A CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT WAGE POLICY AND LABOUR MIGRATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The nature of the wage rate system in Nigeria seems to be a major factor contributing to the migration of skilled and unskilled labour in Nigeria. Therefore, this study examined government wage policy as a key factor causing migration of skilled workers. The study adopted conceptual and theoretical analysis to explain the effect of poor wages on the migratory intention and brain drain in the country. This study classified migration theory into; the Classical Theory of Migration, the Neo-Classical Theory of Migration, and the New Modern Theory of Migration. The study make used of secondary data to explain the influence of government wage policy on international migration of skilled workers in Nigeria. The reviewed of previous studies in this area of knowledge revealed poor remuneration as a key motivator for the emigration of skilled workers in Nigeria. Therefore, this study concluded that poor pay is a key motivator for workers' migrations. The uncompetitive wages in the health and education sectors proved the reality with the current wave of medical doctors leaving the country for other parts of the world. This study recommends that government should restructure the wage determination machinery, process, and policy to embrace global best practices and changes in economic conditions.

Keywords: Brain drain, International Migration, Skilled workers, Wage determination, Government wage policy

Introduction

In the last couple of years, there has been an exodus of experts especially in the Academics and Medical field from Nigeria to Western Countries. This massive relocation of human capital from developing countries to Western Countries is caused by poor remuneration of highly skilled professionals. As advanced by Kalu and Ede (2022) the lack of adequate infrastructure and a competitive wage are the reasons that account for the massive brain drain in Nigeria. The poor infrastructure and inadequate minimum wage policy seem to be major factors accounting for the brain drain in most developing countries. Supporting the claim of Kalu and Ede (2022), Dodani and LaPorte (2005) advocated that quality living standards, High pay, access to advanced technology, and more stable political conditions in developed countries are the major factors that attract professionals from less developed countries. The study by Docquier (2014) revealed that the proportion of foreign-born people in rich countries has tripled since 1960 due to the increasing emigration of high-skilled people from poor countries. An attempt by advanced countries to attract and retain highly skilled professionals increases the risk of brain drain in most developing countries (Kalu and Ede:2022, Elegbede, Okeke, and Salami: 2021, Docquier: 2014, Fajana: 2002).

However, poor remuneration and lack of effective implementation of minimum wage policy in Nigeria appear to be the major cause of brain especially among professionals in the public sector. Nwude (2013) opined that the minimum wages paid by the Nigerian government are grossly inadequate compared to the international benchmarks of the United Nations. The implementation of the minimum wage policy is usually faced with challenges from the private and public sectors in Nigeria (Elegbede: 2016, Akinwale and Elegbede: 2016, Elegbede, Okeke, & Salami: 2021). Fapohunda, Atiku, & Lawal (2010) suggested that the failure of government at all levels to implement a minimum wage, the culture of unfair labour practices by some private sector organizations, the poor nature of enforcement capacity, and the problem of vulnerable non-unionized workers. The non-implementation of minimum wage and wage bargaining always stemmed from reactions from workers in the private and public sectors (Akinwale & Elegbede: 2016, Elegbede: 2016, Shadare and Elegbede 2012). According to Elegbede (2016), some of these reactions are; incessant strikes as experienced in the university system and health sector, protests, demonstrations, and labour mobility. Labour mobility and brain drain are the most damaging to the economic growth of Nigeria. This study aimed at focusing on the influence of minimum wage policy on the brain among Nigeria professionals in the diaspora

