

**THE JAPA PHENOMENON IN NIGERIA: AN EXAMINATION OF RECENT
MIGRATION TRENDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE NATIONAL ECONOMY
(2015-2020)**

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

FACULTY OF ARTS UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

NOVEMBER 2025

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) HONORS DEGREE IN
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY.**

NOVEMBER 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that, to the best of our knowledge, this project was carried out by Osemwengie Oghogho Rejoice in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, under my supervision.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project, first and foremost, to Almighty God. Your grace, wisdom, and strength have carried me through every step of this journey, and I know that without Your guidance, none of this would have been possible.

To my amazing parents, your love, sacrifices, and constant prayers have been my biggest source of strength. You ' ve believed in me even when I struggled to believe in myself, and this achievement truly belongs to you as much as it does to me.

To my siblings, relatives, and friends thank you for standing by me, for your encouragement, laughter, and understanding. Your support has been the light that kept me going whenever things felt tough.

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CHAPTER ONE

Background to the study

Introduction

The term “Japa Syndrome” has been used to describe the growing attitude or trend of people leaving their home countries, especially from Africa, to re-settle in other parts of the world. This phenomenon is not unique to Africa, as migration has been part of human history for centuries in many regions.¹ For example, the Jewish people experienced large-scale migration long ago, moving from their homeland to different continents and countries. This movement was not random but happened in large movements and also at certain times in history. The effects of such migrations can be seen even today, such as in the ongoing disputes over land between the Jews and Palestinians, a conflict that has led to numerous wars over time, including the most recent outbreak in May 2021, which even attracted the involvement of other Islamic neighboring Countries such as Hezbollah from Lebanon.²

What makes the Japa Syndrome particularly interesting and worth studying is that, unlike historical migrations often caused by extreme circumstances such as wars, persecution, or natural disasters, many of those living under this syndrome are doing so by choice. These individuals are motivated not by immediate danger or urgent problems, but by personal goals, ambitions, and the hope of building a better life in another country.³ They actively seek opportunities outside their homeland, driven by the desire to

improve their circumstances, advance their careers, or gain new experiences. In other words, while previous migrations were often forced or reactive, the Japa Syndrome reflects a conscious and deliberate decision to move, sometimes even when life at home is relatively okay and there is no major reason justifying their intention to migrate.⁴ This voluntary movement is significant because it shows a shift in the way people think about migration today. Instead of fleeing hardship, people are increasingly planning their moves based on ambition, lifestyle preferences, or the pursuit of safety and stability elsewhere. Understanding this pattern matters because it influences the nations people depart from and affects how talent, culture, and ideas circulate globally.⁵

The disadvantages of the Japa Syndrome are noticeable and can affect a country in many ways. When a large number of people leave, the country loses part of its workforce, which can slow down businesses and the overall economy.⁶ When skilled workers, such as doctors, teachers, or engineers, move abroad, the country loses important knowledge and experience that are needed to keep key services running well.⁷ Young and ambitious people leaving can also reduce new ideas, small businesses, and creative projects, making it harder for the country to grow and innovate.⁸ On a social level, families may be separated, communities may become less connected, and certain age groups or educated citizens may be missing, which can create imbalances in society.⁹

At the same time, there are some positive effects. People who leave often send money back home, which can help families pay for education, healthcare, or start small

businesses.¹⁰ Some may eventually return with new skills, different ways of thinking, and fresh ideas that can help the country grow. They may also create connections with people or organizations abroad, which can open up opportunities for trade, learning, or partnerships.¹¹ Still, these benefits do not always make up for the problems caused by losing so many people, especially when the country depends on their skills and energy to develop. In the following chapters, we will examine the historical and contemporary trends in Nigerian migration, as well as the causes and drivers of japa syndrome.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this is to examine the Japa phenomenon in Nigeria, studying the recent trend of mass migration and its impact on the Nigerian economy from late 2015 to 2020.

The objectives of this study include;

1. To examine the historical and contemporary trends in Nigerian migration
2. To explore the causes and drivers of the Japa Syndrome in Nigeria
3. To analyze the influence of Social Media and Migration Networks on Nigerian Migration
4. To identify the economic impacts of Mass Migration on Nigeria

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study will cover the period from 2015 to 2020. This timeframe is chosen because it represents a key period when the Japa Syndrome became more visible

in Nigeria. During these years, economic challenges like high unemployment, rising inflation, insecurity, and political issues encouraged many Nigerians to consider migrating. At the same time, social media, migration networks, and opportunities abroad became more accessible, making it easier for people to leave. Focusing on this period allows the study to analyse recent trends, the main reasons for migration, and its effects on the country, as well as government responses during these years.

Research Methodology

The historical methodology will be used in this study. Both primary and secondary sources will be used to achieve a detailed analysis.

Primary Sources

Primary sources such as interviews will be conducted with the family members and friends who now reside in various parts of the world. These interviews will help uncover the underlying causes of their migration, the personal and socio-economic impact of their departure, and their current realities in host countries. In addition, secondary sources including academic journals, research studies, annual reports, news articles, and press releases will be utilised to support and enrich the findings of this research.

Secondary Sources

The study relied on secondary sources such as books, academic journals, newspapers, and online resources to collect relevant information.

Literature Review

Throughout this research, we will review earlier works that hold significant importance and will greatly contribute to this study. The first article to be examined is by Samuel K. Okunade and Oladotun E. Awosusi, titled “The Japa Syndrome and the Migration of Nigerians to the United Kingdom: An Empirical Analysis.”¹² In their study, the authors take a close look at how Nigerians move to the United Kingdom, using both numbers and detailed explanations to support their findings. They focus on the reasons why people decide to leave Nigeria, showing that migration is usually influenced by several factors at once. Among the main reasons is the search for steady jobs, access to better education, personal safety and political security, and improved healthcare. All of these reasons point to a desire for a higher standard of living and opportunities for long-term personal growth.

The authors also explain how these motivations are connected to problems in Nigeria. Issues like an unstable economy, widespread corruption, high unemployment, and weak governance act as strong push factors, encouraging people to leave. On the other hand, the United Kingdom attracts migrants because of its stable economy, clear immigration rules, and high-quality schools and hospitals. The combination of these push and pull factors creates a steady flow of Nigerians moving to the UK, especially young people with skills or professional training. Okunade and Awosusi further discuss how this migration affects Nigeria as a country. While leaving may benefit the individuals themselves, Nigeria loses important workers and talent when skilled professionals leave.

The departure of people in areas like healthcare, education, and technology reduces the country's human resources, slows development, limits new ideas, and worsens existing social and economic problems.

However, the study has some weaknesses. It does not fully look at the history of Nigerian migration or compare current trends with past patterns. For example, it does not explore migration during colonial times, early labour movements, or how global economic changes affected migration. Because of this, the study gives only part of the picture of why Nigerians move abroad and how these patterns have changed over time. It also does not compare Nigeria's migration with that of other African countries, which could help understand whether Nigeria's experience is unique and needs to be studied. The study hopes to fill this space.

Similarly, A. Olumoyo and C. Abiri, in their work titled “‘Japa’ Syndrome: Causes, Effects and Solutions for Sustainable National Development,”¹³ examine the Japa Syndrome as a serious national issue with widespread social, economic, and institutional consequences. The authors identify several key factors driving this migration trend. Among the most significant are high youth unemployment, growing insecurity, limited access to basic services, poor educational infrastructure, and political instability. Together, these issues create a condition or environment where many young Nigerians feel they cannot achieve their ambitions or secure a stable future at home, making the prospect of moving abroad very appealing.

