

## Research Article

# Let me leave for a better country: Systematic Literature Review on Emigration Drives and Policy Implications for Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The study described the nexus between emigration drives in Nigeria and analysed government responses to economic drivers of emigration in the country. Empowerment and push-pull theory were synthesized and applied to the study based on the argument that people engagement in the development of their community is conditioned by government policies, which may act as push-pull for relocation. The study adopted literature review technique and information was sourced from a total of 20 purposively selected journal article. Selected journal articles were published between year 2018 and 2022 and downloaded through the google search engine from open access journal. Selected articles were content analysed and thematically presented. The study noted that while emigration is drive by a host of factors inclusive of unemployment, insecurity, high value of foreign exchange, and liberalization of immigration policy, the push-pull factors are not absolute. Also, the response of the Nigerian government to emigration has been identified from the economic measures such as the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programmes with the policy tool of currency devaluation. The aim of the policy is to attract investment and grow the economy, yet the policy has negatively impacted every sector of the economy and government measures, even on poverty alleviation. The study concluded that the response of government to emigration drive has further enhance the quest to relocate by potential migrants in the country. The study suggested that government should address the currency devaluation policy.*

**Keywords:** Currency devaluation, Emigration, Foreign exchange volatility, Government policy, Nigeria

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## 1. Introduction

Nigeria is one of the source countries of, regular and irregular, migration amidst the increasing quest to manage the resulting irregular migration by governments. Ikeke (cited in Isbell & Ojewale, 2018) for instance noted that in Italy and Greece, Nigerians were the largest immigrant in the year 2016. Nigerians equally formed a large percentage of European bond irregular migrants' population in Libya (Eurostat cited in Isbell & Ojewale, 2018). Nigeria emigrants constituted a higher proportion of the increasing population from Africa to the United States of America (Ekwemalor & Ezeobele, 2019). Hence, while the United Kingdom is the preferred destination of emigrating medical doctors from Nigeria, 57.4 per cent of respondents have intentions to emigrate, 34.8 per cent had attempted emigration from the country (Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2022). Similarly, Onah et al (2022) noted that about 43.9 per cent of sampled physicians want to emigrate from the country. In fact, whilst youths in Nigeria are aware of the dangers of irregular migration, most are ready to get involved and offer themselves as slaves in their 'country of hope' (Nwosu et al., 2022). Hence, Nigeria can be described as a state of potential emigrants.

Thus, explaining factors responsible for regular and irregular emigration from Nigeria has informed submission from various studies. Nwokocha (2016) for instance argued that the anxious emigration of all categories of workers from Nigeria hitherto is in response to the socio-economic realities. Isbell and Ojewale (2018) may have paraphrased the above as the quest to finding economic opportunity and as a result, one in three Nigerians have considered emigration (Isbell & Ojewale, 2018). The position corroborated Darkwah and Verter (2014) interrogation of factors driving emigration from the Nigerian state, using time series between 1991-2011, and identified prevalence of high unemployment, high value of remittances from migrants in 'country of hope', and overpopulation as factors responsible for emigration. Also, the claim by Anene, Njoku, and Iyala (2019) that regular and irregular migration of Nigerians is informed by the quest to escape poverty further explained the quest for emigration from the country.

In an effort to explain how poverty drive emigration, Opono and Kelikwuma (2021) has argued from the poor workers' wages perspective and noted that there is absence of appropriate mechanism to ensure the review of workers' wages to reflect economic realities in the country despite volatile foreign exchange. The continuous raise in the prices of goods and services as occasioned by exchange rate volatility, and the refusal of government to implement a 'living wage' propels industrial actions, with effect on service delivery. This reality also propel emigration as evident in Shin (2021) postulation that the appreciation of exchange rate against a country encourages emigration, depreciation recorded against the same reduces emigration. As such, exchange rate remains a significant factor influencing migrants' decision about the potential 'country of hope'. Nonetheless, social media has been identified as a medium through which potential migrants are attracted through increasing awareness and projection of exaggerated living

conditions in the developed world, and drifted through the diaspora links serving as attractor (Castelli, 2018).

