

## **BRAIN DRAIN AS A CLOG IN THE WHEEL OF NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT: THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FOCUS**

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### **Abstract**

The critical and catalytic role of qualified and skilled manpower in facilitating a country's rapid and sustainable socio-economic and technological advancement cannot be under-estimated. Nations today depend increasingly on knowledge, ideas and skills for solutions to their developmental problems. The impact that a creative and skilled individual can make via his/her inventions, innovations and/or discoveries can be greater than the labour of thousands of unskilled individuals. In contrast, absence or gross inadequacy of pre-requisite manpower considerably retards the socio-economic and technological growth and development of a nation. This is because her capacity to develop her intellectual resources further, manage her institutions and provide required services to her citizens is seriously impaired. This study critically examines the brain drain phenomenon and its causes in Nigeria. These causes range from lack of employment, poor remuneration for top flight intellectuals and professionals, political instability, security risks to lack of research and other facilities (including inadequacy of research funds and professional equipment and tools). Others are under-utilization of qualified personnel, unsatisfactory working conditions, low prospects of professional development, lack of job satisfaction and poor standard of living. The research reveals that the consequences of this phenomenon include **inter alia** drastic fall in the standard of education, tremendous reduction in the quality of skilled manpower in tertiary institutions in Nigeria (particularly the universities), depletion of Nigeria's natural supply of intellectual and professional manpower and rise in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the receiving countries. The paper argues cogently that for national development to be appreciable and sustainable, the issue of brain drain ought to be adequately addressed. The paper concludes by proffering suggestions on how to combat and curb the menace in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Brain drain, clog, wheel, development.

## **Introduction**

Undeniably, human resources constitute the ultimate basis of production activities. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production. Human beings, on the other hand, are active agents who accumulate, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations and carry forward societal development. In short, human resources often used interchangeably with manpower are a nation's most critical and valuable resources. In the words of Kinard (1988), they are more important than physical and financial resources. Without the required human capital in the form of stocks of skills possessed by human beings, physical capital in the form of machines and other technologies will not give rise to rapid economic growth and development.

Economists (especially development economists) have tended, in their treatment and analysis of Nigeria's economic woes, to concentrate principally on the difficulties arising from shortage of financial resources. Implicit in this line of argument is the assumption that if financial resources were available in sufficient quantities, they would be well managed. Research, according to development scholars such as Emeghara (2006) has, however, revealed that problems arising from dearth of skilled manpower particularly in the scientific, engineering, technical and managerial areas are indeed more critical and serious than those associated and connected with mere scarcity of capital.

It is on this premise that this study was conducted to examine the brain drain syndrome in Nigeria which has further exacerbated her human capital crisis. This is through the stimulation of outflow of a significant number of her most highly qualified and skilled nationals to oversea countries (particularly the industrialized countries of the North) in search of greener pasture.

The study therefore, illuminates the causes of brain drain in Nigeria. It concludes by suggesting measures to redress the ugly trend.

## **The Concept of Brain Drain**

The term, brain drain, is also known as human capital flight. It means large-scale movement or migration of top flight manpower from various developing countries (predominantly African countries) to more developed countries notably United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Holland, Newzeland and Australia. As earlier stated, the chief reason for this movement is the quest for better opportunities. Similarly, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines brain drain as "a movement of highly skilled or professional people from their own country to a country where they can earn more money". With particular reference to the University system, Utile (2008) conceptualizes brain drain as "the mass exodus of highly trained and well experienced academics from

countries with poor conditions of service to those with better work conditions in search of greener pasture".

Brain drain is common amongst such skilled personnel as medical doctors, pharmacists, nurses, medical laboratory scientists, industrial chemists and pilots. Others are computer scientists, engineers, university lecturers, researcher technologists and lawyers

The term "brain drain" originally referred to technological workers leaving a nation. But nowadays its application or meaning has widened to include the migration of educated and professional people from one country, economic sector or field for another usually for better remuneration and/or living conditions (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2010).

Brain drain is usually considered an economic cost on the part of the releasing countries. This is because migrants usually take with them the fraction of value of their training sponsored by governments or other organizations. It could be likened to capital flight which refers to the same movement of financial capital. The converse of brain drain is brain gain. Thus, whilst developing countries from which trained personnel are migrating are suffering from brain drain, developed nations are experiencing brain gain.