The study also emphasises the broader impact of this phenomenon on Nigeria as a nation. When skilled and educated individuals leave the country in large numbers, the country experiences a brain drain, where essential knowledge, experience, and talent are lost. This loss weakens government institutions, reduces innovation, and makes it more difficult for the country to solve its social and economic challenges. Public services in critical sectors like healthcare, education, and technology can be strained as professionals migrate, leaving fewer capable individuals to sustain and improve these systems.

Olumoyo and Abiri argue that addressing the Japa Syndrome requires a multi-pronged approach. They suggest that the government should implement reforms aimed at creating more job opportunities, improving governance, and providing better social welfare programs. Strengthening educational institutions and ensuring access to essential services are also crucial steps. Additionally, they propose fostering a national mindset that encourages citizens to stay and contribute to the country's growth. Such reforms, if properly executed, could help retain talent, support local development initiatives, and build a more resilient society. However, despite its comprehensive analysis, the study does not fully address one of the modern factors that has greatly accelerated migration: the role of social media and migration networks. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp allow potential migrants to access information about living conditions abroad, job opportunities, and visa processes. These networks also provide emotional support, advice, and practical guidance from people who have already migrated, deciding to leave seems more achievable and less risky.¹⁴

By ignoring these influences, the study misses an important part of what motivates today's young Nigerians to move abroad. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining how social media and migration networks shape the Japa Syndrome. By understanding these modern channels of influence, it becomes possible to better analyse why migration continues to grow even when economic or political conditions at home improve slightly. This approach not only adds depth to the study of Japa Syndrome but also provides insights that could guide policymakers in designing interventions that address both traditional push and pull factors, as well as the new, digitally-driven drivers of migration.

Kenechi Nnaemeka Afunugo, in his article “Japa Syndrome and Its Challenges to Nigeria's Labour Force: A Search for Religious Solutions,”¹⁵ explores the spiritual and ethical aspects of the migration problem. He argues that while economic and political challenges are often shown as reasons why Nigerians leave the country, there is also a deeper issue involving a decline in national loyalty and moral values. According to Afunugo, this weakening of moral and ethical principles contributes to the mindset that leaving the country is the best or only option. The author emphasises the potential role of religion and faith-based institutions in addressing this aspect of the crisis. He suggests that religious teachings can help guide citizens' behaviour, strengthen personal resilience, and promote a sense of responsibility and patriotism. When individuals are encouraged to value their communities and see the importance of contributing to national growth, they may be more inclined to remain in the country and work toward its development rather

than seeking better opportunities abroad. In this sense, Afunugo presents a moral and spiritual framework as a solution to the economic and political measures often proposed.¹⁶

However, while the article provides an important perspective on the ethical and spiritual dimensions of migration, it does not fully examine the economic consequences of mass emigration for Nigeria. For example, the loss of skilled and educated workers reduces the country's productive capacity, slows innovation, and can strain public services in areas such as healthcare, education, and technology. Additionally, the departure of a large portion or size of the workforce can affect local businesses, decrease tax revenues, and weaken the overall labour market, creating long-term challenges for economic growth. This research seeks to build on Afunugo's work by linking the moral and spiritual considerations with the tangible economic and social effects of the Japa Syndrome. By combining these approaches, it becomes possible to achieve a fuller understanding of why Nigerians leave the country, what the consequences are, and what strategies, both ethical and practical, might help reduce the impact of mass migration on the nation's labour force and development.

Furthermore, Faith Adeyamju, in her article “The ‘Japa’ Syndrome of Nigerian Youths as a Survival Strategy: A Socio-Economic Perspective,”¹⁷ examines the Japa Syndrome as a method young Nigerians use to cope with difficult living conditions. She explains that many youths view leaving the country as a practical and necessary decision

because of the tough economic realities in Nigeria. Factors such as high unemployment, poorly paid jobs, growing inequality, and limited opportunities for personal and professional growth make staying in the country feel increasingly unsustainable. For many young people, migrating abroad is no longer just a dream or a personal ambition, it has become a survival strategy and a way to secure a better future. Adeyamju highlights how the decision to leave is influenced by the urgent need to improve living standards and create long-term stability. In her view, the Japa Syndrome reflects the adaptation of young Nigerians to systemic challenges, as they actively seek environments where their talents, education, and skills can be better recognised and rewarded.

However, while the study provides valuable insights into the economic and social motivations behind youth migration, it does not explore the significant role of social media and migration networks in shaping and facilitating these decisions. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp allow young people to access information about life abroad, job opportunities, and visa procedures, while also providing advice, support, and guidance from peers who have already migrated.¹⁸ These networks make migration seem more achievable and less risky. The current research aims to address this gap, showing how these modern tools amplify the Japa Syndrome and influence the choices of young Nigerians in ways that go beyond traditional economic and social factors.

Lastly, Ogar Ali, in his book chapter “Brain Drain: Impact and Consequences on Technological Advancement in Nigeria,”¹⁹ provides a thorough analysis of how the widespread emigration of skilled Nigerians negatively affects the country's technological and industrial development. He focuses on the continuous outflow of professionals such as scientists, engineers, medical experts, and ICT specialists, showing that their departure creates a significant gap in the nation's human capital. This loss of expertise weakens Nigeria's ability to innovate, develop industries, and compete on a global scale, making the country increasingly reliant on foreign knowledge and solutions. Ali emphasises that brain drain has far-reaching consequences beyond the immediate shortage of skilled workers. It slows the progress of research and development, reduces the creation of locally designed technologies, and limits the capacity of universities, research institutions, and companies to develop innovative solutions for pressing national challenges. By losing these critical minds, Nigeria faces difficulties in keeping pace with global technological advancements, which can affect everything from healthcare and education to agriculture and information technology.

To address these challenges, Ali proposes a range of strategic interventions. He calls for policy reforms aimed at making it more attractive for professionals to remain in the country, such as better working conditions, competitive salaries, and career growth opportunities. Additionally, he stresses the importance of investing in research and development, strengthening technological infrastructure, and creating incentive programs to retain top talent. By implementing these measures, Nigeria could reduce the outflow of

skilled workers, enhance local innovation, and build a foundation for sustainable economic and technological growth.²⁰ Despite its valuable contributions, Ali's study has certain limitations. While it provides a clear picture of the technological impact of brain drain, it does not examine the historical evolution of Nigerian migration patterns, nor does it explore contemporary trends beyond technology-related professions. Understanding these historical and current dynamics is crucial because the motivations for migration, the sectors most affected, and the societal consequences have changed over time. By considering this wider perspective, future research like this study can fully understand why Nigerians migrate, the impact on the country's growth in various areas, and ways to keep talent from leaving.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides a clear and updated understanding of the rapidly growing Japa phenomenon and how it shapes Nigeria's economic direction between 2015 and 2020. By examining the major drivers of this migration wave and its effects on labour supply, productivity, and key sectors such as health, education, and technology, the research offers valuable insight into the challenges created by the loss of skilled professionals. The study also highlights the mixed impact of remittances, showing both the benefits and limitations for national development. Its findings will assist policymakers in designing realistic strategies to manage migration, improve working conditions, and strengthen institutions that are currently weakened by brain drain.

