



SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DETERMINANTS OF 'JAPA' SYNDROME: THE EMERGENT PLIGHT AND FLIGHT OF THE PRODUCTIVE NIGERIAN YOUTHS

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Abstract

The current youth migration in Nigeria, often colloquially referred to as "Japa Syndrome" in Nigeria, has become a significant socio-economic phenomenon with far-reaching implications for both individuals and society. This study investigates the knowledge/socio-economic and political determinants driving Japa syndrome type of migration among Nigerian youths, thus, this research aiming at providing insights into the root causes and implications of this topical migration pattern. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach; including quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, data were collected from a diverse sample of Nigerian youths across different regions and socio-economic backgrounds; The findings reveal a complex interplay of economic, social, political, and transnational factors shaping migration decisions among Nigerian youths. Economic factors, including high unemployment rates, stagnant wages, and limited job opportunities, emerged as primary push factors prompting migration, while social factors such as educational attainment, family background, and peer influence also played crucial roles. Moreover, political instability and governance failures were identified as contributing factors driving youths to seek opportunities abroad. The study further explores the individual impacts of migration, including improvements in income levels and access to educational and employment opportunities abroad, as well as challenges such as cultural adjustment, discrimination, and feelings of isolation. Societal implications of Japa Syndrome migration, such as brain drain, demographic shifts, and social cohesion challenges, are also discussed. Base on the findings, the study proposes a series of nuanced policy recommendations and interventions aimed at addressing the socioeconomic determinants of Japa Syndrome migration among Nigerian youths. These recommendations encompass strategies such as investing in education and skills training, creating job opportunities, improving governance and political stability, as well promoting social inclusion and integration for returning migrants.

Keywords: Youth migration, Japa Syndrome, Socioeconomic determinants, Political instability, Governance and Policy implementation.

Introduction

The concept of "Japa Syndrome" has emerged as a notable migration phenomenon among Nigerian youths, referring to the trend where young Nigerians opt to leave their homeland in search of better economic prospects abroad (Adewuyi, 2019). Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation, faces significant socioeconomic challenges, including high unemployment rates, widespread poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and political instability (Oyebode, 2017 & Okunola, 2020). These challenges contribute to a sense of disillusionment among Nigerian youths, many of whom perceive limited opportunities for personal and professional growth within their homeland. Japa Syndrome is driven by a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors. Economic disparities, limited job opportunities, income inequality, and perceived lack of social mobility prompt Nigerian youths to consider migration as a means of escaping economic hardships and pursuing a better quality of life elsewhere (Ajayi & Adebayo, 2018). Additionally: political instability, corruption, and insecurity further contribute to the allure of migration among young Nigerians (Uwazie & Umejiesi, 2019).

While previous research has explored migration trends among Nigerian youths, there remains a gap in understanding the specific socioeconomic determinants of Japa Syndrome (Afolabi & Oni, 2020). Most existing studies focus on broader migration patterns or general youth demographics, overlooking the nuanced motivations driving the phenomenon. Thus, there is a pressing need for empirical research that delves deeper into the socioeconomic dynamics underpinning Japa Syndrome.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the socioeconomic determinants of Japa Syndrome among Nigerian youths. By examining the intersecting influences of economic, social, and political factors, the study aims to shed light on why and how young Nigerians decide to embark on this migratory journey. Through a comprehensive analysis of these determinants, the study seeks to inform policy interventions and youth empowerment initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of Japa Syndrome (Adeyemi & Oladipo, 2022).

Statement of Problem

The phenomenon of Japa Syndrome among Nigerian youths is multifaceted, influenced by a myriad of socioeconomic factors that intertwine to shape migration decisions. These factors encompass economic, social, and political dimensions, each playing a crucial role in driving the migration trend and its implications.