Basically, brain drain entails the transfer of knowledge, experience, skill and expertise from one region, country or geographic location to another. Brain drain has grown in scale due to recent developments in modern electronic information technology, the widening of gap between the South and the North and spread of corporate globalization, an increasing political instability, civil wars and social and religious strife in many Southern and African countries, of which Nigeria is one.

Another term closely related to brain drain is brain waste. This is a situation whereby foreign nationals or workers are often hired to do jobs for which they are over qualified. For instance, there are many Nigerian doctors and European scientists working as taxi drivers in some large United States of American cities like New York, Chicago, Texas, Michigan, Washington, etc.

The obvious implication of this scenario is that Nigeria is being deprived of valuable contributions of this highly skilled manpower who are grossly underutilized in the USA. This is because they would have been contributing their quota to the development of the country if they were at home.

### **Causes of Brain Drain in Nigeria**

The pertinent and worrisome question is: why have Nigerian intellectuals and professionals left or contemplating seriously leaving the country? A variety of reasons account for the migration of a large chunk of Nigeria's best brains from the country to other parts of the globe (especially the West). Previous and recent studies have revealed that a key driver of intellectual and professional exodus from Nigeria is the harsh economic condition under which most intellectuals and professionals work. Next is the desire to go to countries that could pay for and utilize their competitive skills (Adebayo, 2010).

It is germane, however, that we also take cognizance of the social, political and psychological pressures that compel Nigerian intellectuals and professionals to seek more conducive climates for their work and lives. It should therefore, occasion no surprise that they avail themselves of better opportunities in other countries when the situation presents itself.

In this study, we shall adopt a bi-polar model of push and pull factors propounded by Lee (1966) in analyzing the factors responsible for brain drain in Nigeria. The former are the depressing characteristics in the countries of origin which produce emigration, whilst the latter are the attracting features in the countries of destination. Prominent amongst the push factors are lack of employment opportunities, under employment, political instability, security risks, lack of research and other facilities and unsatisfactory working conditions. Others include desire for higher qualification and recognition, better career expectation, discrimination in appointment and promotion, lack of job satisfaction, desire for a better urban life and lack of freedom.

The pull factors, on the other hand, include better economic prospects (especially better employment opportunities and enhanced remuneration), higher standard of living, easy access to inputs necessary for satisfying job performance, adequate/proper value for intellectual and professional worth and better opportunity for higher education. Others are relative political stability, allocation of substantial funds for research, intellectual freedom, better service conditions, prestige of foreign training and better research facilities.

### **Effects of Brain Drain on Nigeria**

Brain drain has been identified as one of the principal factors hampering development in Nigeria especially in the University system, teaching hospitals and research centres. This was especially during the 1990s (Adebayo, 2010). The phenomenon has caused and continues to cause incalculable damage to the country. Its effects on Nigeria are legion and multifarious. Some of the consequences are discussed below:-

**a) Drastic Fall in Standard of Education** The mass movement of highly skilled and seasoned academics from Nigeria's tertiary institutions (particularly universities) to overseas countries for greener pasture has certainly adversely affected the quality of outputs from the institutions. As Yesufu (1996) aptly observes "the quality of graduates is so poor that their impact on the national economy in terms of productivity is generally below the required standard for a developing economy".

Corroborating the above view, Oni (2008) avers that "the mass movement of academics from the nation's universities to other countries has invariably taken its toll on the quality of outputs produced from the system". He further laments that "in this very depressing situation the process of teaching, research, publication and

knowledge development has no relevance to the challenges of the next millennium or even the present global market".

**b) Tremendous Reduction in the Quality of Skilled Manpower in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions, Teaching Hospitals and Research Centres**

Akin to the issue of fall in standard of education is that of reduction in the quality of skilled manpower in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Ipso facto, there is mass exodus of seasoned intellectuals from these institutions (especially the ivory tower) to other sectors of the economy within the country or other countries for greener pasture. It is hardly surprising, that the quality and quantity of academic staff will be considerably reduced. In this perspective, Mbanefo (1992) aptly observes that "today the Nigerian university system continues to suffer from intellectual haemorrhage created by the problem of brain drain". This, according to him, is more so in the very critical fields of human medicine, pharmacy, computer science and engineering. Similarly, in the words of Adebayo (2010) many hospitals and research centres in Nigeria were without specialist and consultants in the 1990s, whilst many higher education institutions (HEIs) were left hollow and shallow. The clear implication of this development is that as a result of migration of technological know - how, the economy cannot grow.

