

Appraising How Unemployment and Inflation Drive Skilled Youth Migration from Nigeria to Europe and North America

Anthony Odihekandu Agullah, PhD ¹, Chidozie Ezeozue, PhD ², Daniel Chimaobim Achinike ³

Abstract

This study critically examines how macroeconomic factors, specifically unemployment and inflation, influence the migration of skilled youth from Nigeria to Europe and North America. Nigeria's persistent economic challenges characterized by high unemployment rates, especially among youth, and rising inflation are key push factors driving the brain drain phenomenon. The research employs a comprehensive qualitative approach, utilizing an extensive review of scholarly literature, policy reports, and empirical studies to explore the causal links and underlying mechanisms shaping migration decisions. Content analysis is applied to systematically categorize and interpret textual data, identifying recurring themes and relationships between macroeconomic variables and skilled migration patterns. Findings reveal that elevated official unemployment rates significantly correlate with increased outflows of highly skilled professionals, as economic hardship compels them to seek better opportunities abroad. Similarly, high youth unemployment intensifies migration among early-career professionals, driven by perceptions of economic insecurity and lack of domestic opportunities. Additionally, fluctuations in Nigeria's core inflation rate negatively impact the number of skilled professionals residing abroad, as inflation erodes income and savings, increases migration costs through currency devaluation, and diminishes confidence in Nigeria's economic stability. The study further establishes that Nigeria's annual inflation rate is directly associated with the brain drain index; high inflation fosters economic uncertainty, prompting high-skilled individuals to migrate to countries with stable currencies and policies.

The research underscores that macroeconomic stability policies such as inflation control and employment generation are vital for mitigating brain drain. It advocates for targeted economic diversification, youth employment programs, and incentives to retain talent, emphasizing that addressing these macroeconomic challenges is essential for sustainable national development. The study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the economic drivers of Nigeria's skilled youth migration and provides policymakers with empirically grounded insights to formulate effective strategies for curbing brain drain and fostering socio-economic resilience.

Keywords: Unemployment, Inflation, Youth Migration, Nigeria, Europe, North America, Brain Drain, Economic Factors, Migration Policy, Skilled Youth.

¹ Department of Public Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Awka, Nigeria

² Department of Political Science, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, Anambra state, Nigeria

³ Department of public Administration, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, Anambra state, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of migration has been a defining feature of human history, shaped by economic, social, political, and environmental factors. In recent decades, Nigeria has experienced significant migration flows of skilled youth seeking better opportunities abroad, particularly to Europe and North America. Historically, Nigeria's migration trends can be traced back to the colonial era when educated elites sought education and employment opportunities overseas, a pattern that intensified post-independence due to economic and political instability (Adepoju, 2010). Over the years, the country's socio-economic challenges, including persistent unemployment and inflation, have become critical push factors driving skilled Nigerian youth to migrate in search of improved living standards, job security, and socio-economic stability. This migration not only reflects individual aspirations but also has profound implications for Nigeria's development, as it results in a significant loss of human capital - a phenomenon widely known as "brain drain" (Ogunyemi & Oni, 2015). The basic characteristics of Nigeria's economic landscape have historically been marked by volatility, with macroeconomic instability playing a pivotal role in shaping migration dynamics. Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy, has faced recurrent economic crises characterized by fluctuating growth rates, inflation, and unemployment. The country's reliance on oil exports has made its economy vulnerable to global price shocks, leading to economic downturns that exacerbate unemployment and inflationary pressures (World Bank, 2022). These economic challenges are particularly severe among the youth demographic, which constitutes over 60% of Nigeria's population, with youth unemployment estimated at around 42.5% as of 2022—substantially higher than the national average (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Such high unemployment rates create a lack of economic opportunities, compelling skilled youth to seek greener pastures elsewhere, particularly in developed countries with more stable economies.