Furthermore, Obi-Ani, Obi-Ani, and Isiani (2020) has presented explanation of unequal relationship between Africa and the developed countries as stimulating emigration. It was claimed that the developed countries continue to engage the natural as well as human resources of the developing countries for their development and to the detriment of the developing country through the instrumentality of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The continuous advocacy for a free trade arrangement, for instance, has worsen the economic reality in developing states and manifesting as an unfavorable economic condition, and propelling emigration (Obi-Ani et al., 2020). In another dimension, Targba (2022) has attributed the causes of forced migration, resulting to internal displacement, with the activities of non-state actors such as separatist movements, bandit, and insurgent. Also, in the situation of civil war, Schaub and Auer (2022) discovered that an individual having the tendency of been recruited by a rebel group may emigrate. In fact, relocation becomes available option in the event of crisis and natural disaster. Thus, given the above factors, identifying the exact reason for emigration has become problematic and this reality has been acknowledged by Ezemenaka (2019) that factors encouraging emigration are vast and cannot be generalized because emigration causes are dynamic and diverse.

While the trends in emigration from Nigeria continue, it is believed to have implications on the country. For instance, whilst Clemens (cited in Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2021) claimed that the emigration of skilled professionals implies manpower shortage and revenue loss, Nwokocha (2016) argued a counter point. It was claimed that government invested money in training professional in the country and their emigration will encourage referral of citizens requiring their services to their immigrating country, a development that implies loss of revenue to government both for their training and income generation in their 'country of origin' (Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2021). However, Nwokocha (2016) countered the believe that emigration has negative implication for the 'country of origin' with the statement that while migration may affect development in diverse ways, the brain-drain argument is not absolute. This is because despite the fact that highly skilled workers, especially the employed classes, are leaving the country at a very high rate, a higher number of the same category are in the country and unemployed (Nwokocha, 2016). In fact, emigration is believed to reduce pressure of unemployment on the labour market in the country (Darkwah & Verter, 2014).

It is useful to note that the process of emigration from Nigeria remained difficult with rules and regulations enacted for different purposes. Black et al (cited in Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2021) remarking on the regular process of emigration stated that despite the time consuming and tedious nature of emigrations, it has not restrained the desire for relocation by Nigerians. In fact, Shin (2021) has equally noted that policy

makers in the potential immigrating states often liberates certain aspect of immigration policy because of their desire for immigrants as alternative sources of labour. Hence, it is obvious from the foregoing that while pressures to emigrate arises from different factors, the onus of addressing the issues relies on government especially through policy. However, while extant studies have evaluated issues in isolation despite the possibilities of nexus between emigration drives, little is known about the complementary nature of these factors and how government is responding to the factors driving emigration. The study is conducted against this gap.

The study described the nexus between emigration drives in Nigeria, and analyzed government responses to economic drivers of emigration in Nigeria. The study was conducted on the assumption that the clear definition of the nexus between factors encouraging emigration will allow a clear policy response from government. The study is significant in that it allows policy makers and the international communities to have a better insight into how policies are informing emigration from countries including Nigeria. Also, it provides a new perspective on the preference for emigration from Nigeria. The study has five sections. The study has been introduced through section one. Literature review captures empirical review and theoretical framework in section two. Methodology of the study is discussed and presented in section three. In section four, the findings and discussion of the study is highlighted. The conclusion of the study was drawn in section five.

## **2. Literature Review**

Literature review featured two sections and these are theoretical and empirical review. The empirical review systematically interrogated extant literature while the theoretical analysis presented the theoretical perspectives to the study.

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of analysis adopted for the study are empowerment and the push-pull theory of migration. The central position of the empowerment theory is that engaging the people in community focused activities enhances their acquisition of required skills, guarantee self-dependence, and sustain their confidence to be productive (Omeje et al., 2020). On the other hand, the push-pull theory of migration as developed by Ernest Ravestien posited that unfavorable conditions which serves as a push factor in one environment, is the pull in the other (Obi-Ani et al, 2020). The lists of such factors are endless and inclusive of insecurity, unemployment, and the implications of such for the people welfare, and economic power. Thus, the synthesis of the two theories is that while the empowerment theory seeks to encourage the engagement of the people in the development of their community or state, and through different measures, the problem is that the empowerment is conditioned by factors such as government policies and this in turn

affect diverse things. The theory is applied to this study from the perspective that while the people are encouraged to drive their community development, outcome of government decisions on currency may serve as push from the country and pull in the other. Thus, participatory development is conditioned by the pull and push factors.