Literature Review

International migration of skilled and unskilled labour in Nigeria has been one of the major factors affecting human resource development, economic growth, and development. Ogbenika (2019), the country's future development is assured by reliance on educated and skilled individuals, and even unskilled workers (Fajana,200). The development of nations appears to be the responsibility of talented skilled workers (Ogbenika,2019). However, Poor remunerations and inadequate wages are partly responsible for the continuing migration of human resources (Fajana, Elegbede**,** Kolawole, & Gbajumo-Sheriff,2021). Dodani & LaPorte (2005) claimed that lack of political stability, good standards of living, and poor salaries in developed countries account for a high rate of brain drain. Kalu & Ede (2022) suggested that pay inequality between the Western world and Sub-Sahara Africa attracts talent from less developed areas into developed countries. According to Dcquier (2014), brain drain refers to the international transfer of human capital resources majorly from poorer nations to advanced nations (Dodani & Larpote, 2005) or a form of human capital flight. The major cause of attraction is the pay differential between advanced nations and poorer countries (Fajana,2000). Dcquier (2014) argues that brain drain is used majorly to connote the migration of highly educated individuals from developing to developed countries. Nwude (2013) argued that the erosion in the real wages and salaries of workers due to inflation has caused several damages to employment patterns in the country (Elegbede, Okeke, & Salami, 2020) including reactions from workers (Shadare & Elegbede, 2012) especially among graduates and highly skilled workers (Elegbede & Shadare,2018) through migration to other areas with better conditions of work. International migration of the Nigerian workforce has been a major factor affecting the economic growth. As observed by Kalu & Ede (2022) the issue of brain drain has been confronting Nigeria for several years with economic consequences.

The economic data from the World Bank (2019) reveal a negative net migration data (-300000) moving out of the country in 2017. According to Dauda (2020), the World Bank data suggests that the number of Nigerian emigrants outweighs her immigrants (Ogbenika, 2019) mostly the highly educated and skilled. Docquier (2014) observed that poor wages and the search for better living conditions are the primary motivations for migration from developing to developed countries. Kalu & Ede (2022) supporting the claim of Docquier (2014) Kalu & Ede stated that the primary factor responsible for the brain drain in Nigeria is the unreasonably low wages paid to professionals (Elegbede & Shadare, 2018) causing reactions from graduates, especially in the Medical and information technology field to seek greener pastures abroad. The high unemployment rate creates a surplus in the labour market that enables employers the opportunity to pay low wages (Shadare & Elegbede,2012). Consequentially, skilled workers migrated to Western and developed countries to earn a living with better pay and working conditions. Olaniran (2020) noted that a severe lack of adequate and worthwhile remuneration is a major driving factor for the emigration of skilled workers from Nigeria.

Most experts and scholars suggested that poor remuneration is a motivating factor for brain drain in Nigeria. This implies poor remuneration accounts for the international migration of skilled workers in Nigeria. Dauda (2024) supporting this claim emphasized that Poor pay package is a major reason motivating people to leave Nigeria for other countries. Nigeria's academic and health sectors are synonymous with inferior salary packages, leading to frequent industrial actions (Elegbede, Okeke, and Salami 2020). The new minimum wage of N70,000:00 (US$43:21) is not enough to meet the cost of living of a worker and the entire household. As noted by Fajana (2000) the inability of a worker to meet monthly expenses informed the decisions by skilled workers to seek greener pastures in countries with better wages and salaries. As Dauda (2018) noted most skilled workers do not mind the nature of the job available in such countries.

Theoretical Framework

Migration and brain drain are complex issues and decisions that a single theory may not be sufficient to explain especially in the Sub-Sahara African Countries. This paper classified migration theory into; the Classical Theory of Migration, the Neo-Classical Theory of Migration, and the New Modern Theory of Migration.

The Classical Theory of Labour Migration OR The Push-Pull Factors (CTM)

The classical theory of migration theory stresses that migration decisions are influenced by the push-pull factors available at the origin and destination of the migrants. The main proponent of this theory is Todaro (1969) who emphasis on the causes and nature of attraction in the point of origin and destination. Similarly, Lee (1966), focuses on the factors influencing migration decisions. The push-pull factors are still very relevant in migration literature but with major refinement such that the push-pull factors are classified as intervening obstacles (distance, physical barriers, migration law), personal factors (age, sex, marital status, school, and jobs), and Economic factors including environmental and demographic factors. (de Haas, 2007,2010: McDowell and de Haan,1997). However, the Push-pull theory of migration has been criticized for being static and that factors are generally mirrored in the origin and destination points. (Fajana, 2000)

Neo-Classical Theory of Labour Migration

The neo-classical theory of migration is a refinement and advancement of the classical theory of migration because they both focus on the causes and attraction in the origin and destination points. However, the neo-classical theory of migration advocated that people moved from one location to another because of geographical differences in relative labour scarcity. The proponent of this theory stressed that migration from one location to another will continue so long as there is a pay differential that continues to exist between two geographical points (Todaro, 1969, 1980: Harris, 1980). For instance, pay differentials between skilled workers in the Western world and Sub-Saharan African countries. Therefore, skilled workers migrate Western world as a haven to actualize their potential that comes with better living conditions and pay. These migration behaviors or factors account for the massive brain drain observed in health and academic sectors in Nigeria (Fajana, 2002). The neoclassical theory of migration suffers the same fate as the classical theory because both theories underestimate human beings reacting only to macro push-pull factors.