**c) Retardation of Socio-economic and Technological Growth and Development of Nigeria**

There is no gainsaying the fact that like other developing nations, brain drain has seriously retarded the socio-economic and technological growth and development of Nigeria. This is by depleting her natural supply of intellectual and valuable manpower. Evidence abounds to show that there are many talented and well educated Nigerians such as medical doctors, pharmacists, nurses, medical laboratory scientists, computer scientists, professors, lawyers, pilots, etc working and living in overseas (especially in the West). The educational and health sectors of the Nigerian economy appear to be the most affected by brain drain. For instance, according to Jibril and Obaje (2008) a source estimates the population of Nigerians in the United States of America as follows:

as of 2004, up to 3.24 million Nigerians were in the United States alone...Some 374, 000 were information technology professionals 202,000 were medical and allied professionals, about 50,000 were engineers and another 250,000 were professionals in other areas, including University lecturers.

Also, according to estimates of the Presidential Committee on Brain Drain set up in 1988 by the Babangida administration and headed by Professor Oye Ibidapo-Obe, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos, Nigeria between 1986 and 1990 lost 10,694 professionals from tertiary institutions alone. Also according to

Bangura (1994) between 1988 and 1990 over 1000 lecturers left federal universities in Nigeria. Ekundayo et al (2010) have, in their own view, opined that it is widely believed that more than 10,000 Nigerian academics were employed in the United States alone in 2010.

Similarly, according to the Minister of Health in the Abacha regime Dr. Ihechukwu Madubuike, 21,000 Nigerian doctors were practicing in the United States alone in 1995. According to him, by the time Nigerian doctors in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, Europe, Australia and those in other African countries are included, the figure would be close to 30,000. It is perhaps pertinent to stress that during this period Nigeria's health system was in a state of near collapse due largely to acute dearth of experienced medical practitioners. Evidence indicates that this appalling situation has not yet been ameliorated accordingly. This is evident in the medical check-up or treatment trips abroad by Nigerians. These educated Nigerians abroad (ENA) are basically making very insignificant or no contributions to the economy of Nigeria. Rather, they are contributing meaningfully to the economies of overseas countries (particularly the industrialized nations of the North) where vast majority of them are domiciled. By so doing, the West has become the major beneficiaries of their talents.

**d) Increased Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Receiving Countries**

Undoubtedly, with the flight of seasoned intellectuals and professionals to other countries due mainly to better opportunities, the GDP of the receiving countries are boosted. Consequently, whilst the receiving countries are the winners, the releasing countries (Nigeria in particular) are automatically the losers (Utile, 2008).

Other negative consequences of brain drain include: it increases the level of dependence on foreign aid by Nigerian government; it costs Nigeria billions of naira (huge foreign exchange) to replace Nigerians with expatriates from the West; it brings about separation of family members and leads to less adequate family cohesion thereby promoting delinquency (Osinowo, 2005).

Conversely, some scholars have expressed the view that brain drain is not an unmitigated phenomenon. They have argued that on a global level, free movement or interaction of highly skilled people is a positive thing which has its own merits and results in better development of the World and nations forming it. They are of the opinion that Nigeria has benefitted (albeit marginally) from the process in certain respects (Onwuharaonye, 2011). First is that through brain drain foreign remittances have been and will continue to be sent by migrants to their families back home to boost their families' income. It has been argued that monetary remittance is one of the main reasons family members tolerate migration and physical absence of their loved ones. Conversely, their inability or failure to remit money to their families at home has aggravated rather than ameliorated their (families') economic condition.

Next is the belief that brain drain is capable of transferring technology from the advanced industrialized nations of the West to developing countries like Nigeria. Accordingly, as Onwuharaonye (2011) posits the migrants would eventually return to

Nigeria with the knowledge acquired over the years and impact same on the ready and willing Nigerians. However, their contribution in this regard will be minimal as most of them would have wasted their talents by the time they are back.