## **2.2 Empirical Review on Emigration Drive and Government Response in Nigeria**

The history of migration has been identified with the quest for survival, escape of insecurity/uncertainty, and accomplishment of opportunities by human being (Anene et al., 2019). Of course, insecurity has manifested as civil war, separatist agitation, and boko-haram insurgency against residents in Nigeria and as influenced the decision for emigration (Targba, 2022). Schaub and Auer (2022) in their explanation claimed that people are displaced through violence conflict, and while movement recorded from the displaced are usually within the state, some equally relocate to other countries. However, while it was noted that in the midst of violent conflicts including civil war, an estimated half of the population remains in their home, the threat of recruitment of young men by rebel group in the midst of violent conflict could propel their relocation from their home (Schaub & Auer, 2022).

Thus, the outcome of insecurity has been presented Yusuf and Mohd (2022) in their analysis of the insecurity effect of growth on the economy of Nigeria using time series from 1980 through 2019, insecurity in the country is noted to affects the rate of unemployment, formation of capital at domestic level, spending of government on education, and foreign direct investment. This manifests in the form of poverty. Hence, factors propelling emigration between countries has been identified to include poverty and insecurity (Adepoju, 2011; Anene et al., 2019; Yusuf & Mohd, 2022).

The quest for emigration among Nigerians has been on the increase and identified with the quest for employment opportunity and mitigating the ravaging economic difficulty, that is poverty, in the country (Adepoju, 2011; Darkwah & Verter, 2014; Isbell & Ojewale, 2018; Anene, et al., 2019). While poverty is a major issue confronting the country, government, international organization, as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), are continued to intervene through the introduction of loans, empowerment, grants, and trainings to specific populations. Despite the extant interventions, the rate of poverty remains high in the country with its impact on the increase in pressures on the labour market and stimulating emigration. The reasons for this continued to be identified with devaluation of the country's currency.

The devaluation of the Nigerian currency (that is naira) remain a major tool in addressing the economic challenges since the fall in the price of crude oil, in 1980s. The aftermath of the economic crisis encouraged the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Program, SAP (Egwaikhide, Chete, & Falokun, 1994;

Ismaila, 2012) which was targeted at correcting the fiscal imbalance, reform of exchange rate. The Second-tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM) was created for the task (Egwaikide et al., 1994), and since the enactment of the SFEM the naira has continued depreciate against the United States dollar (Egwaikide et al., 1994). Hence, while devaluation has been resulted to by successful government in Nigeria, it does not have a robust effect on the economy of the country (Ismaila, 2012; Loto, 2018). This has manifested in the consistent decline in the value of the country's currency, and impact on the economy (Ismaila, 2016; Loto, 2018). Ofor and Manukaji (2016) specifically noted that while the devaluation policy in the short run accomplished output increase and enhance balance of payment, the raising price of good and services within the country in the long run neutralizes the short run achievements. Also, despite the intention of enhancing production output through the currency devaluation policies, there is absent of viable evidence between exchange rate revaluation and output growth in Nigeria. In fact, the reality is the consistent fall in wage, inflation, and quest for emigration.

In another dimension, Kolawole (2021) remarking on the reasons why poverty remain high in the country despite the various measures introduced explained that after the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP), orientation of the approaches adopted were supply and demand driven, which are unable to meet the expectation of the poor (Kolawole, 2021). The reasons for the inability of the measures to fulfil its purpose has been attributed to corruption, politicization of empowerment programme, and adoption of top-bottom approach (Aminu & Onimisi, 2014; Musa, Abdullah, & Wahid, 2016; Taiwo & Agwu, 2016). The effect of currency devaluations also impacts such programs. Hence, while job creation for unemployed youths remains a topical issue, which despite the various approaches remains unsuccessful in alleviating poverty (Aminu & Onimisi, 2014; Musa et al., 2016; Taiwo & Agwu, 2016; Omeje, Jideofor, & Ugwu, 2020), poor harmonization of poverty intervention measures between the levels of government, international organization, private sector, and NGOs is believed to impact programs in the country (Musa et al., 2016). Similarly, fall in the price of crude oil at the global market, the major source of revenue to the government, affects the budget (Musa et al., 2016), and the execution of poverty alleviation programs in the country.