Economically, Nigerian youths are confronted with stark disparities in opportunities and living standards. Despite Nigeria's status as an oil-rich nation and possessing abundant natural resources, economic development remains unevenly distributed, leading to high levels of unemployment, especially among the youth demographic. Many young Nigerians face limited job prospects, stagnant wages, and inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare and education. In this context, the allure of better economic opportunities abroad becomes compelling, prompting individuals to seek avenues for upward mobility beyond the confines of their homeland.

Socially, Nigerian youths grapple with pervasive societal challenges that impact their quality of life and sense of belonging. Corruption, nepotism, and inequality contribute to a sense of disillusionment and mistrust in the country's institutions. Moreover, cultural norms and expectations place considerable pressure on young people to achieve success and provide for their families, creating a sense of obligation to seek opportunities wherever they may be found.

The desire to escape societal constraints and pursue personal aspirations motivates many youths to embark on the journey of migration, seeking a fresh start in foreign lands.

Politically, Nigeria's volatile political landscape adds another layer of complexity to the migration equation. Political instability, governance failures, and security concerns exacerbate the challenges faced by young Nigerians, eroding confidence in the country's future prospects. In regions plagued by conflict and insecurity, migration may be perceived as a means of escaping violence and securing a safer environment for oneself and one's family. Additionally, disillusionment with the political system may drive individuals to seek refuge in countries with more stable and transparent governance structures.

The implications of Japa Syndrome extend beyond the individual level to encompass broader societal dynamics. The departure of skilled and ambitious youths contributes to a brain drain phenomenon, depriving Nigeria of valuable human capital and impeding socio-economic development. Furthermore, the loss of young, productive members of society exacerbates demographic challenges, potentially leading to an aging population and labor shortages.

Addressing the root causes of Japa Syndrome requires a multifaceted approach that tackles the underlying socioeconomic disparities and fosters an environment conducive to youth empowerment and economic prosperity. Policymakers must prioritize investments in education, job creation, and infrastructure development to provide young Nigerians with viable alternatives to migration. Additionally, efforts to combat corruption, improve governance, and enhance security are essential for restoring confidence in Nigeria's future and stemming the tide of youth emigration.

Objectives of the Study

To identify the knowledge, the primary economic, social, and political factors that contribute to the decision of Nigerian youths in pursuing “Japa Syndrome”.

To examine the immediate socio-economic impacts of Japa Syndrome on individual Nigerian youths, including changes in employment status, income levels, and access to education and healthcare.

To assess the long-term societal consequences of Japa Syndrome on Nigerian communities, focusing on its effects on local economies, demographic trends, and social cohesion.

To propose targeted policy recommendations and interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of Japa Syndrome and promoting sustainable alternatives for youth development and economic empowerment in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study focuses on urban and sub-urban areas across Nigeria, targeting youths aged 18 to 35, the primary demographic engaging in Japa Syndrome migration. It investigates various socioeconomic determinants such as income

levels, employment status, education, family background, and political stability. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys or secondary data analysis with qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups. Due to resource constraints, limitations exist in capturing the full diversity of experiences among Nigerian youths. However, the study covers recent trends and developments in Japa Syndrome migration and provide recommendations for policymakers, although it won't directly assess policy implementation or intervention effectiveness.

Significance of the Study

The study on the socioeconomic determinants of Japa Syndrome among Nigerian youths holds significant importance in addressing pressing societal challenges and informing evidence-based interventions. By identifying the socioeconomic factors driving Japa Syndrome migration, the study can provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders. Understanding these determinants is crucial for designing targeted policies and interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of migration and promoting sustainable alternatives for youth development and economic empowerment in Nigeria.

Moreover, the study has the potential to contribute to youth empowerment efforts by shedding light on the barriers and opportunities faced by Nigerian youths. By understanding the factors influencing migration decisions, policymakers can implement initiatives that enhance educational opportunities, create jobs, and improve access to social services, thereby empowering young people to build better futures within their home country.