As already emphasized, from whatever angle it is considered, the cost of brain drain to Nigeria is incalculable in terms of both development opportunities and loss of investments. This is as result of loss of her highly skilled manpower

### **Suggested Solutions**

In view of the deleterious effects of brain drain on Nigeria's economy, it is hereby suggested that urgent steps should be taken towards curbing the menace. Below are some of the ways out.

**i) Proper Funding of Tertiary Education in Nigeria** Funds are very critical to tertiary education in Nigeria. Without adequate finance, tertiary education can hardly function properly. In this study, we shall use the university system for our analysis. This is because of its pivotal role in the whole gamut of Nigerian tertiary education. University education has over the years witnessed inadequate funding. As Odekunle (2001) succinctly notes, Nigerian universities have been grossly underfunded which resulted in the loss of great deal of valuable manpower to overseas countries. Also, according to Saint et al (2003), the university system in Nigeria has not had the financial wherewithal necessary to maintain educational quality even in the midst of significant population explosion. Worse still, Olukoya (2005) has painted a grimmer picture with the assertion that Nigerian universities have become "glorified secondary schools", due to overcrowded classrooms, with students sitting on the floor during lectures, lack of books in libraries, ill-equipped laboratories that cannot conduct experiments, and the menace of brain drain. It therefore entails that for the universities to execute their mandate satisfactorily they should be properly funded. In this regard, Mgbekem (2004) aptly opines that "there is the dire need for efficient funding of the university system through increased budgetary provision". This is necessary for the maintenance of dilapidated or decaying infrastructure, procurement of new equipment, relevant books and journals, chemicals and other vital learning inputs.

Also, given the capital-intensive nature of university education the universities themselves ought to adopt a number of strategies in order to exploit alternative sources of revenue. This is necessary rather than depending solely on revenue profile of the government. This is because experience has shown that government alone cannot provide all the resources required by the universities due to lack of predictability in resource flow. To this end, the Minister of Education Professor Riqqayatu Rufai recently commended the efforts of the University of Ilorin for putting in place recreational facilities for commercial purposes in order to boost internally generated revenue. She, therefore, enjoined other Nigerian universities to embrace the University of Ilorin example so as to improve their internal revenue base.

**ii) Provision of Conducive Working Environment** Based on the premise that unsatisfactory working environment, owing largely to dilapidated and obsolete facilities, was and is still partly responsible for human capital flight in Nigeria, it is suggested that urgent and massive overhaul of facilities especially in the universities, hospitals and research centres be undertaken. In the view of Ekundayo et al (2010), apart from the physical working environment, there is also the compelling need to make the psycho-social environment conducive. In this regard, there should be proper appreciation and recognition for intellectual and professional worth. Also, the Nigerian government should address and review all the various policies that have triggered the migration stream of intellectuals from universities, and other professionals like doctors, pharmacists, nurses, engineers, etc, from the country. For instance, the hitherto frequent harassment, arrest and dismissal from service of leaders of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which was common during the military era should not be allowed to re-occur.

**iii) Upward Review of the Pay Package for Academics and Professionals based on their Qualifications** Incontrovertibly, there exists a strong correlation between motivation via enhanced remuneration and employee performance (Ogunna, 1999). However, the research has revealed that there has been a general lack of motivation amongst Nigerian lecturers and professionals like medical doctors, pharmacists, nurses, lawyers, medical laboratory scientists, etc, due chiefly to poor wages. For instance, available statistics from ASUU Secretariat Abuja indicates that until recently, Nigerian lecturers constituted one of the least paid workers in the country. For example, whilst the annual salaries of some public sector (Oil and iron and steel) workers as at 1997 were N600,000 and N400,000 respectively, that of university academic staff was N54,000 (ASUU, National Secretariat Publication, 1997).