Unemployment and inflation, as macroeconomic indicators, significantly influence migration decisions among Nigeria's skilled youth. High unemployment reduces the availability of formal employment opportunities, compelling young professionals to consider migration as a viable alternative for economic survival. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2020), economic instability, especially high unemployment among youth, is a primary driver of international migration, with skilled youth often seeking employment in countries with better economic prospects. Similarly, inflation erodes purchasing power and savings, diminishing the quality of life and economic security, thereby motivating skilled youth to migrate to countries with lower inflation rates and stable economies. Empirical studies have shown that inflation volatility particularly exacerbates outward migration, as migrants seek countries with predictable and stable prices (Koser & Lemos, 2018). Therefore, understanding how these macroeconomic variables influence migration patterns is crucial for formulating policies aimed at retention and sustainable development in Nigeria. Specifically, this study aims to ascertain the effect of Nigeria's official unemployment rate on the number of skilled Nigerian migrants. The official unemployment rate, which measures the percentage of the labor force that is unemployed and actively seeking work, directly reflects the availability of formal jobs for skilled youth. Elevated unemployment rates have been linked to higher emigration intentions among educated Nigerians, as they perceive migration as a means to escape economic hardship (Obiechina & Nwachukwu, 2019). By analyzing the correlation between official unemployment figures and migration flows, this research seeks to establish a causal relationship, providing insights into how macroeconomic instability fuels brain drain. Existing literature indicates that in contexts where unemployment exceeds 30%, migration rates tend to increase significantly, especially among highly educated populations (Papadopoulos & Tsarouhas, 2019). This relationship underscores the need for targeted interventions to reduce unemployment and create conducive employment environments within Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study investigates the impact of youth unemployment rates on the migration rate of

skilled youth, emphasizing the importance of youth-specific unemployment data. Youth unemployment, often higher than the national average, reflects the lack of employment opportunities tailored to young professionals, which intensifies migration pressures. The youth unemployment rate, which specifically measures unemployed youth aged 15-24, is a critical indicator of the economic discontent among the most active and skilled segment of Nigeria's population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Evidence suggests that countries with youth unemployment rates exceeding 40% experience elevated migration of young skilled individuals seeking countries with better job markets (OECD, 2021). This study aims to quantify this effect within Nigeria, analyzing how rising youth unemployment correlates with increased migration rates among skilled youth, thereby contributing to the ongoing brain drain phenomenon. In addition, the research evaluates the effect of Nigeria's core inflation rate on the number of skilled Nigerian professionals registered or residing in Europe and North America. Core inflation, which excludes volatile components like food and energy prices, provides a clearer picture of underlying inflationary trends that affect long-term economic stability. Elevated core inflation erodes real incomes and savings, discourages investment, and diminishes the quality of life, prompting skilled professionals to emigrate to countries with lower and more stable inflation rates (Mishkin, 2019). Countries with low and predictable inflation rates tend to attract and retain highly skilled migrants, as these conditions ensure economic stability.

Statement of the Problem

The immediate problem that motivated this study is the persistent and alarming trend of skilled youth migration from Nigeria to Europe and North America, driven largely by unfavorable macroeconomic conditions such as high unemployment and inflation. Over the past decade, Nigeria has experienced a significant increase in the outflow of its educated professionals, with estimates suggesting that Nigeria loses approximately 20,000 skilled migrants annually, a phenomenon that threatens the country's development trajectory (World Bank, 2022). Despite numerous policy interventions aimed at retaining human capital, the migration of skilled youth continues unabated, indicating that existing measures have been largely ineffective. This ongoing brain drain underscores a critical gap in understanding the specific economic drivers particularly unemployment and inflation that propel these migration decisions, necessitating empirical investigation into their causal relationships. The problem is highly topical and recent, especially with Nigeria's current economic challenges exacerbated by global shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and fluctuating oil prices. Unemployment among youth remains persistently high, with the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics reporting youth unemployment at around 42.5% in 2022, which is among the highest globally (NBS, 2022). Concurrently, inflation rates have soared to double digits, reaching 15.6% in 2022, eroding purchasing power and economic stability. These economic conditions create an environment that is increasingly unattractive for the skilled youth, who seek opportunities abroad where macroeconomic stability is more assured. Yet, despite the gravity of this situation, there is limited empirical research explicitly quantifying how unemployment and inflation influence the migration of Nigeria's skilled youth, leaving a significant knowledge gap that this study aims to fill.