Scholars and students will benefit from the academic contribution it makes, while government agencies and private organisations can use the evidence to develop better retention and workforce policies. Overall, the study deepens public understanding of the long-term implications of mass migration and provides a strong foundation for future research on Nigeria’s labour and economic trends.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of citizens migrating abroad in search of better economic opportunities, safety, education, and improved living conditions. This movement, popularly referred to as the “Japa” phenomenon, has become a widespread social and economic trend, especially between 2015 and 2020. While migration is not new in Nigeria, the speed, scale, and composition of the recent wave—particularly the departure of skilled professionals such as doctors, nurses, lecturers, engineers, and tech workers—raise serious concerns about its long-term implications.

Despite the growing public debate, there is limited academic research that provides a clear understanding of how these migration trends affect the Nigerian economy. Key issues such as brain drain, loss of skilled labour, reduced productivity, pressure on educational and health institutions, and the mixed impact of remittances are often discussed but not thoroughly examined with empirical evidence. This gap makes it

difficult for policymakers to design effective strategies to manage migration and its consequences.

Therefore, the problem this study addresses is the lack of comprehensive, data-driven analysis on the causes, patterns, and economic impact of the Japa phenomenon in Nigeria between 2015 and 2020. Without such understanding, the country risks facing deeper labour shortages, weakened institutions, and slowed national development.

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CHAPTER TWO

Historical and Contemporary Trends in Nigerian Migration

Introduction

Historical overview of Trends in Nigeria migration

The human race and practically every region of the world today were explored as a result of specific individuals who dared to move away from their place of upbringing to discover what other parts of the world had to offer. Biblically, the nation of Israel, founded through Abraham, was a result of migration. The words, “Move ye out of thy fatherland into a land that I will show thee,” reflect the uncertainty faced by individuals who choose to migrate.¹ Migration involves a decision to let go of the familiar and move into an unspecified or unfamiliar land, often due to war, hardship, or in search of better opportunities.²

Having said this, migration is not a foreign concept. In fact, the term “migration” gained prominence due to globalisation, increased human mobility, and the eventual creation of modern nation-states.³ According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), migration is defined as “the movement of persons away from their

place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a state. It is the movement of people, across significant distances, with the intention of settling either temporarily or permanently in the new location.⁴ It can occur within a country (internal migration) or across national borders (international migration) and may be voluntary (such as moving for work, education, or better living conditions) or forced (due to conflict, persecution, or natural disasters).⁵

The Europeans, who had a significant impact on the African continent, also migrated from their homelands to exert dominance over indigenous populations. France, for instance, practised direct colonial rule in its areas of influence. The Dutch migrated to southern Africa, establishing control and leaving behind communities that still exist today.⁶ These historical migrations were not just acts of exploration, but also of settlement, domination, and long-lasting cultural transformation. These examples show how frequently migrations occurred. It is important to note that even before the arrival of the Europeans, the various tribes on the African continent had already undergone significant migration. For instance, in the area now known as Nigeria, the different ethnic groups, specifically the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba, frequently migrated for various reasons such as wars, religion, agriculture, and trade. Unlike modern emigration, which is often international and formally documented, pre-colonial migration was primarily regional and intra-African.⁷ Yet, it played a crucial role in shaping the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of present-day Nigeria.

Many of Nigeria's ethnic groups trace their origins to migratory movements both within and beyond the region. For instance, the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, have oral histories that link their origins to migration and movement across regions. The Hausa trace their roots to a legendary prince named Bayajidda, who is said to have come from the Middle East or North Africa. According to the story, Bayajidda arrived in Daura (in today's Katsina State), married Queen Daurama, and had a son named Bawo. Bawo's children later founded the seven original Hausa city-states, known as the Hausa Bakwai; Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Daura, Gobir, Rano, and Biram.⁸ This story not only shows a connection to outside regions like North Africa, but also highlights how trade and early Islamic influence helped shape Hausa society.

The Fulani, originally from the Senegambia region (around present-day Senegal and Gambia), moved eastward over many centuries. They were mainly cattle herders and travelled in search of grazing lands, trade opportunities, and later to spread Islam. Eventually, they settled in northern Nigeria and became key figures in the 19th-century Sokoto Jihad led by Usman dan Fodio. This religious movement led to the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate and united the Fulani and Hausa people into what is now commonly referred to as the Hausa-Fulani identity.⁹

The Yoruba people believe their origin began in Ile-Ife, which is considered the spiritual and historical centre of their culture. According to Yoruba myths, the supreme god Olodumare sent a being named Oduduwa from the heavens to create the earth in Ile-

Ife. Oduduwa is seen as the father of the Yoruba people, and his descendants went on to establish major Yoruba kingdoms such as Oyo, Ijebu, and Ketu.¹⁰ Another version of the story, especially among the Benin people, claims that Oduduwa was originally a Benin prince named Ekaladerhan, son of the last Ogiso Owodo, who was exiled and later migrated to Ile-Ife, where he became a powerful leader. Whether seen as divine or human, Oduduwa's story reflects a migration-based beginning for the Yoruba. His children spread out from Ile-Ife and founded new towns and kingdoms, helping to expand Yoruba culture across southwestern Nigeria.¹¹

The Igbo people have a unique origin story. Unlike the Yoruba and Hausa, the Igbo did not form large kingdoms or centralised political structures. Instead, they lived in small, self-governing communities that valued collective decision-making. However, many Igbo trace their ancestral roots to the ancient Nri Kingdom located in present-day Anambra State. Oral traditions speak of a figure named Eri, believed to have either migrated from the north or been divinely sent. Eri is said to have settled in Nri and established a religious and political system that deeply influenced Igbo culture and values. Over time, many Igbo communities migrated within the region due to factors such as land scarcity, internal family disputes, or the desire for independence. This led to the creation of numerous settlements across southeastern Nigeria.¹²

Several important factors contributed to migration in pre-colonial Nigeria. Conflicts such as wars of succession, land disputes, and rivalries between communities often led

people to flee their homes and settle in new areas.¹³ A good example of this was the collapse of the Oyo Empire in the 19th century, which caused many Yoruba subgroups to migrate in search of safety and stability. In addition, both the trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan slave trades had serious impacts on population movements. Many individuals were captured and forcefully taken from their communities, some transported to the coast for shipment overseas, while others were sent northward into cities across the Sahara. These displacements changed the population size and structure of several regions.¹⁴

Powerful kingdoms such as Benin, Oyo, Kanem-Bornu, and later the Sokoto Caliphate also influenced migration through expansion. These empires grew by conquering nearby communities, often forcing people to move or become part of new territories. Seasonal agricultural migration was another common reason for movement. People relocated temporarily or permanently to more fertile lands, especially along the Niger and Benue rivers, to grow crops and support their livelihoods.¹⁵ All of these forms of migration helped shape the ethnic and cultural diversity that is seen in Nigeria today.