Equally, the hitherto continuous drop in the price of the crude oil is also with notable implications on the exchange rate of the country's currency. This follows Omotosho (2019) claimed that crude oil export accounted for about 93.1 per cent of the country's export and 24.4 per cent of import. Hence, the adoption of alternative means to the generation of energy such as wind, solar and related in advanced economies, the demand for crude oil declined sharply such that from about \$110 in 2018, it is sold for less than \$38.77 in 2020 (Iheanachor & Ozegbe, 2021). This development impacts the foreign exchange rate value of Nigeria's currency such that there is continuous depreciation in value of the country's currency (that is naira). After

all, the continuous loss of value of a country's currency has implications for the economic growth and welfare of the population (Abubakar, 2019; Bawa, Abdullahi, Tukur, Barda, & Adams, 2020). This position follows Shin (2021) establishment of relationship between exchange rate and migration pressure. Exchange rate has been identified as the major influencing factors encouraging migrants' drift. Hence, when the value of a country's currency is low to exchange rate, migration pressure increases accordingly. While workers relocate, those requiring their services also migrate. After all, exchange rate has been identified as an important element in evaluating the economic growth rate of a country (Iheanachor & Ozegbe, 2021).

The above analysis provided insight into the reasons for medical tourism/emigration from Nigeria. Abubakar et al (2018) identified incessant industrial action by health practitioners, brain drain in the health sector, preference for foreign health service, poor and inadequate funding, prevalence of obsolete equipment in the operation of health facilities, poor remuneration of health workers as factors affecting the efficiency of the health sector. These factors have also been identified as been responsible for medical tourism/emigration from the country. Hence, while there are suggestions for provisions of adequate funding from government to the health sector and prohibition of government sponsorship for medical tourism in the country as a solution (Abubakar et al., 2018; Orekoya & Oduyoye, 2018), the inability of government to respond effectively to adequate funding has been attributed to the effect of exchange rate. Hence, volatility of the exchange rate equally affects the revenue available to government (Ayinde, 2020). In fact, the downswing recorded in sectors of the Nigerian economy are attributable to the volatile exchange rates (Ayinde, 2020). Thus, exchange rate significance as an economic policy is notable for enhancing the ability of a state to compete in the international system (Karakostas, 2021) for all resources.

These realities may have informed the submission of Iyeli and Utting (2017) that the adoption of policies that can curb inflation and ensures stable exchange rates will promote economic growth in the country, and possibly prevent emigration. While the exchange rate in Nigeria has been flexible system since the adoption of SAP, Obadan (cited in Urama & Iloh, 2018) as noted that exchange rate choice by developing countries is of importance to their growth and currency value stability. Hence, on the issues of exchange rate crisis in Nigeria, Urama and Iloh (2018) has identified the inconsistencies and recurrent devaluation of the naira to institutional incentives, group interest, and politics rather than the believed impact of the fall in the price of crude oil. This was explained with respect to the consistent failure of the Central Bank of Nigeria in attaining its fundamental obligation on exchange rate management including value protection for the naira, and ensuring stability with other currencies (Urama & Iloh, 2018).

Hence, it was further argued that exchange rate decision by the apex bank of the country has been influenced by policymakers rather than economic realities and this is evident in the recurrence of conflicting exchange rate policy, that is 'official and the black market' (Castelli, 2018; Urama & Iloh, 2018). Also, the

exchange rate policy is influenced by regime attribute such that pro-west government in the country adopts the liberalization and currency devaluation program of the IMF while anti-west oriented regime adopted fixed exchange rate (Urama & Iloh, 2018). Thus, the management of the exchange rate influences the economic realities in the country and this in turn manifests in the unemployment realities in the labour market, high poverty rate, and the quest for emigration in search of better live in ‘country of hope’.

### **3. Methodology**

The study adopted literature review method. Qualitative information was sourced on emigration drives and government response in Nigeria, from a total of 20 purposively selected journal articles. Articles selected were those published between the year 2018 and 2022, in open access journal, and on the subject matter of migration and emigration. Journal articles selected were content analyzed and information gathered were presented thematically.

### **4. Findings and Discussion**

This section presents the finding of the study.

#### **4.1 Emigration Drives and Reality in Nigeria**

It is an established fact in literature that government empowers its populace for different task inclusive of education, health, security, and defense (Omeje et al., 2020). Whilst there are roles in the state, individuals have the possibility of relocation such that the push-pull theory of migration believed that factors that act as push in a country also pull into other (Obi-Ani et al, 2020). However, studies have identified the limitations of the push-pull theory to include the immigration policy of countries (Shin, 2021; Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2022), and interest of potential emigrants (Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2022; Schaub & Auer, 2022). Shin (2021) for instance argued that countries often liberate certain aspect of their immigration policy to allow for immigrants as alternative source of labour. Hence, without the liberation of immigration policy, potential immigrant may assume the title of illegal immigrant, especially when their mean of accessing the country contravenes the countries immigration policy.

