and personal extents of migration but also offers a foundation for understanding the relationship between Nigeria's development challenges and the opportunities presented by post-Brexit UK immigration policies.

Methodology

The study employed a case study design to investigate the impact of UK immigration policies following Brexit on Nigeria's socioeconomic development. Using a case study design enabled a detailed examination of how policy changes in migration affect the development of a particular area, in this instance, the bilateral relationship between Nigeria and the UK. Yin (2018) states that a case study design is valuable in analysing complex contemporary issues within their real-life settings, which makes it appropriate for this research. The population of this study consists of individuals and institutions involved in migration governance and Nigeria–UK relations. These included government officials working in migration-related agencies, policy analysts, and Nigerian migrants residing in the United Kingdom, such as students and professionals. The diversity embedded within this population allows for an exploration of both micro-level (individual migrant experiences) and macro-level (policy and institutional framework) analyses. (Patino & Ferreira, 2018; Connelly, 2020).

The study utilised 20 participants drawn from relevant stakeholder groups involved in Nigeria–UK migration in the post-Brexit period. The justification for this sample size is supported by Bryman (2012), who observes that, despite variations in recommended figures, a minimum of 20 participants naturally provides sufficient depth and variety of perspectives for meaningful qualitative insights. This study adopted both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. These techniques were used to select participants with specific knowledge and understanding relevant to the study. Purposive sampling, also

known as subjective sampling, was employed in this study because it involves the deliberate selection of individuals with specific expertise or information. (Nikolopoulou, 2023). Snowball sampling was also employed to reach individuals who might be difficult to identify through purposive sampling alone. This technique involves identifying participants through referrals from initial respondents (Chan, 2020).

Instrument of Data Collection

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide, which allowed flexibility in exploring participants' perspectives while maintaining consistency across interviews. The interview questions were designed around three central themes:

1. The perceived effects of post-Brexit UK immigration policies on migration flows from Nigeria.
2. The role of government and bilateral cooperation in managing migration for mutual benefit.
3. The developmental implications of these migration trends for Nigeria's development.

Interviews were conducted both in person (for participants in Nigeria) and virtually (for those in the UK), depending on accessibility. In addition to primary data, secondary data were drawn from policy documents, government reports, academic articles, and journals.

Method of Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-step framework of familiarisation, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval to comply with institutional and global research standards was obtained from the Covenant University Research Ethics Committee. This study was careful in following the ethical guidelines in data collection, analysis, and presentation. All participants in the research provided informed consent, indicating that their participation was voluntary and that they were assured confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section examines the socioeconomic effects of Nigerians' migration to the UK in the post-Brexit period on Nigeria, focusing on three key subthemes: brain drain, remittance effects, and losses in the healthcare and education sectors. These findings are drawn from respondents' interviews and triangulated with existing literature.

Brain Drain

Brain drain emerged as a central concern across respondents. Migrant students and professionals consistently referenced Nigeria's growing loss of talent due to migration to the UK. As Student 2 explained, "the goal should be to return and contribute to Nigeria, but with no jobs, people are forced to stay abroad." Professional 4 noted, "With UK visa reforms after Brexit, sectors like healthcare and tech have opened up, and Nigerians are highly skilled in these areas, so many are leaving. Professional 4 cited an example,

These are individuals who, ideally, should be contributing to Nigeria's growth and development, but instead are thriving abroad, often in countries that recognise and reward their expertise. This has caused the healthcare sector, among others, to suffer a

lack of sufficient staff. In fact, I experienced a situation with a close family member who required immediate medical care, and we could hardly find the medical staff needed to attend to them. It's now a common belief in some families that no one should fall seriously ill in Nigeria because the medical infrastructure is no longer reliable.

Government official 2 mentioned that,

The rise of the Japa Syndrome, a term used to describe the mass migration of Nigerians in search of better opportunities abroad, further intensifies the brain drain. This trend, particularly noticeable since 2020, refers to the outflow of skilled professionals.

The healthcare system in Nigeria is the main area where the impact has been clearly seen. The quality of patient care has gone down as a result of the lack of sufficient personnel. Policy Analyst 1 reported that “the Nigerian diaspora is increasingly composed of highly skilled professionals in medicine, IT, and academia. In 2023 alone, over 4,000 Nigerian doctors registered with the UK’s General Medical Council.” Policy Analyst 1 further asserted,

The Nigerian government has raised concerns about this mass exodus, with some officials proposing restrictions on migration. However, despite government concerns, the absence of a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Nigeria and the UK has meant that there are no structured agreements to regulate this migration, such as temporary placements where professionals could return after a fixed period to contribute to Nigeria’s development.