Migration during Colonial Period

From the late 19th century, after the British invaded Lagos in 1861, more Nigerian territories were taken over by colonial forces. This process continued until 1914, when the British merged the northern and southern protectorates to form what is now known as Nigeria.¹⁶ During the colonial period, migration continued, but the reasons evolved. British colonial policies, especially those focusing on education and infrastructure,

encouraged movement toward urban centres like Lagos, Ibadan, and Kaduna. These cities became hubs of opportunity, drawing people from rural areas.¹⁷ The British also recognised outstanding academic performance, granting scholarships or study opportunities to top Nigerian students. One notable example is Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who was selected to study in the United Kingdom because of his academic excellence. He later became Nigeria's first Prime Minister after independence in 1960.¹⁸

Post-independence and Economic Migration Trends

As the colonial period was coming to an end, a small group of educated Nigerians started travelling abroad, especially to the United Kingdom, to continue their studies. This began what later became a strong tradition of Nigerians moving to other countries for education and professional growth. After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the pattern of migration began to change. In the 1960s and 1970s, many Nigerians, professionals, students, and even political exiles, left the country. This happened mostly during and after the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), as people searched for safety or better opportunities in other African countries and even outside the continent.¹⁹ During the oil boom years between 1973 and 1983, the movement actually reversed, and Nigeria itself became a popular destination for people from nearby West African nations like Ghana, Togo, and Niger.²⁰ They were attracted by the hope of getting jobs and enjoying a better life. Unfortunately, this period of wealth and progress did not last long.

By the middle of the 1980s, Nigeria's economy started to fall apart because of many problems, including corruption, poor management, and changes in the world economy. The value of the Naira dropped badly, unemployment grew, prices of goods increased, and public services stopped working properly. All of this made many Nigerians decide to migrate for better chances elsewhere. During President Shehu Shagari's government, the poor handling of the economy made the country's financial troubles even worse.²¹ Then, when General Ibrahim Babangida introduced the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), the situation became even more difficult. As living conditions continued to decline, a large number of skilled professionals, such as doctors, university lecturers, and engineers, started leaving the country. This created Nigeria's first major wave of “brain drain,” as educated and talented people sought better opportunities abroad.²²

By the 1990s and early 2000s, migration from Nigeria grew even stronger because of political troubles, years of military rule, abuse of human rights, and the collapse of the education system. Large numbers of Nigerians moved to countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and South Africa, mainly to find safer lives, better education, and improved living conditions. Nigerian migrants today can be grouped into different categories depending on why they left. Skilled migrants are professionals such as doctors, nurses, IT specialists, lecturers, and engineers. They usually follow legal and formal processes to move abroad, where they are often employed to fill shortages in advanced countries. Semi-skilled and unskilled migrants include artisans, housemaids, and labourers. Many of them travel through irregular routes or are recruited on short-term

contracts, especially to the Middle East and North Africa.²³ Another major group is student migrants, which has become one of the biggest categories in recent years. Every year, thousands of young Nigerians travel abroad for higher education, especially to the UK, Canada, and the US, and in more recent times, to Germany and some parts of Eastern Europe. For many of these students, studying abroad is not only about education but also a pathway to secure permanent residence in those countries. In addition, although they are fewer, some Nigerians migrate as asylum seekers or refugees. These are mostly people from conflict-affected areas in the northern part of Nigeria, who flee to other countries because of threats, violence, persecution, or insecurity.²⁴

Even though Nigerians living abroad have had many positive impacts and achieved great success in areas like education, medicine, business, and the creative arts, their global image has sometimes suffered because of the actions of a few individuals. For example, the former U.S. President, Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, put in place immigration policies that made it harder for people from some countries, including Nigeria, to enter the U.S. He claimed that Nigerians should stay back in their own country to help develop it, instead of moving to the United States.²⁵ Sadly, the growing number of Nigerians abroad has not always brought only pride to the country's name. While many Nigerians have built strong reputations and made outstanding contributions in their host countries, the criminal activities of a few, such as involvement in internet fraud (popularly called “Yahoo Yahoo”), have given Nigeria a bad image. These negative acts have encouraged damaging stereotypes, making some

foreigners see Nigerians as dishonest or untrustworthy.²⁶ This kind of perception continues to affect how Nigerians are viewed, treated, and welcomed in different parts of the world.

In conclusion, the history of Nigerian migration reveals a continuous pattern of movement shaped by changing social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances. From pre-colonial times when people migrated due to wars, trade, and agriculture, through the colonial era when education and urban opportunities spurred internal and external movements, to the post-independence period marked by political instability, economic decline, and the search for better living conditions abroad, migration has remained central to Nigeria's development. In contemporary times, Nigerians continue to migrate as skilled professionals, students, and laborers in pursuit of improved opportunities, while remittances from the diaspora contribute significantly to the nation's economy. Despite the challenges of brain drain and negative stereotypes, migration remains a testament to the resilience, adaptability, and global presence of the Nigerian people.

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CHAPTER THREE

Causes and Drivers of the Japa Syndrome

Introduction

Understanding the Japa Syndrome and it's meaning

Many young Nigerians, and Africans in general, are either hoping to travel abroad, are in the process of doing so, or have already left their home countries in search of a better life. This growing trend is popularly known as the “Japa Syndrome.” The term “Japa,” which comes from a Yoruba word meaning “to run or flee,” has come to represent the increasing desire of young people to escape the difficult living conditions in their home countries and seek greener pastures in foreign lands.¹ It describes a situation where citizens no longer find their home environment livable, promising, or secure enough to build a future, and therefore begin to look outside for better opportunities, whether in education, employment, safety, or general quality of life.² This movement is not random. It is the result of a rising sense of hopelessness, frustration, and lack of confidence in the systems meant to provide a good life for the people. Young people,

especially graduates, skilled professionals, and ambitious individuals, feel that their dreams and talents are being wasted due to the many problems that surround them at home.³

For some, leaving the country is a matter of survival, while for others, it is the only way to reach their full potential. The decision to “japa” is not always made out of excitement, but often out of necessity and a deep desire for a life that offers dignity, fairness, and progress. To properly understand this situation, it is important to examine the different forces that lead people to leave. These forces are broadly divided into two groups: push factors and pull factors.⁴

Push Factors Driving Migration from Nigeria

Push factors are the negative conditions within a country that drive people away, things like economic hardship, insecurity, lack of opportunities, and political instability. On the other hand, pull factors are the positive attractions found in other countries that make migration more appealing, such as scholarships, jobs, peaceful environments, and immigration policies that welcome skilled workers or students.⁵ In light of the push factors, one of the most serious reasons many young Nigerians are leaving the country is:

Unemployment: Every year, thousands of students graduate from universities, polytechnics, and training centres with high hopes of starting a meaningful career. They have spent years studying, doing assignments, writing exams, and dreaming of a better future. But after graduation, many of them face the painful reality that there are not

enough jobs in the country. The job market is overcrowded with too many people looking for work and not enough positions available. This means that even highly qualified and skilled individuals can remain jobless for months or even years. Some people are forced to take jobs far below their level of education and training, just to survive.⁶ The problem is not just the lack of jobs, but also how difficult it is to get the few jobs that exist. In many cases, getting a job depends more on who you know than what you know. People without strong connections or family influence often find themselves left out, no matter how capable they are. This has made the system feel unfair and discouraging, especially for hardworking young people who believed that education would change their lives. In addition to this, when people do manage to get jobs, the working conditions are often poor. Many workers earn salaries that cannot even take care of their basic needs like food, transport, housing, and healthcare. Some employers delay payments for months, and there are cases where workers are mistreated or dismissed without proper reasons or benefits. Job insecurity is very high, and this makes it difficult for people to plan or build a stable life in Nigeria.

This kind of situation leads to deep frustration and hopelessness. Young people then begin to feel that no matter how hard they work, they will never achieve their goals in Nigeria. Many become tired of staying at home doing nothing or watching their talents waste away.⁷ Some even fall into depression or engage in harmful activities out of desperation. But for others, the only option that seems realistic is to leave the country and search for better opportunities abroad. They believe that in other countries, their efforts

will be rewarded, their skills will be useful, and they can live a decent life without constantly struggling. This is why unemployment is not just a problem, it is one of the main reasons people are running away from Nigeria in large numbers.