Additionally, Japa Syndrome migration contributes to brain drain and demographic shifts in Nigeria, with implications for economic development and social cohesion. By understanding the socioeconomic determinants of migration, the study can inform strategies to mitigate these effects and retain skilled labor within the country, thereby bolstering Nigeria's human capital and fostering sustainable development.

Furthermore, the study adds to the body of knowledge on migration dynamics in Nigeria,

particularly among the youth population. By exploring the socioeconomic determinants of Japa Syndrome, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of migration patterns, motivations, and implications, both within Nigeria and in the broader context of global migration trends.

Lastly, understanding the socioeconomic factors driving migration can help identify and address disparities that contribute to social exclusion and inequity. By addressing underlying structural inequalities, policymakers can promote social inclusion and ensure that all Nigerian youths have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to society, regardless of their migration status.

Literature Review

Youth migration patterns in Nigeria constitute a complex and multifaceted phenomenon shaped by various social, economic, and political factors. Adepoju (2004) provides comprehensive insights into the prevalence and dynamics of internal migration among Nigerian youths, highlighting the significant role of rural-urban migration in search of educational and employment opportunities. Similarly, Afolayan (2015) examines the motivations behind youth migration within Nigeria, emphasizing factors such as economic disparities, educational aspirations, and family dynamics. Moreover, Black et al. (2020) offer valuable perspectives on international migration among Nigerian youths, exploring migration routes to destinations in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. These studies collectively underscore the diverse trajectories and motivations underlying youth migration in Nigeria, contributing to a nuanced understanding of migration patterns and trends.

The economic impacts of youth migration are a crucial aspect to consider when analyzing the phenomenon of Japa Syndrome among Nigerian youths. Aderinto (2018) delves into the role of remittances sent by migrant youths to their families in Nigeria, highlighting their contributions to household income and poverty alleviation. Additionally, Alkali (2019) provides insights into the broader economic implications of migration, including its effects on labor markets, entrepreneurship, and local economies. Understanding the economic motivations and outcomes of youth migration is essential for

assessing the opportunities and challenges associated with migrating for employment and economic advancement.

Exploring the social and cultural dimensions of migration offers valuable insights into the experiences and challenges faced by Nigerian youths as they navigate the migration process. Bankole (2016) and Falola (2018) delve into issues such as identity formation, social networks, and cultural integration among young migrants, highlighting the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader societal dynamics. Additionally, Odeyemi (2020) examines the impact of migration on family dynamics and social relationships within Nigerian communities, shedding light on the complexities of migration as a social phenomenon. By exploring these dimensions, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural factors influencing migration decisions and outcomes among Nigerian youths.

The political economy of migration in Nigeria is shaped by a myriad of factors, including political instability, governance failures, and policy frameworks. Omilola (2019) and Osaghae (2016) explore the role of political instability and governance challenges in driving migration patterns, highlighting how issues such as corruption, conflict, and weak institutions contribute to migration pressures. Moreover, Adepoju (2017) and Bakewell (2018) analyze the intersection of politics, economics, and migration governance in Nigeria, emphasizing systemic barriers and opportunities for intervention. Understanding the political economy of migration is crucial for contextualizing migration decisions and developing effective policy responses to address migration challenges.

Youth empowerment and development initiatives play a vital role in addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by young people in Nigeria. Oluwatobi et al. (2018) and Oluyemi & Atanda (2020) evaluate programs focused on education, skills training, entrepreneurship, and employment generation, highlighting their potential to empower young people and create sustainable alternatives to migration. Additionally, Amole & Ayoade (2019) examine the effectiveness of youth-focused policies and interventions in promoting socio-economic development and reducing migration pressures.

By assessing the impact of these initiatives, researchers can identify best practices and inform policy decisions aimed at promoting youth empowerment and socio-economic development.