Worse still is the comparative disadvantage suffered by Nigerian academic vis-à-vis their contemporaries in other African countries. For instance, according to (Adebayo, 2009) a survey conducted in 2007 by the National Universities Commission (NUC) Abuja found that a full professor in Botswana earned \$27,000 per annum, in Namibia between \$21,000 and \$35,000 and in South Africa between \$58,000 and \$75,000. Whilst in Nigeria even with all the adjustments that ASUU was able to negotiate then with the Federal Government, the same professor earned about \$12,000 per annum in 2006. The same was applicable to other Nigerian professionals.

All the above led to a tremendous decline in the purchasing power of lecturers and other professionals and served as a strong incentive for brain drain. Perhaps the above unsavoury state of affairs may have influenced the present upward review of salaries of lecturers and professionals by government. Whilst the measure is commendable, it is the considered opinion of this paper that more needs to be done in this regard to further enhance their productivity.

**iv) Enthronement of Good Governance.** Brain drain has been identified as a product of bad governance. It is also a product of structural inequality in the political economy of Nigeria where those who control political power aggregate economic power to themselves through corruption. Hence, enthronement of good governance anchored on the principles of the rule of law, high level of integrity, transparency, probity and accountability becomes imperative. Also, there should be establishment of necessary and positive socio-political and economic conditions to curb brain drain. Of paramount importance is provision of a conflict-free political environment for the immigrants to return in order to contribute to the economic development of Nigeria. In this regard, the federal government should as a matter of urgency come to grips with security challenges being posed by kidnapping and Boko Haram menace in the southern and northern parts of Nigeria respectively.

**v) Creation of Job and Career Opportunities with Commensurate Remuneration** Another way of stemming the tide of brain drain in Nigeria is creation of adequate job and career opportunities with commensurate salaries. Evidence has indicated that there are scores of Nigerian professionals such as doctors, pharmacists, nurses, engineers, lawyers, etc , currently abroad who are tired of second class status in their countries of stay. They are willing to return to Nigeria provided they are assured that appropriate employment and career opportunities would be made available for them.

**vi) Provision of Educational Opportunities** Education plays a crucial role particularly in the growing problems of international migration. Thus, offering the individuals the necessary educational qualification in their home countries and expanding better educational infrastructure are capable of preventing emigrants from seeking a higher education abroad.

**vii) Staff Retention Programme** Another means of curbing brain drain in Nigeria especially in the university system is by putting in place staff retention programmes. This entails adopting measures capable of dissuading those still in the system from thinking about leaving. One of such measures is by providing deserving individuals with career opportunities as well as affording them the opportunity to prove their mettle. Another is the promotion of existing staff who have proven adequate academic excellence to senior lecturers, readers and/or professors (Mgbekem, 2004). All the above are capable of rejuvenating staff morale necessary for higher productivity.

**viii) Nigerian Experts and Academics in Diaspora Scheme (NEADS)** The NEADS was launched in November, 2004. Its main aim is to attract experts and academics of Nigerian extraction in the Diaspora to contribute their quota to the development of the Nigerian university system and by extension to the development of the country through short-term academic appointments. According to Ajayi and

Ayodele (2005), this programme is designed to encourage the return of academics of Nigerian origin in the Diaspora to come and contribute to national development through engagement in teaching, research and community services. In the words of Yaqub (2007), if the scheme can be sustained, those who fled the country at the height of the economic trough and military dictatorship may eventually be lured back on a voluntary basis, just as they voluntarily went away in the first instance.

### **Conclusion**

This study has been able to prove that multiplicity of factors account for the large-scale migration of skilled and intellectual manpower from Nigeria to overseas countries. Also, it has been able to x-ray the effects of brain drain on Nigeria. Based on the evidence provided above it is clear that the negative consequences of brain drain in Nigeria far outweigh the gains. The study revealed that the industrialized nations of the North where the vast majority of Nigeria's professionals are domiciled are the beneficiaries of Nigeria's human capital crisis. The only benefit that the country has tended to derive from the process has generally been in the form of individual-level remittances and some concomitant spin-offs.

It is, therefore, the paper's considered and fervent view and belief that the monster called brain drain should be adequately tackled without further delay. The measure is capable of launching Nigeria on the trajectory of rapid and sustainable socio-economic and political growth and development. This is in addition to enabling her to realize her aspiration and hope of becoming one of the leading economies of the World come 2020. The above discussed strategies can be of immense assistance in this regard.

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