Low wages and inflation: Closely connected to the problem of unemployment is the issue of low wages and inflation, which has made life even harder for many Nigerians. Even those who are lucky enough to have jobs often find that their salaries are far too small to cover their daily expenses. People work very hard, sometimes for long hours and under stressful conditions, but still go home with pay that cannot feed a family, pay house rent, buy fuel or transport, or take care of basic medical needs. What makes this situation worse is that while salaries remain the same or even get reduced, the prices of everything keep rising.⁸ This is called inflation, and it affects the cost of food, clothing, transport, school fees, rent, and almost everything a person needs to survive. Inflation in Nigeria has been rising steadily, making it difficult for average workers to live a comfortable life. A simple bag of rice, a bottle of cooking oil, or a loaf of bread that was affordable in early 2015 have suddenly doubled or tripled in price by the end of 2020. Despite this, most workers still earn the same salary they earned years ago. This makes it feel as though the more people work, the poorer they become. Many parents cannot afford to send their children to good schools, visit the hospital when sick, or even eat three meals a day. They are constantly under financial pressure, and this leads to stress, frustration, and fear of the future. Because of these harsh economic realities, many Nigerians feel trapped in a system that does not reward hard work. They begin to dream of starting over in a

new country where they believe the value of money is stable, and where people are paid fairly for the work they do.⁹ This hope for a better standard of living is one of the main reasons people decide to leave Nigeria. In this case, they aren't just looking for jobs, but jobs that would make them feel like humans, jobs that will be more than sufficient in ensuring that their daily needs are met, and for these reasons many travel or aspire to travel abroad.

Lack of professional growth and limited career advancement opportunities is another reason why many Nigerians are choosing to leave the country. For many hardworking and talented individuals, building a successful career in Nigeria feels like an impossible task. After spending years gaining education, training, and experience, they often find themselves stuck in positions where they are not able to grow or move forward.¹⁰ In many offices and industries, promotions are rare, and people can work for several years without being recognized or rewarded for their efforts. There is little to no encouragement for workers to improve their skills, and the work environment is usually not designed to support learning or progress. Another very serious problem is that many workplaces are poorly managed. Systems are outdated, processes are slow, and leadership often lacks vision. Instead of focusing on performance and results, promotions and opportunities are sometimes given based on who you know rather than what you know. This kind of favouritism and lack of fairness has discouraged many professionals, especially young people who are eager to grow in their careers. These people lack proper training, mentorship, or tools that would help them develop and grow in their workplaces,

and so to prevent being stuck in the same position with no growth, they decide to find better opportunities abroad, where a more organized and supportive career system exists.¹¹

Educational limitations are also a major factor driving the Japa movement, especially among young Nigerians who value knowledge and personal development. Although Nigeria has a large number of universities, polytechnics, and colleges across the country, the quality of education has dropped significantly over the years. One of the biggest challenges is the constant disruption of the academic calendar due to strikes by academic staff unions. These strikes, often caused by disagreements between the government and lecturers over salaries, working conditions, or funding, can last for months. As a result, students are forced to stay at home, wasting precious time and delaying their graduation.¹² What should take four years can easily stretch into six or more. A well-known strike is the ASUU strike, whose strike has been known to last for several months (almost a year), thereby disrupting the academic calendar and causing confusion in the university system.¹³

Apart from strikes, the education system in Nigeria also suffers from poor funding. Many public universities lack basic learning facilities such as libraries, laboratories, internet access, and functional classrooms. Students often sit on broken chairs, study outdated textbooks, and learn in crowded lecture halls that are not conducive to learning. Lecturers are overworked and underpaid, which affects the quality of teaching.¹⁴ In many

cases, the curriculum being used is old and does not match the current needs of the job market or global standards. Because of all these issues, even students who are brilliant and hardworking may graduate without the skills or confidence needed to compete internationally. Unlike in Nigerian Universities, many foreign universities offer modern facilities, up-to-date courses, and academic calendars that are not disrupted by strikes. These schools also provide students with access to technology, internship opportunities, and international exposure that can help them succeed in today's competitive world. For students who want to specialise in certain fields like medicine, engineering, or information technology, foreign institutions are seen as the best place to gain a world-class education.¹⁵ These make them eager to enrol for scholarships abroad, in developed countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, etc, thereby increasing the number of people who desire or have emigrated from the country.

Insecurity is another major reason why many Nigerians are leaving the country, and it continues to grow worse year after year. In different parts of Nigeria, people face daily threats to their lives and property. Incidents of armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, bandit attacks, and communal violence have become far too common. In almost all regions in Nigeria, there have been numerous cases of insecurity and so many citizens fear for their lives, since anyone can be prey to these evil ones. The massive level of hunger has significantly increased the rate of crimes in Nigeria and so people are afraid for their lives and seek refuge elsewhere in developed countries, where the law doesn't

smile on lawbreakers and where there is adequate security.¹⁶ As a result, countries that are known to be peaceful and law-abiding become attractive destinations.

Corruption and political instability are also powerful reasons why many Nigerians are choosing to leave the country. Over the years, people have watched their leaders mismanage public funds, make empty promises, and run the government with little regard for fairness or transparency. Many citizens believe that those in power care more about enriching themselves than serving the people. Money that is meant to build schools, hospitals, roads, and provide social services often ends up in the pockets of a few individuals. This widespread corruption has created a system where merit is ignored, and dishonesty is rewarded, leaving ordinary citizens feeling cheated and abandoned.¹⁷ The political system itself is also seen as unstable and unreliable. Elections are not as peaceful as they should be in an ideal democratic nation, but are filled with violence, ballot box snatching and other despicable practices. As a result, people begin to lose trust in the democratic process. They feel that no matter how they vote or how many times they speak out, nothing will change because the system is already controlled by a few powerful hands. This deep sense of political frustration makes it hard for people to believe that things can ever improve. They feel like strangers in their own country, with no voice and no hope of being heard.¹⁸

In addition, many governmental institutions, such as the police, the judiciary, and the civil service, are seen as inefficient, slow, or corrupt. People no longer believe they

can get justice, protect their rights, or rely on the government for basic services. Everything seems to require bribery or connection, and those without influence are often left behind. This kind of broken system creates an environment of helplessness and despair, especially for young people who want to build honest lives based on hard work and integrity. As a result, many Nigerians begin to look beyond the country for a better political environment, a place where the law works, where leadership is accountable, and where ordinary citizens are treated with dignity.¹⁹ They are drawn to countries where justice is upheld, government officials are answerable to the people, and institutions function as they should. This hope for fairness, order, and responsible governance is what has driven many to migrate.

Pull Factors Attracting Nigerians Abroad

On the other hand, the pull factors responsible for the Japa syndrome in Nigeria include employment. Many developed countries today offer employment opportunities in specific sectors where there is a shortage of skilled workers. This has become a major pull factor attracting Nigerians who are trained in fields like healthcare, engineering, information technology, and education. In these countries, there is a high demand for professionals with technical knowledge and hands-on experience, and many Nigerians fit that profile.²⁰ Jobs abroad in these sectors often come with better pay, structured working conditions, health benefits, and clear career growth opportunities, far more than what is

available in Nigeria. This gives professionals the chance not only to earn more but also to build a meaningful career in an environment where their contributions are valued.