New Labour Migration Theories

The new labor migration theory advanced two principles for labor migration; the household decision to generate income diversification, and conscious attempts to overcome failing markets and socio-economic inequalities (deHaas,2007). The New Labour Migration focuses on spatial-temporal factors or processes in defining labor migration as a part of general developmental processes. The process is; modernization, capitalist economic development, urbanization, and demographic transitions (Amaral,2018). This theory stresses that labor migration, brain drain, and mobility become inevitable as societies develop economically and politically. Despite the conclusion of economic and behavioral theories suggesting desirability of people moving to another nation or region, a number restrictions usually occur to hinder the realization of migratory intentions (deHaas,2010). These are state policy, of the federal character, deployments of contract employment system, the monetary and social cost of moving into new areas, working conditions and social security differences between nations, entry requirement into occupations, the workers present position and specialty of skills, and wage (Doqcuier, 2014). However, there exist positive and negative outcomes of to the migratory phenomenon involving skilled members of the labour force. Acquisition of skills by migrating Nigerians would definitely be useful for the country's development assuming that the migrants would later choose to return to the country (Fajana,2002). Foreign exchange earnings would also increase through remittance by emigrants. There is the possibility of transfer of essential technology from abroad to the country. Despite the attractions mentioned above, there are moral considerations positing unfairness in the actions of developed nations exploiting at cheap rates manpower needed for development purposes in the developing countries.

The Minimum Wage Policy in Nigeria

Two essential issues are necessary for critically analyzing the problems associated with minimum wage policy in Nigeria. Nwude (2013) argued that the history of minimum wage cannot be separated from the history of public service negotiations and increments. Historical polemics depict that Nigerian workers have always demanded a general upward review of wages and an increase in the National Minimum Wage. In 1945 workers staged the famous 45-day general strike for a Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA), (Otobo:2007, Fajana: 2000), Fashoyin:1992). In 2007 the award won by workers for a 25% general wage increase through the Ernest Shonekan Wage Consolidation Committee was arbitrarily cut down to 15% by the government, workers have struggled 15 times to have wages improved and a national minimum wage legislated upon (Nigerian Labour Congress Bulletin, 2011). The Nigerian Labour Act (2004) sets the minimum wage at #5,500, and after seven years new minimum wage was agreed upon between workers and the government in 2011 at #18,000. Subsequently, in 2019, the national minimum wage was fixed at # 30,000 after an 8-year interval. The trend in minimum wage determination in Nigeria shows a lack of recourse to the cost-of-living index and inflation rate which must have grossly reduced the real wage of the pay a worker received on a monthly or weekly basis due to the longer period between when the minimum wage was imposed and a new minimum wage is determined.

As noted by Fajana (2002) minimum wage imposition in Nigeria is more of a political exercise than economic consideration. Therefore, highly skilled professionals would struggle to cope with the cost of living. Especially, those residing in urban centers with a high rate of cost-of-living index. The National Minimum Wage was always set below the minimum wage needed by workers to survive (Fashoyin,1997). The wage reviews were unstructured; sometimes negotiated wages were changed by the government through circulars; at other times, the government unilaterally imposed wage increases (Elegbede, 2016). Agreements reached between the governments and labour were sometimes distorted at implementation or not implemented, and workers always had to fight to get the government to agree to collective bargaining even when the procedure was agreed upon in previous negotiations. In developed countries where the collective bargaining process is highly developed, minimum wages are set at levels approximating the wage rates reached under the collective bargaining process. Regarding this, the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA) made a contention based on the Trade Disputes Act of 1976 for basing the minimum wage on the outcome of wage bargaining.