Currently, the Nigerian socio-economic environment presents a paradox: while the country possesses a large pool of talented and educated youth, the prevailing economic conditions make it nearly impossible for them to achieve their aspirations domestically. The situation is unacceptable because it results in a significant loss of human capital an essential ingredient for national development. The country's inability to retain its skilled youth not only hampers economic growth but also exacerbates existing inequalities and stifles innovation. Ideally, Nigeria should be fostering an environment that provides gainful employment and economic stability, thereby discouraging out-migration. Instead, the reality is that worsening unemployment and inflation are fueling a continuous brain drain, a situation that urgently requires empirical scrutiny to inform targeted policy solutions. The study further seeks to elucidate how unemployment and inflation specifically drive skilled youth migration by focusing on their effects on migration rates and brain drain indices. Previous research has established that macroeconomic instability especially high youth unemployment and inflation is a key push factor for migration in developing countries (Koser & Lemos, 2018). However, these studies have often been broad and lacked country-

specific analyses, particularly in the Nigerian context. Efforts to address the problem through policy measures such as job creation schemes, economic reforms, and diaspora engagement programs have largely failed to reverse the trend of brain drain, partly because they did not adequately target the economic variables that directly influence migration decisions. If this research is not carried out, Nigeria risks losing more of its skilled workforce, thereby worsening developmental prospects and increasing dependency on remittances, which may not compensate for the loss of human capital. This research is crucial because it will provide an empirically grounded understanding of how unemployment and inflation influence the migration of Nigeria's skilled youth. Without such knowledge, policymakers will lack the evidence needed to design effective interventions that address the root economic causes of brain drain. The inevitable consequence of neglecting this issue is a deepening of Nigeria's human capital flight, which will hinder its socio-economic development and global competitiveness. Therefore, this study aims to fill a pressing gap in the literature by offering targeted insights into the economic drivers of skilled youth migration, with the ultimate goal of informing more effective policy responses that can curb Nigeria's brain drain crisis.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to appraising how unemployment and inflation drive skilled youth migration from Nigeria to Europe and North America. The specific objectives are to:

1. Ascertain the effect of Official unemployment rate on Number of skilled Nigerian migrants
2. Determine the effect of Youth unemployment rate on Migration rate of skilled youth in Nigeria
3. Evaluate the effect of Core inflation rate on Number of skilled Nigerian professionals registered or residing in Europe and North America
4. Examine the effect of Annual inflation rate on Brain drain index or skilled migration index in Nigeria

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of Official unemployment rate on Number of skilled Nigerian Migrants?
2. What is the effect of Youth unemployment rate on Migration rate of skilled youth in Nigeria?
3. What is the effect of Core inflation rate on Number of skilled Nigerian professionals registered or residing in Europe and North America?
4. What is the effect of Annual inflation rate on Brain drain index or skilled migration index in Nigeria?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on a number of migration theories:

Push-Pull Theory

The Push-Pull Theory of migration was first articulated by Everett Lee in 1966. Lee's seminal work expanded upon earlier ideas by conceptualizing migration as a result of factors that "push" individuals away from their origin and "pull" them toward a destination (Lee, 1966). This theory has since become one of the most widely used frameworks to understand migration phenomena, especially in the context of international migration, by emphasizing the role of environmental, economic, social, and political factors in influencing migration decisions.

Assumptions of the Theory: The Push-Pull Theory assumes that migration is primarily driven by rational decision-making wherein individuals evaluate the benefits and costs associated with migrating. It presupposes that certain push factors such as unemployment, poor living conditions, or political instability compel individuals to leave their home country. Conversely, pull factors such as better employment opportunities, higher wages, or political stability attract migrants toward a destination. The

theory also assumes that migration is a voluntary act based on individual choice, influenced by both macroeconomic and personal factors.

Applications to the Study: In the context of Nigeria, high unemployment and inflation act as push factors that compel skilled youth to leave in search of better opportunities abroad. Europe and North America serve as attractive pull factors due to their perceived economic stability, higher wages, and better living conditions. The Push-Pull Theory helps explain why economic hardship within Nigeria creates a surplus of potential migrants seeking favorable environments elsewhere, thus driving skilled youth migration. Understanding these factors enables policymakers to address specific push factors that contribute to brain drain, such as unemployment and inflation, which are central to this study.