In addition to job opportunities, **scholarships and educational grants** are another strong pull factor for Nigerian youth and professionals. Countries with advanced education systems, like Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands, regularly offer fully funded or partially funded academic programs for international students. These scholarships cover tuition, living expenses, and sometimes even travel costs.²¹ For students who come from a poor background, this opportunity presents itself as a once in a life time opportunity and so they rush at it. It is not only young undergraduates who benefit; even mid-career professionals apply for master's or PhD programs to improve their qualifications.

Favourable immigration policies are another powerful pull factor that encourages many Nigerians to leave the country in search of better opportunities. Over the years, several developed nations have created clear, accessible, and welcoming immigration systems designed to attract skilled workers, students, and professionals from around the world. For example, Canada's Express Entry program is widely known for its openness to foreign professionals. It allows skilled workers to apply for permanent residency based on a points system that considers their age, education, work experience, and language ability. These policies attract individuals who are seeking better opportunities abroad.²²

Also, the influence of Social media on Japa syndrome is alarming. In today's digital age, the influence of social media and migration networks has also become a strong pull factor that cannot be ignored. On platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter, many Nigerians share their success stories, showing off their lives in foreign countries with well-furnished homes, reliable electricity, clean streets, organised systems, and quality healthcare. These posts create a powerful image of life abroad as peaceful, prosperous, and full of opportunities. For those back home who are struggling with hardship and uncertainty, such images bring hope, ambition, and a strong desire to migrate.²³

Finally, Migration Networks, made up of friends, relatives, and former classmates who have already left the country, play an important role in helping others do the same. These networks provide guidance, encouragement, and sometimes even financial help to those planning to leave. They assist with visa applications, help newcomers find housing, share job openings, and explain how to settle into a new country.²⁴ This kind of support makes the whole process feel less intimidating, especially for first-time migrants. It gives people confidence that they will not be alone when they arrive, and that they will have a community to lean on.

In conclusion, the Japa Syndrome is driven by a combination of push factors such as unemployment, poor wages, insecurity, corruption, and limited career or educational opportunities, which make life difficult in Nigeria. At the same time, pull factors like

better job prospects, quality education, favourable immigration policies, and support from migration networks attract Nigerians to more stable and promising countries. Together, these forces explain why many choose to leave in search of a better future.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Impacts of Japa Syndrome on the Nigerian Economy

Introduction

The large outflow of Nigerian citizens to other countries, often referred to as the "Japa Syndrome," has become one of the most significant social and economic trends in recent years. This phenomenon is not limited to a particular group of people; it affects young graduates, skilled professionals, and even entrepreneurs who seek better

opportunities abroad. The movement of people across borders has been driven by various factors, including the search for improved living conditions, higher salaries, better education, and a sense of personal security. As a result, this migration has grown persistently, influencing not only the lives of those who leave but also the communities and institutions they leave behind. The decision to migrate is not simple or easy. For many Nigerians, it involves leaving behind families, friends, and familiar surroundings to go to countries where they may face new cultures, language barriers, and new ways of living or behaving.¹

Even with these challenges, millions of Nigerians still choose to make this move, driven by the hope of building a better life. At the same time, the large number of people leaving brings clear changes to the country, such as shifts in how workers are spread across different jobs and changes in how communities operate. Over time, this trend has led to conversations in many places, such as government offices, the media, and schools, about what such large-scale migration means for Nigeria. Leaders, researchers, and economists have all tried to understand why so many citizens feel the need to leave and what this movement means for the country's future. Now, it's worth noting that this syndrome, although it has far more negative implications for Nigeria, still has some positive impacts, all of which will be discussed subsequently. The negative impacts are more visible and acknowledged.

Negative Economic Impacts of Japa Syndrome

One of the biggest problems caused by Japa Syndrome in Nigeria is the loss of skilled workers, which is often called brain drain. Skilled workers are people who have special training, education, and experience that make them very important in their jobs. In Nigeria, many of these people, who include doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, and IT experts, are leaving the country to work in places where they can earn higher pay, work in safer conditions, and have more chances to grow in their careers. The problem is, this outflow is not small; millions of skilled workers have left the country over time. The result is that many important areas of life in Nigeria are now short of the people who keep them running smoothly. ² As a result, the level and speed of innovation and growth decline because there are fewer people with the knowledge and experience needed to introduce new ideas or improve existing systems. The damage is felt most severely in industries that depend heavily on expertise, such as healthcare, education, engineering, and technology.

In the healthcare system, for example, when a large number of doctors and nurses leave, hospitals and clinics are left with fewer staff to take care of patients. This means longer waiting times, overworked medical staff, and lower quality of care for the sick. Some hospitals have had to reduce their services because there are simply not enough hands to manage the workload.³ In fact, during an interview with a past patient in the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, she recounted how her dad, who had been admitted there, wasn't given enough attention and care whilst he was there before he passed on. According to her, it became worse when she was asked to give him an injection herself,

without any prior knowledge or training whatsoever. When a country's capable men and women specifically trained in the sphere of healthcare services leave, the nation suffers badly.⁴

Also, in the educational sector, the same problem appears. When experienced teachers and lecturers travel abroad, schools and universities are left with fewer qualified educators to teach students. This reduces the standard of learning, and in some cases, students may graduate without receiving the best possible education.⁵ The technology sector of the country also suffers greatly from brain drain. Many young and talented software developers, engineers, and innovators leave Nigeria to work in countries where their skills are more valued and better rewarded. This slows down the growth of local tech companies, reduces innovation, and makes it harder for Nigeria to compete in the fast-moving global technology market. Without enough skilled people in the country, it becomes difficult to create new products, improve services, keep up with changes in technology, or even compete globally with other developed nations.⁶

Even government offices and research institutions are affected. When highly trained professionals leave, there are fewer people with the knowledge and experience needed to lead important projects, give expert advice, and make sound policies. This can slow down development plans and weaken the government's ability to deliver good public services. It also affects how fast Nigeria can grow and how effectively it can improve the daily lives of its citizens. The effects do not stop there as small and medium-sized businesses,

which form the backbone of Nigeria's economy, also suffer greatly when they lose trained employees.⁷

Replacing skilled staff often takes time, money, and extra training, and during this period, productivity declines. Customers may experience delays in service, reduced quality of products, and lower satisfaction, and all these can harm the business's reputation and income. Over time, these challenges weaken not only individual companies but entire sectors of the economy. When work slows down in different industries, Nigeria finds it harder to keep up with other countries in trade, technology, and new ideas. Less work being done means the economy grows more slowly, there are fewer jobs, and foreign investors bring in less money. This creates a cycle where people see fewer chances at home and more skilled workers decide to leave, making the problem worse. Over time, the country can end up stuck with a weak economy, slow growth, poorly developed industries, and living conditions that don't get better.⁸

Furthermore, the economic impacts of Japa Syndrome go far beyond a decrease in productivity. When a large number of highly skilled workers and high-income earners leave the country, the amount of tax collected by the government drops sharply. Taxes are one of the main ways the government gets money to run the country, so when this money reduces, it creates a big hole in the national budget, and this can make the government struggle to fund important projects and services, such as road construction, investment in electricity and water supply, and maintaining public facilities. Also, while

funds from Nigerians living abroad can provide some financial relief, depending too much on this money is risky. These funds often go directly to their families to cater for their feeding, rent, and basic needs, rather than being invested in industries that can grow the economy. And these funds are reduced in very difficult circumstances such as global economic crises, job losses abroad, or stricter immigration policies in other countries, thereby leaving many families and even parts of the economy struggling. This dependence can make the country's economy fragile, as it becomes tied to events happening outside Nigeria's control.⁹

Another serious way that Japa Syndrome affects the Nigerian Economy is in the area of politics and the way the country is governed. When young people, especially those who are educated, talented, and have useful skills, decide to leave Nigeria to live in other countries, the nation loses a very important group of citizens. This is because these individuals are not ordinary people but people equipped with the necessary skills needed for leadership. Education is the key to the success of any nation, and when potential leaders who are taught necessary subjects like Civic Education and Government in primary and secondary schools respectively, and even trained as far as university in subjects like Political Science, leave their country to go abroad, it affects Nigeria tremendously because well-trained leaders are nowhere to be found and could have played a big role in building a better Nigeria.