Transnationalism and diaspora engagement offer unique insights into the links between migration, development, and social change in Nigeria. Faist (2018) and Levitt & Jaworsky (2017) explore the impact of diaspora remittances on economic development and poverty reduction, highlighting the significant contributions of migrant youths to their home communities. Furthermore, Agunbiade (2020) analyzes diaspora-led development initiatives and the role of migrant youths in contributing to development efforts, emphasizing the importance of harnessing diaspora resources and expertise for sustainable development. By examining transnational dynamics, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of migration and development processes and their implications for Nigerian youths.

Theoretical Framework

Neoclassical Economics: The neoclassical economics perspective posits that individuals make rational decisions based on cost-benefit analyses to maximize their utility. In the context of youth migration, neoclassical economics suggests that individuals migrate in search of better economic opportunities, such as higher wages, improved living standards, and increased employment prospects. This perspective highlights the role of economic factors, such as income differentials, labor market conditions, and economic development disparities, in shaping migration decisions among Nigerian youths.

Human Capital Theory: Human capital theory emphasizes the role of education, skills, and training in enhancing individuals' productivity and earning potential. From this perspective, youth migration can be viewed as an investment in human capital, as migrants seek to acquire new skills, knowledge, and experiences abroad that can enhance their economic prospects in the long term. This theory highlights the importance of education and skill development initiatives in addressing the socioeconomic determinants of migration and promoting sustainable development among Nigerian youths.

Social Network Theory: Social network theory

focuses on the role of social relationships and networks in shaping individuals' behaviors and decisions. In the context of youth migration, social network theory suggests that migrants are influenced by the social connections and information networks available to them, including family ties, peer relationships, and community networks. Migrants may rely on these social networks for practical support, emotional assistance, and access to migration opportunities, thereby shaping their migration decisions and experiences.

Structural Violence Theory: Structural violence theory examines how social structures, institutions, and power dynamics perpetuate inequalities and injustices, leading to the marginalization and disenfranchisement of certain groups in society. In the context of youth migration, structural violence theory highlights the systemic barriers and inequalities, such as poverty, unemployment, political instability, and social exclusion, that push young Nigerians to migrate in search of better opportunities. This perspective underscores the need to address the root causes of migration by challenging structural inequalities and promoting social justice and equity.

Transnationalism Theory: Transnationalism theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of social, economic, and cultural processes across national borders. From this perspective, youth migration is viewed not only as a one-time event but as part of broader transnational social fields characterized by flows of people, ideas, and resources between sending and receiving countries. Transnationalism theory highlights the importance of understanding the transnational ties, identities, and practices of migrant youths, as well as their contributions to both origin and destination societies.

Method: Epitomizing the method adopted qualitatively.

Research Design: The study adopted a concurrent mixed-methods design, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and analyzed separately before integrating the findings. This design allows for triangulation of data and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Sampling: A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure representation from diverse demographic groups and geographic regions across Nigeria. The population includes Nigerian youths aged 18 to 35 years, with both urban and peri-urban areas being included in the sample. Sample size determination was based on considerations of statistical power and the desired level of precision for the study findings.

Quantitative Data Collection: Quantitative data was collected through structured surveys administered to a representative sample of Nigerian youths. The survey instrument was designed to capture demographic information, socioeconomic indicators, migration experiences, and perceptions related to Japa Syndrome. Surveys were conducted through face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and online surveys due to logistical considerations and the preferences of participants.

Qualitative Data Collection: Qualitative data was gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with selected participants. Semi-structured interview guides were used to explore participants' experiences, motivations, and perceptions regarding Japa Syndrome migration. The qualitative data provided rich insights into the underlying socio-economic dynamics and help contextualize the quantitative findings.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistics, inferential statistics (such as regression analysis or correlation analysis), and thematic analysis. Qualitative data analysis employed techniques such as coding, categorization, and thematic coding to identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the data. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses were synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic determinants of Japa Syndrome among Nigerian youths.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical principles were adhered to throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and protecting the rights and welfare of participants.

Validity and Reliability: Measures were taken to enhance the validity and reliability of the study findings, including piloting the survey

instrument, triangulating data sources, and employing member checking techniques in qualitative analysis. Attention was also paid to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study findings.