Policy Analyst 4 asserted that brain drain, the outflow of talent, affects Nigeria’s overall economic productivity. With the departure of skilled workers, the country experiences reduced outputs in different sectors, which decreases GDP and the welfare of the nation. Policy Analyst 4 went on to clarify more by saying,

Less production led by a smaller number of people should result in lower growth rates. The high inflation that we are witnessing in Nigeria is partly due to the shortage of skilled workers. The reason for this is the lack of goods in the market, caused by low production, which in turn results in increased prices.

Professional 5 noted,

The country continues to lose some of its most qualified individuals... while Nigeria has the talent, it lacks the enabling environment.

Academic literature corroborates these trends. According to Enahoro, Ugochi and Augustine (2023), Nigeria is experiencing systemic human capital flight that directly undermines socioeconomic development. The lack of return on government investment in public training institutions deepens the crisis. Similarly, Oguejiofor and Onwuasoigwe (2024) describe Nigeria’s “Japa” trend as a youth-driven migration wave triggered by domestic economic collapse and poor governance. Government Official 4 suggested that “brain circulation,” rather than brain drain, is a more productive lens. However, as Government Official 7 observed, the lack of reciprocal UK-Nigeria migration frameworks makes reintegration difficult, limiting diaspora contributions to Nigeria’s development.

Remittance Effects

While the loss of talent is damaging, respondents noted that remittances play a major role in supporting Nigeria's economy. Government Official 2 explained, “Remittances help cushion the

economy, especially with the Naira so unstable.” Professionals cited the challenge of consistently sending money home due to rising living costs in both countries. As Professional 5 stated,

Remittances play a vital role in supporting families and funding various projects. People send money for school fees, building homes, starting businesses, and caring for elderly relatives. However, it is essential to note that the UK’s cost of living and economic environment influence how much people can remit. Even though there are more opportunities to earn, expenses like rent, bills, and high living costs can limit the amount sent back. Nevertheless, remittances from the diaspora continue to make a meaningful contribution to Nigeria’s economy.

Government Official 4 noted that "Nigeria is among the highest remittance-receiving countries in Africa, with inflows from the diaspora exceeding \$23 billion in 2022." The Policy Analyst 3 stated that this "figure outpaces foreign direct investment and forms a vital income stream for many households." The respondents’ assertions strongly align with the study of Darkwah and Verter (2020), who noted that diaspora remittances to Nigeria have exceeded both Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) inflows, positioning them as one of the country's most significant sources of foreign earnings in recent years. In 2022 alone, remittances from Nigerians abroad were equivalent to 83% of the Federal Government’s budget and exceeded Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows by a factor of 11. In addition, the value of these remittances was approximately 7.4 times greater than the total net official development assistance received that year, which stood at US\$3.4 billion (Knomad, 2023). However, these funds are largely used for consumption rather than investment, limiting their long-term effects.

Government Official 1 noted,

While remittances are economically beneficial, they are not a substitute for the value lost through the emigration of skilled labour.

While elucidating on the long-term effect of remittances, Government Official 3 stated that

Nigeria's remittance inflows have increased over the past year, reaching approximately \$23 billion, up from \$17-18 billion. While this influx of funds provides some relief to families and communities, it does not necessarily translate into long term development for Nigeria. Most of these remittances are used for day-to-day expenses, such as food and school fees, rather than being invested in productive activities or services that would drive economic growth. It is estimated that fewer than 10% of remittances directly contribute to the country's development.

Although remittances alleviate household poverty and support consumption sometimes, they do not translate into productive capital formation or structural economic improvement. Similarly, Ewubare and Odu (2025) posit that the inflow of funds should be managed through policy mechanisms to stimulate local enterprise and innovation. Despite their volume, remittances are no replacement for the intellectual and institutional capital lost to migration.

Healthcare and Education Sector Losses

Numerous respondents expressed concern about the outflow of healthcare workers and educators. Professional 2 shared, “The health system is crumbling. There are no doctors left. According to Government Official 1,

Nigeria now has more medical personnel working abroad than domestically, creating a critical shortfall. These gaps are exacerbated by UK visa policies that prioritise sectors where Nigeria has comparative labour advantages.

Government Official 8 stated,

Post-Brexit policies have thus created a pipeline for Nigerian professionals into the NHS and UK school systems, further draining Nigeria's already thin workforce.

Academic studies support these accounts. Some studies note that Nigeria's healthcare crisis is being worsened by medical migration, particularly of early career doctors and nurses, who are targeted by UK labour recruitment drives. The situation in education is similar, with Nigerian university lecturers increasingly migrating, leaving domestic institutions under-resourced and overcrowded (Idio, Akadi & Wilcox, 2016). Government Official 6 emphasised that these sectoral losses extend beyond staffing and affect national development indicators, including child mortality, literacy rates, and GDP. The socioeconomic Implications of Nigerian migration to the UK in the post-Brexit period are deeply interwoven. Brain drain deprives Nigeria of skilled professionals; although remittances are valuable, they fail to compensate for structural losses, and key public sectors, such as healthcare and education, face worsening productivity gaps. These findings reveal the urgent need for policies that retain talent, structure diaspora engagement, and ensure migration benefits are reciprocal.