They could have been the ones to bring in fresh ideas, speak up for justice, and challenge wrong practices like corruption and abuse of power. They could have taken part in political activities, joined reform movements, and worked to improve the lives of citizens through better laws and policies. If they were still in the country, they could have contested for political positions, helped design strong and fair policies, and made sure that public services like schools, hospitals, and roads are properly managed. When they leave, the country is left with fewer capable people to take up these important roles. This creates a gap in leadership and governance. Over time, this gap means that less experienced or less qualified people are now left in power, and this can lead to poor decisions, misuse of resources, and weak government performance.¹⁰ It also becomes harder to hold leaders accountable because the people who would normally speak out and demand better performance are not around to do so. Without enough skilled and courageous citizens in politics, government institutions can become weak, and it may take longer to fix deep problems in the system. Also, development plans may be poorly designed or abandoned halfway because there are not enough experts to guide and manage them. The overall effect is that progress becomes slow, mistakes happen more often, and ordinary citizens suffer the most from bad leadership. In the long run, this weakens the country's stability, reduces public trust in leaders, and makes it harder for Nigeria to compete with other nations that can keep their skilled citizens at home.¹¹ The major cause of underdevelopment in Nigeria is due to bad leadership, a problem that could have been solved had there been numerous capable individuals in the country.

Furthermore, a direct effect of Japa Syndrome in Nigeria is its social and emotional impact, however, it can still affect Nigeria's economy in the long run. When large numbers of people leave the country, families are often separated for many years. This separation can be painful, as parents, children, and siblings miss the daily care, guidance, and companionship they once shared. In many cases, the person leaving is the main provider for the family. While they may send money back home to support loved ones, this financial help can never fully replace the comfort, presence, and emotional support they once gave. In some situations, if the person abroad cannot find a stable job or if communication breaks down, families may even face worse financial and emotional struggles than before. The absence of a parent or breadwinner can leave children feeling lonely or unsupported, and their spouses may carry the heavy responsibility of managing the household alone.¹²

Furthermore, the effects of mass migration are not limited to individual families; entire communities also feel the strain. When young, educated, and active members leave, the number of people available to participate in local events, cultural activities, and civic responsibilities becomes smaller. This makes it harder to organise projects, maintain traditions, and promote unity within the community. Cultural heritage, which is usually passed down from one generation to the next, can slowly fade when fewer young people remain to transmit it. Leadership at the local level can also suffer, as the number of capable and energetic people who can step up and take action becomes smaller. Over time, this loss of human capital creates a sense of emptiness and discouragement among

those who remain. People may feel abandoned, isolated, or left to carry the burdens of community life without enough helping hands.¹³ Also, friendships and social networks usually weaken because distance makes regular contact harder. This gradual loss of skilled and active individuals also affects the economy, as there are fewer people to work in local businesses, pay taxes, and drive economic activities in their communities.

Japa Syndrome also changes how people see success, opportunity, and the future. As more people leave Nigeria, moving abroad starts to feel like the normal thing to do. It creates a “migration culture” where going overseas is seen as the main way to have a better life, and staying in the country is seen as less attractive. This way of thinking is very common among young people, who watch their friends, family members, and role models start new lives abroad. Over time, this mindset can reduce local ambition.¹⁴ Fewer people want to invest in education, learn new skills, or start businesses in Nigeria. Many talented people who could have built cultural pride or helped their communities instead focus on finding ways to leave. As time goes on, this change in attitude can be just as harmful as losing skilled workers, because it affects how future generations see their country, their communities, and their responsibility to improve them.¹⁵ This long-term shift in mindset can weaken economic growth, as fewer people are motivated to start enterprises, innovate, or contribute to local industries, leading to slower development and reduced competitiveness for Nigeria in the global economy. However, despite these negative impacts, there are positive effects of migration (Japa Syndrome) on the economy of Nigeria.

Positive Economic Impacts of Japa Syndrome

Despite the challenges often linked with Japa Syndrome, it has also bring important positive impacts on the Nigerian economy. A major benefit of Japa Syndrome to the economy of Nigeria is the steady flow of money sent home by Nigerians living abroad, known as remittances. These funds play a huge role in supporting families and communities back home. They help pay for important needs such as school fees, medical bills, house rent, and daily living expenses. Beyond survival, remittances can also be used to start or grow small businesses.¹⁶ For example, in an interview with Adenike Adewuyi, she shared how her aunt, a former nurse in Nigeria who migrated to the UK about ten years ago, sends money regularly to cover the children's school fees and to set up a small kiosk selling everyday goods. That small kiosk not only provides income for the family but also creates local jobs and boosts economic activity in the community.¹

The benefits go beyond individual households. When families use remittances to buy food, clothing, or household items, local traders sell more products, earn more income, and then spend that income on transport, tailoring, repairs, and other services. This cycle spreads money throughout the community. In rural areas, remittances can be used for farming tools, seeds, and fertilisers, leading to better harvests and more produce for local markets. In cities, they may go into paying school fees, building houses, or starting small ventures like salons, mobile phone shops, or roadside food stands. Although remittances cannot replace the skilled workers who have migrated, they often

keep communities afloat, ensuring children remain in school, patients get medical care, and small businesses survive.¹⁸

Beyond helping in the short term, many migrants use the money they earn abroad for bigger, long-lasting projects in Nigeria. They might open factories, start small shops, or build houses to rent out. This creates jobs for workers and also works for suppliers, drivers, and other service providers. These projects can also help improve local roads, electricity, or other facilities. Nigerians living abroad often form groups that bring in foreign investors and open doors for joint business projects.

Moreso, when Nigerians live abroad, they are often exposed to new ways of working, advanced technology, and higher professional standards that they might not have access to in Nigeria. They learn from modern systems, better infrastructure, and diverse work environments. If these professionals later return home, they can pass on their knowledge to colleagues, train younger workers, and introduce better practices to local businesses or institutions. Even when they do not return permanently, they can still make a big impact from abroad. For instance, a fashion designer in Italy could collaborate with Nigerian tailors, sharing international design trends and connecting them to bigger platforms. This kind of knowledge and experience exchange strengthens the skills of people in Nigeria, improves business performance, and opens doors for partnering with other foreign individuals. Over time, it can help the country's economy grow stronger and more competitive.¹⁹

Migration can also reduce some pressure on the job market at home by lowering the number of people chasing the same few jobs, and this can open doors for those who stay to get employed. When young professionals move abroad, it automatically means the vacancies in offices of all kinds are no longer rushed as they used to be. Employers who once received hundreds of applications for one role now get far smaller numbers, so they look more closely at local candidates and are willing to train them. Also, when fewer people are applying for each job, employers may focus less on trying to remove as many candidates as possible and more on looking for someone they can train and develop.²⁰ This makes it easier for fresh graduates, people changing careers, those without personal connections, and individuals from smaller towns to get a fair chance.