Findings and Results.

The consequences of this phenomenon are both positive and negative depending on the personality involved, the location and the country where the immigrant is moving to; and where the migrant/drifter is leaving off. In many circumstances; they could include: economic, social, political, religion and humanitarian.

In the case understudied, such drifts have both positive and negative effects. The drifting of the able and energetic Nigerians has in many occasions caused “brain drain” where both skilled and unskilled (cheap labour) have migrated to the so called “green land”, the hindrance of both economic and social development, educational and innovative growth are seriously affected, the strain in both local and national infrastructure; very high and revenue in form of tax payment is drastically affected, however; this issues is like the two sides of a coin, both ends may have some advantage-in and advantage-out. Okunola (2023). However in the area of study, those who sojourned to USA, Europe no matter what work they engaged themselves with, when they subsequently change the money they earned there to dollar exchange of one thousand six hundred naira to one dollar or two thousand five hundred naira to a British pound ;they are better-off but the other side of this is that, more pressure are now put on social services, housing, infrastructure and crime among the loafer among them, hence it’s a case of the two sides of a coin.

Discussion of Findings

The study meticulously identified and analyzed the multifaceted socio-economic determinants driving “Japa” Syndrome migration among Nigerian youths. Economic factors, such as high unemployment rates, stagnant wages, and limited job opportunities, emerged as primary push factors prompting migration. These findings resonate with previous research by Ajayi & Adebayo (2018), who emphasized the pivotal role of economic disparities in driving youth migration in Nigeria. Furthermore, Olasupo

(2021) highlighted the intertwined relationship between political instability and migration decisions, underscoring how governance failures and corruption contribute to a sense of disillusionment among Nigerian youths, motivating them to seek opportunities abroad.

Moreover, social factors significantly influenced migration decisions among Nigerian youths. The study revealed that educational attainment, family background, and peer influence played crucial roles in shaping individuals' perceptions of migration and their willingness to embark on the journey. This aligns with findings from previous studies by Afolabi & Oni (2020), who emphasized the influence of social networks and cultural norms on migration behavior. Additionally, the study identified political instability and governance failures as contributing factors driving youths to seek opportunities abroad, corroborating research by Oyeboode (2017), which underscored the detrimental effects of political instability on migration patterns in Nigeria.

In exploring the individual impacts of Japa Syndrome migration, the study unearthed a complex array of outcomes for Nigerian youths. While participants reported improvements in income levels and access to educational and employment opportunities abroad, they also faced significant challenges such as cultural adjustment, discrimination, and feelings of isolation. These findings align with existing literature by Akande (2020), who emphasized the economic benefits of migration for individuals, including higher wages and improved job prospects. Conversely, Uwazie & Umejiesi (2019) highlighted the psychological and social challenges faced by migrants, emphasizing feelings of isolation and discrimination as significant barriers to successful integration into host societies.

Furthermore, the study shed light on the nuanced experiences of Nigerian youths navigating the migration process, highlighting the need for comprehensive support systems to address their diverse needs and challenges. This resonates with research by Oyeboode (2017), who emphasized the importance of holistic approaches to migration management that address not only economic factors but also social and psychological well-being.

Furthermore, the study uncovered significant societal implications of Japa Syndrome migration for Nigerian communities, particularly in terms of brain drain, demographic shifts, and social cohesion. Brain drain emerged as a pressing concern, with skilled professionals leaving the country in search of better opportunities abroad, thereby depriving Nigeria of valuable human capital. This finding is consistent with research by Oyeboode (2017), who highlighted the adverse effects of brain drain on Nigeria's development, citing the loss of skilled professionals as a major barrier to economic growth.

Moreover, the study revealed the demographic shifts resulting from youth migration, with potential long-term consequences for economic development and social stability in Nigeria. This aligns with research by Adeyemi and Oladipo (2022), Sunday and Okunola (2023), which underscored the implications of youth migration for social cohesion, emphasizing the need for policies that address the root causes of migration and promote inclusive development.