Evidently, emigration has been attributed to the factors inclusive of insurgency, insecurity, increased social media awareness on living condition in developed countries, unemployment in the country of origin, high value of foreign exchange, increase in population, liberation of immigration policy by developed countries, relocation interest, and poverty rate in ‘host country’ (Urama & Iloh, 2018; Anene et al, 2019; Iheanachor & Ozegbe, 2021; Karakostas, 2021; Kolawole, 2021; Shin, 2021; Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2022; Schaub & Auer, 2022; Targba, 2022). However, while poverty, unemployment, foreign exchange value, social media influence, and liberation of migration policy appears to be an interrelated



factor with possibility to drive emigration (Urama & Iloh, 2018; Karakostas, 2021; Shin, 2021), Adebayo and Akinyemi (2022) noted that while 34.8 per cent of sampled respondents had attempted emigration while 57.4 per cent had intention to relocate, but have not migrated. This implies that there is more to the migration liberation policy explanation among other.

Specifically, while Nigeria as a country was noted to have fall into economic crisis following the collapse of the price of crude oil in the international market, poverty was said to have been on the increase in the country (Loto, 2018). Of course, the value of foreign exchange against the country has continue to raise (Iheanachor & Ozegbe, 2021) but the people are still resident in the country. Also, flowing from the argument of Schaub and Auer (2022) for instance that during the prosecution of (civil) war, more than half of the population do maintain their residence while some relocate further established the fact that potential migration needs to show interest. These established the fact that despite emigration drives and the continuous residents in the country, there are other factors conditioning emigration other than the push-pull explanation (Ezemenaka, 2019).

#### **4.2 Government Responses to Economic Driver of Emigration in Nigeria**

The push-pull factors that as continued to drive emigration from Nigeria as been outlined to include poverty, unemployment, and unfavorable foreign exchange (Abubakar, 2019; Bawa et al., 2020; Karakostas, 2021; Shin, 2021) aided by the social media (Castelli, 2018). Historically, Nigeria as continued to experience poor economic growth since the crash in the price of crude oil (Abubakar, 2019; Bawa et al., 2020). Of course, crude oil is the major source of foreign exchange for Nigeria (Omotosho, 2019). In addressing the issues, the Structural Adjustment Policy, SAP, has been adopted by the Nigerian government to revive the economy and this has currency devaluation as a major tool. While currency devaluation was aimed at attracting investment, it has also impacted measures adopted by government to address poverty. Opono and Kelikwuma (2021) for instance had identified absence of appropriate measures aimed at implementing living wages for workers resulting from the volatility of exchange rate.

Obviously, while foreign exchange continues to raise against the country, wage and salaries of labour become unstable and unsustainable because the price of good and service increases. The effect of currency devaluation has also been noted in every sector of the economy. For instance, cases of health tourism have been reported from the country (Abubakar et al., 2018), and sectors of the economy has been affected in term of their expected performance. These realities are attributed to the volatile exchange rate (Ayinde, 2020). Curbing the retrogression recorded in the sectors of the economy and with possibility of driving emigration has informed the suggestion for government to adopt policies that addresses the recurrent devaluation of the currency (Urama & Iloh, 2018).

## 5. Conclusion

The study described the nexus between emigration drives in Nigeria and analyzed government responses to economic drivers of emigration in the country. The study was conducted on the assumption that clear definition of the nexus between factors encouraging emigration will allow a clear policy response from government. The study noted that while emigration is driven by a host of factors inclusive of unemployment, insecurity, high value of foreign exchange, and liberalization of immigration policy, the push-pull tendency is conditioned by choice of potential migrants. Also, the response of the Nigerian government to emigration has been identified from the economic measures such as the adoption of structural Adjustment Policy with the policy tool of currency devaluation. The aim of the policy is to attract investment on the one hand and grow the economy on the other hand, but the policy has negatively impacted every sector of the economy and government measures on poverty alleviation. The study concluded that the response of government to emigration drive has further enhanced the quest to relocate by potential migrants in the country.

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