Moreover, when competition for jobs becomes less intense, it can also help solve the problem of overqualification. This is when someone with a master's degree applies for a simple clerical job. With less competition, that clerical job might go to someone with a diploma, while the graduate gets a job that better matches their skills. As more positions open up, learning at work becomes easier. In busy sectors like hospitals and call centres, having fewer job seekers can push employers to give slightly better working conditions, clearer schedules, small salary increases, or flexible shifts to keep their workers. This helps reduce staff turnover. The change can also benefit people outside big cities; when large companies in developed areas find it hard to hire, they start looking in nearby towns, giving chances to those who can't afford to move.²¹ This does not fully solve unemployment, some jobs still need training before employees can do them well, but it

can make the job hunt less stressful in skilled and professional settings, and give people in Nigeria a better chance to get in, learn, and move up.

In conclusion, Migration in Nigeria brings both benefits and challenges. On the positive side, Nigerians who move abroad often send money home, which supports families, boosts local spending, and helps small businesses grow. Some use their earnings for bigger investments such as factories, shops, or rental housing, creating jobs and improving infrastructure. They also form networks that attract foreign investors and open new business opportunities. Migration can ease job competition at home, allowing workers to find roles that better match their skills, while creating chances for apprentices, interns, and junior staff to take on leadership responsibilities earlier. On the negative side, migration can cause brain drain, as skilled professionals leave the country, reducing the local supply of experienced workers in sectors like healthcare, education, and engineering. Families may face emotional strain from long separations, and some communities lose young, active members, slowing local development. Heavy reliance on remittances can also make some households dependent rather than self-sufficient, while local industries may struggle if too many skilled workers are abroad.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusion

The Japa Syndrome is a modern trend in which many Africans, particularly Nigerians, voluntarily migrate to other countries in pursuit of better opportunities, personal goals, and improved living conditions. Unlike historical migrations often driven by wars, persecution, or natural disasters, Japa Syndrome reflects conscious, ambition-driven decisions rather than urgent necessity. While this migration can provide benefits such as remittances, new skills, and international connections, it also presents significant challenges, including brain drain, economic slowdown, reduced innovation, and social disruptions like family separation. Understanding this phenomenon is important because it highlights changing motivations for migration and its impact on both the individuals who leave and the countries they depart from.

Nigerians have a long history of migration that has deeply influenced the country's cultural, social, and political landscape. Ethnic groups such as the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo have origin stories that highlight movement across regions, often motivated by factors like wars, land scarcity, trade, religious expansion, and agricultural opportunities. Pre-colonial kingdoms and empires, including Benin, Oyo, Kanem-Bornu, and the Sokoto Caliphate, further shaped migration patterns through conquest, settlement, and territorial expansion. These movements contributed to Nigeria's rich ethnic and cultural diversity. During the colonial era, migration patterns evolved as the British introduced urbanisation, infrastructure development, and educational programs that encouraged people to move to urban centres or study abroad, creating pathways for professional growth that continued into the modern period.

After Nigeria gained independence, migration intensified due to economic decline, political instability, military rule, and deteriorating public services. Skilled professionals, students, and semi-skilled workers increasingly left the country in search of better safety, education, and career opportunities, giving rise to a significant “brain drain.” While Nigerians abroad have made remarkable contributions in fields such as medicine, education, business, and the creative arts, the actions of a small minority, including involvement in internet fraud, have sometimes tarnished the country's international reputation. Overall, migration from Nigeria reflects a combination of historical, economic, and political forces, highlighting both the benefits of global engagement and the challenges posed by the loss of human capital and its effects on national development and perception abroad.

The Japa Syndrome refers to the growing trend of young Nigerians and Africans leaving their home countries in search of better opportunities, quality of life, and safety abroad. This movement is driven by a combination of push and pull factors. Push factors include high unemployment, low wages, inflation, lack of career advancement, poor working conditions, limited educational opportunities, insecurity, corruption, and political instability. Many young people feel frustrated and hopeless as they struggle to find meaningful employment, earn a living wage, or advance in their careers. The education system also contributes, with frequent strikes, outdated curricula, inadequate facilities, and insufficient resources pushing students to seek education abroad. Insecurity, widespread corruption, and ineffective governance further reinforce the perception that

life at home is unpredictable and unfair, prompting many to look for safer, more stable environments.

Pull factors attract Nigerians to foreign countries, including better employment opportunities, higher salaries, structured working conditions, and clear paths for professional growth. Educational scholarships and grants in countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands provide access to world-class learning and career advancement. Favourable immigration policies, such as Canada's Express Entry program, make migration more accessible for skilled workers and professionals. Social media and migration networks also play a significant role by showcasing success stories abroad, creating aspiration, and providing practical guidance, support, and reassurance for first-time migrants. Together, these factors combine to make migration an appealing and sometimes necessary choice for many Nigerians seeking a better life, contributing to the large-scale exodus known as the Japa Syndrome.

The Japa Syndrome, characterized by the mass migration of young Nigerians and skilled professionals abroad, has profound effects on Nigeria's economy, both negative and positive. One of the most significant consequences is brain drain, where Nigeria loses trained professionals like doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, and IT experts. This depletion of skilled labour adversely affects critical sectors such as healthcare, education, technology, and government institutions. Hospitals and clinics struggle with understaffing, overworked personnel, and reduced quality of services, while schools and

universities face a decline in teaching standards. The tech sector suffers from reduced innovation, slowed growth, and diminished global competitiveness. Government offices and research institutions experience delays and inefficiencies due to fewer experts, weakening policy-making, project implementation, and public service delivery. Small and medium-sized businesses also lose productivity and incur higher costs in replacing skilled staff.

Economically, the departure of high-income earners reduces tax revenue, limiting the government's capacity to fund infrastructure and public services. Reliance on remittances is unstable, exposing the economy to external shocks like global crises or stricter immigration policies. Politically, the exodus of educated citizens weakens the pool of potential leaders, leaving governance gaps that contribute to poor decision-making, corruption, and inefficient public administration. Socially and emotionally, families face separation, reducing parental support and community cohesion. Migration fosters a “culture of leaving,” diminishing local ambition, entrepreneurship, and investment in Nigeria, further slowing economic development. Despite the drawbacks however, Japa Syndrome brings economic benefits, primarily through remittances sent home by Nigerians abroad. These funds support household expenses, education, healthcare, and small businesses, generating economic activity and local job opportunities. Remittances can also fund larger projects, such as small enterprises, real estate, and infrastructure improvements, which stimulate local economies. Exposure to foreign systems, technologies, and professional standards allows migrants to transfer skills,

knowledge, and international best practices back to Nigeria, either directly or through collaborations. Migration also reduces domestic competition for jobs, providing opportunities for remaining citizens to secure employment, receive training, and gain career progression, particularly in sectors previously overcrowded.

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2	Joseph Adedayo	Employee at Kay Elan Design	27	Lagos State	August 20, 2025
3	David Ebuka	Student of the University of Lagos	26	Lagos State	August 20, 2025
4	Esther Owoniyi	Pharmacist	25	Lagos State	August 25, 2025
5	Kinsley Sunday	Teacher	27	Lagos State	August 25, 2025

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