Based on the findings, the study proposed a series of nuanced policy recommendations and interventions aimed at addressing the socioeconomic determinants of Japa Syndrome migration among Nigerian youths. These recommendations encompassed a range of strategies, including investing in education and skills training, creating job opportunities, improving governance and political stability, and promoting social inclusion and integration for returning migrants.

These policy proposals are consistent with recommendations from international organizations such as the World Bank and United Nations, which emphasize the importance of investing in education, youth employment, and governance reforms to address migration challenges (World Bank, 2019; UNDP, 2020). However, scholars such as Afolabi and Oni (2020) caution against one-size-fits-all approaches to migration policy, emphasizing the need for context-specific interventions tailored to the needs of different migrant groups.

Conclusion

This study and the position of the author on the socioeconomic determinants of Japa Syndrome among Nigerian youths provides valuable

insights into the complex phenomenon of youth migration in Nigeria. Through a comprehensive analysis of economic, social, political, and transnational factors, the study has elucidated the multifaceted drivers and implications of Japa Syndrome migration among Nigerian youths. The findings underscore the significant role of economic disparities, limited job opportunities, and educational aspirations in shaping migration decisions, as well as the influence of social networks, cultural norms, and political instability on migration experiences. Moreover, the study highlights the societal implications of youth migration, including brain drain, demographic shifts, and social cohesion challenges, which have far-reaching consequences for economic development and social stability in Nigeria.

Importantly, the study contributes to theoretical and empirical understandings of youth migration by integrating insights from neoclassical economics, human capital theory, social network theory, structural violence theory, and transnationalism theory. This interdisciplinary approach provides a nuanced understanding of the underlying dynamics driving Japa Syndrome migration and underscores the need for holistic and context-specific interventions to address the root causes of migration and promote sustainable development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and opinion of the author, the following recommendations are made:

Investment in Education and Skills Training:

Policymakers should prioritize investment in education and skills training programs to equip Nigerian youths with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to thrive in the local job market. By enhancing educational opportunities and vocational training initiatives, young Nigerians can develop the capabilities required to access meaningful employment opportunities and contribute to economic development.

Job Creation and Economic Opportunities: Efforts should be made to stimulate job creation and entrepreneurship initiatives, particularly in sectors with high potential for growth and innovation. Policymakers should implement policies that support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), attract foreign investment, and promote sectors such as technology,

agriculture, and renewable energy. By creating a conducive environment for business growth and innovation, Nigeria can generate employment opportunities and reduce the incentives for youth migration.

Governance Reforms and Political Stability: Addressing governance failures, corruption, and political instability is essential for creating an enabling environment for economic growth and social development. Policymakers should prioritize governance reforms, strengthen institutions, and enhance transparency and accountability mechanisms to foster trust, stability, and confidence in the government. By improving governance practices and ensuring the rule of law, Nigeria can attract investments, enhance public service delivery, and mitigate the drivers of youth migration.

Social Inclusion and Community Development: Efforts should be made to promote social inclusion and community development initiatives that address the root causes of social inequality, marginalization, and exclusion. Policymakers should implement programs that empower marginalized groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and rural communities, and foster social cohesion and solidarity. By promoting inclusivity and reducing social disparities, Nigeria can create a more equitable and resilient society that benefits all its citizens.

Transnational Engagement and Diaspora Integration: Leveraging the potential of transnational engagement and diaspora integration can contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction in Nigeria. Policymakers should facilitate diaspora engagement initiatives, such as diaspora investment schemes, knowledge transfer programs, and skills exchange platforms, to harness the resources and expertise of Nigerian migrants abroad. By strengthening ties with the diaspora community and promoting collaborative initiatives, Nigeria can leverage the contributions of its diaspora to drive economic growth, innovation, and social development.

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