Discussion of Findings

The skilled migration of Nigerian professionals and students to the UK, in the post-Brexit era, has resulted in notable socioeconomic implications for Nigeria. The findings reveal a significant issue regarding the escalation of brain drain in critical sectors such as health and education. The emigration of highly trained professionals, including nurses, doctors, and university lecturers, has led to major deficiencies in service provision and institutional capacity. Respondents attributed this outflow largely to poor working conditions, limited career advancement opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure in Nigeria. Conversely, pull factors, including the availability of more stable education systems, structured immigration pathways for skilled workers, and better living conditions in the UK, have encouraged this movement. These findings reflect the assumptions of the push-pull theory, which suggests that migration decisions are influenced by the interaction between adverse conditions in the home country and attractive opportunities in the host country. These observations align with the findings of Oguejiofor and Onwuasoigwe (2024), who investigated the mass emigration of Nigerian professionals and youth to the United Kingdom from 2015 to 2023, underscoring substantial socioeconomic repercussions for Nigeria. Their study identified key push factors driving this migration, including high youth unemployment, economic instability, political uncertainty, insecurity, and poverty. They emphasised that this large-scale emigration has resulted in a severe brain drain, affecting critical sectors such as health and education. The loss of skilled professionals, including doctors, nurses, and university lecturers, has led to diminished service delivery, reduced productivity, and slower economic growth in Nigeria. They asserted that overcoming these difficulties necessitates extensive reforms, encompassing economic diversification, job creation, enhanced governance and investment in infrastructure and education. Adenipekun (2023) corroborates this claim, emphasising that Nigeria has long struggled with the emigration of skilled professionals. Industries like healthcare and education have been notably impacted, with a substantial contingent of Nigerian-trained physicians migrating to the UK for enhanced career opportunities. He also notes that the UK's immigration policies, designed to attract highly skilled migrants, may exacerbate this trend. Although these policies provide opportunities for individual migrants, they jeopardise Nigeria's human capital and thereby limit the nation's long-term developmental prospects.

Some respondents acknowledged the economic benefits associated with skilled migration through the inflow of remittances from the Nigerian diaspora. These financial inflows continue to be a substantial source of income for many Nigerian households and have been linked to poverty alleviation and increased investment in small-scale businesses. Such contributions can stimulate local economic activities and enhance household welfare, offering short-term relief in the face of widespread economic hardship. These responses are validated by the findings of Aja, Nnaji, and Okorie (2024), who stated that remittances from Nigerians living abroad have become an increasingly vital source of national development, enhancing the livelihoods of recipients back home. In recent years, these inflows have become a

significant contributor to Nigeria's gross domestic product and overall socioeconomic growth. However, a recurring concern among respondents was that the benefits of remittances do not outweigh the long-term damage of continuous brain drain. This outflow of talent undermines Nigeria's National Development Plan (2021–2025), which prioritises the revitalisation of the health and education sectors. In this view, the financial contributions of the diaspora, while helpful, cannot substitute for the human capital required to drive national development. This also corroborates the research of Oguejiofor and Onwuasoigwe (2024), who asserted that while the contributions of the diaspora are valuable but they cannot substitute for the sustained presence and engagement of professionals within the country. This is part of a wider tendency in global South migration discourses, whose gains in past remittances have been matched by the vulnerability of the service sector and the development potential forgone. The study's findings reveal that Nigeria must adopt a balanced policy approach, one that appreciates the role of the diaspora while simultaneously investing in domestic systems that incentivise skilled professionals to remain. This includes addressing the systemic push factors that drive migration, such as poor governance, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of professional development opportunities. Without such measures, Nigeria's long-term socioeconomic development may remain compromised, despite the short-term financial gains from migration.

Conclusion

Post-Brexit UK immigration reforms have intensified the migration of skilled Nigerians, leading to complicated socioeconomic impacts for Nigeria. While remittances from the diaspora remain a vital source of income, their benefits are largely short-term and consumption driven, failing to offset the long-term losses caused by sustained brain drain in critical sectors, such as healthcare and education. The findings reveal that the continued outflow of skilled labour undermines Nigeria's institutional capacity, economic productivity, and development agendas, even as the UK benefits from filling labour gaps with Nigerian professionals. This paradox indicates the dual role of migration as both an opportunity and a challenge. To maximise its benefits, Nigeria requires a balanced policy approach that strengthens domestic institutions, addresses the systemic push factors driving emigration, and structures diaspora engagement beyond remittances. Equally, the existing bilateral frameworks with the UK remain limited in scope, underscoring the need for policies that ensure migration becomes a reciprocal process, supporting Nigeria's long-term development rather than exacerbating its vulnerabilities.

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