The Nigerian Experience of Brain Drain

Labour mobility refers to the ease with which human resources can be transferred from one location to another (Fajana, 2002), especially to the most suitable and comfortable environment (Docquier ,2014). Labour mobility could be inter-regional, rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural, urban-urban, or between nations (Fajana, Elegbede, Kolawole, and Gbajumo-sheriff: 2021). However, Fajana (2002) stressed that the most deeply troubling phenomenon in the labour market of less developed countries is the international migration of skilled labour. The movement from developing to developed countries assumed a regenerated momentum in the 1980s and 1990s on account of significant differences erected by disparaging economic fortunes between the advanced and developing countries (Dauda, 2018), the continued devaluation of the currency of the developing areas, the continued inability of Nigeria to provide education locally to meet national demands, continued diffusion of information to Nigerians at home by those who have managed to migrate abroad Gibson and McKenzie:2010, Fajana: 2002, and Dauda: 2018). The development of Nigeria as a nation began in the early 1900s with the optimism that investment in education and modern management would be sufficient for economic growth (Ananaba,1979). Dauda (2018) noted that the developed countries provide educational support loans to the LDCs for the training of students from LDCs in foreign countries (Fajana,2002). However, the progress made by the developed countries became uneven with the LDCs, by the 1960s, the advanced countries moved at a greater pace thereby widening international gaps regarding growth, infrastructure, and employment opportunities (Berger,2022). The availability of abundant opportunities in advanced countries became attractive to foreign students who then chose to stay back after their studies Dauda: 2018.Fajana: 2002).

However, the movement of highly skilled workers from Nigeria to foreign countries was caused by several factors, and most significantly the search for greener pastures because of economic hardship and difficulty in present-day Nigeria account majorly for the high rate of brain experience in the last three years. Economic hardship, poor condition-of-service, and inadequate remuneration experienced in the past few years resulted in the exodus of highly skilled Nigerians searching for more favorable opportunities in other countries. However, the study under investigation would examine the impact of poor packages as a major factor causing highly skilled workers to migrate. Dauda (2018) observed that Nigeria is one of the countries with the poorest pay package. The current minimum wage of #30,000 ($18) is inadequate to sustain a worker and his household. As noted by Kalu and Ede (2022) poor pay mostly served as the motivation for the migration of highly skilled workers to foreign countries with better pay packages (Dauda, 2018) without reference to the nature of the job (Fajana,2002)

The present human capital flight to foreign is not restricted to a particular profession with unskilled personnel as part of the train. Significantly, the current human capital flight can be observed in the university system with many lecturers leaving the system every month in the last five years, medical doctors and nurses, pilots, engineers, and IT personnel. The choice of countries is not restricted, but the emphasis is on Britain, the United States of America, Saudi Arabia, Canada, etc. The study by Development Research and Project Centre (dRPC) revealed that 233 Nigerian doctors migrated to the UK in 2015; there was a significant increase in the number to 279 in 2016; by 2017 the figure was 475, and in 2018, the figure rose to 852, in 2019 it jumped to 1,347; in 2020, the figure was 833 and in 2021, it was put at 932.

Methodology

The study adopted a conceptual and theoretical explanation of the impact of government wage policy and capital flight in Nigeria. The study relied on previous literature, reports of the Central Bank of Nigeria, the Federal Bureau of Statistics data, and a review of extant literature, books, and journals to substantiate evidence from the conceptual and theoretical analysis. Findings and conclusions will also be deduced from the secondary data collected.

Discussion

The nature of the wage rate system in Nigeria seems to be a major factor contributing to the migration of skilled and unskilled labour. The increase in the real wage is not always commensurate with the money wage or the purchasing power of the wage due to certain explainable reasons (Fajana, 2000). First, the wage determination process adopted by the federal government often failed to consider changes in the inflation rate and cost of living index. Most certain often wage rates are set through government decrees and Acts of Legislation (Fapohunda, Atiku, & Lawal, 2012). And without recourse to current economic conditions (Elegbede,2016). Aside from wage determination by government fiat, the government often uses wage commissions and administrative procedures to determine wages in civil services (Elegbede, Okeke, & Salami, 2020). The government approaches may have become obsolete and not about the economic reality of living conditions (Elegbede,2016). For instance, the last minimum wage of #30,000 was imposed in 2019 whereas the cost-of-living index has increased astronomically since then.

Table 4.1 Inflation Rate in Nigeria from 2019 to 2024

No	Year	Inflation Rate (%)	Percentage increase %
1	2024	34.2	11.4
2	2023	22.8	3.95
3	2022	18.85	1.9
4	2021	16.95	3.7
5	2020	13.25	1.85
6	2019	11.40	0.7

Source: NBS Data(2024)

The distributions above were deduced from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics Bulletin (2024) showed a 23.5% increase in the inflation rate since the minimum wage of #30,000 was fixed in 2019 causing the real wage to decline and the purchasing power to be reduced to #1276. Even the newly imposed minimum wage of #70,000 will only have a purchasing power of #2978. Similarly, according to available data on the NBS Bulletin, the cost-of-living index has increased because of the inflation rate and the crisis in the forex market. For instance, the agricultural index increased from 2.8% in 2023 to 130.6% in 2024 due to supply disruptions from political tensions in the northeast (NBS Bulletin, 2024). Another issue contributing to wage-related international labour migration is the failure of the government to consider differences in the geographical cost-of-living index. The Bulletin on the general cost-of-living index in 2024 showed the highest increases in Lagos (4.52 %), Ondo (3.35%), Edo (3.27%), while Kano (0.30%), Ebonyi (0.97%) and Adamawa (1.25%) recorded the slowest rise in month-on-month inflation.

Also, in April 2024, NBS Bulletin revealed that food inflation was highest in Lagos (4.74%), Edo (4.06%), and Yobe (3.99%), while Kano (0.47%), Adamawa (0.98%), and Zamfara (1.50%) recorded the slowest rise in Food inflation. Previous studies in this area of knowledge identified poor remuneration as a key motivator for the emigration of skilled workers in Nigeria (Ogbenika, 2019; Fajana, Elegbede**,** Kolawole, & Gbajumo-Sheriff,2021) supporting this claim further Kalu & Ede (2022) suggested pay inequality between advanced and developing countries (Shadare & Elegbede,2012) coupled with a high rate of unemployment and government wage determination by fiat. Docquier (2014) & Kalu & Ede (2022) identified unreasonably low wages as the reason for brain drain in the country. Elegbede & Shadare (2018) explained that the brain drains or international migration of skilled workers in Nigeria is a reaction to low wages. Health and academic sectors are vulnerable to the brain drain due to low wages causing the sectors to experience the highest rate of brain drain (Dauda,2018; Elegbede, Okeke, and Salami 2020; Shadare & Elegbede,2012).

Therefore, this study concluded that poor pay is a key motivator for workers' migrations. The uncompetitive wages in the health and education sectors proved the reality with the current wave of medical doctors leaving the country for other parts of the world. Government wage policy failed to consider economic parameters and the reality of the economic conditions in the wage determination process. Inflationary rate, price index, cost of living index, and different geographical cost of living index within the country are not considered in government wage policy and by extension organized private sector. The bureaucratic wage determination machinery has become obsolete and nonconformity with present economic conditions and global best practices. The hardship of economic conditions and the absence of reasonable and competitive wages prompted reactions from workers and professionals with globally recognized credentials in the medical field, information technology, and educational sector. Professional workers emigrate to escape poverty created by unreasonable government wage policies to countries with attracting or pull-in factors. The real wage of an average worker has been decimated by the continued increase in the inflation rate and poor performance of the Nigerian currency in the international market. The purchasing power of the wage rate has declined causing most workers to fall into the poverty line. These caused migration reactions from workers to lift their households out of poverty. Conclusively, migration intentions and actions are escape valves from poverty and poor living conditions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Migration though has some positive impacts on foreign direct investment through repatriation of funds from those living abroad. However, the negative effect of continued brain drain on general economic growth is enormous. Therefore, this study recommended the following:

- I The government should restructure the wage determination machinery, process, and policy to embrace global best practices and changes in economic conditions.
- ii Economic parameters such as elasticity of labor demand, inflation, unemployment, dependency rate, the average size of a household, cost of living index, and differences in geographical cost of living index within the country should be adequately considered in government wage policy and wage determination.
- iii The government should focus special interest on the most vulnerable but important sector. Health and education are important in every economy and require government attention.
- iv The government should establish a competitive pay structure based on an average comparative pay survey in the health and education sectors.
- vi Payment of unemployment benefits which might discourage the exit of unemployed people,
- vii The government should also adopt the strategy of labour export by focusing on the production of graduates that are needed by both the advanced and developing areas at relative cost advantages.

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