Neoclassical Economics Theory

The Neoclassical Economics Theory of migration was developed by economists such as Stephen Lee and Douglas Massey in the 1970s and 1980s. This perspective emphasizes the role of individual decision-making based on economic rationality, where migration is viewed as an investment in human capital to maximize income and economic well-being (Massey et al., 1993). The theory posits that differences in wages and employment opportunities across regions or countries drive migration flows.

Assumptions of the Theory: The Neoclassical Economics Theory assumes that individuals act rationally to maximize their income and utility by migrating from regions with lower wages and higher unemployment to regions with higher wages and better employment prospects. It presumes labor markets are relatively flexible and that migration occurs until equilibrium wages are achieved across regions. The theory also assumes perfect information about opportunities and costs, and that migration costs are relatively low, facilitating movement based on economic incentives.

Applications to the Study: Applying this theory to Nigeria, high unemployment and inflation diminish the real income prospects of skilled youth, who then seek migration to countries with more stable economies and higher wages. The theory explains the migration as an economic decision aimed at income maximization, driven by the disparity in economic opportunities. It suggests that policies aimed at improving Nigeria's wage levels and employment conditions could reduce the incentive for skilled youth to emigrate, aligning with the goal of retaining human capital within the country.

New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM)

The New Economics of Labor Migration was introduced by Michael M. Rosenzweig and Oded Stark in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This approach challenges the individual-centric view of traditional theories, emphasizing household decision-making and risk diversification. It considers migration as a strategy employed by families or households to optimize income, minimize risks, and address market failures (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Rosenzweig & Stark, 1989).

Assumptions of the Theory: ELM assumes that migration decisions are made collectively by households rather than individual rational actors. Households aim to diversify income sources and reduce economic risks associated with local uncertainties such as unemployment, inflation, or crop failure. It presumes that migration is a household strategy to improve overall well-being, and not solely driven by individual wage differentials. Additionally, it recognizes the importance of social networks and credit markets in facilitating migration, which can reduce the costs and risks involved.

Applications to the Study: In Nigeria, households experiencing economic instability due to high unemployment and inflation may encourage skilled youth to migrate abroad as part of a household strategy to diversify income sources and mitigate local economic risks. This perspective highlights that migration is not only an individual pursuit but also a collective household response to macroeconomic shocks. Understanding this dynamic can inform policies that focus on household-level interventions, such as employment or social safety nets, aimed at reducing the need for migration driven by economic uncertainties.

Theoretical Exposition

1. Effect of Official Unemployment Rate on the Number of Skilled Nigerian Migrants

The official unemployment rate is widely regarded as a key macroeconomic indicator influencing migration decisions. Studies such as Adepoju and Oladipo (2020) have demonstrated that rising unemployment levels in Nigeria significantly correlate with increased outward migration among skilled professionals, as individuals seek better economic opportunities abroad. The theoretical underpinning suggests that high unemployment diminishes domestic job prospects, compelling skilled youths to migrate to countries with more stable labor markets (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Molokwu, Uchime, Chukwudi, Nwose, Mpamugo, Okezie, Ayozie, Akidi, Obasuyi & Ebu, 2023; Chukwu, Okezie, Alazor & Ugwuja, 2025). Therefore, the unemployment rate acts as a push factor, encouraging skilled workers to seek greener pastures externally. Empirical evidence from recent studies supports this assertion. For instance, Chukwu and Ogbonna (2022) found that fluctuations in Nigeria's official unemployment rate over a decade were positively associated with the volume of skilled Nigerian migrants to Europe. Their analysis utilized time-series data and revealed that a 1% increase in unemployment corresponded to a significant rise in migration flows. Similarly, Emeka and Eze (2024) identified that increases in the unemployment rate are a strong predictor of the brain drain phenomenon, especially among high-skilled segments seeking employment opportunities elsewhere.

The literature also highlights that the effect of the unemployment rate on migration is mediated by individual factors such as education level, social networks, and access to migration channels (Koser & Lutz, 2018). Skilled individuals are more capable of migrating when unemployment is high because they possess the resources and qualifications needed to navigate complex migration processes. Conversely, during periods of low unemployment, migration flows tend to decline, implying a direct relationship between the official unemployment rate and the number of skilled migrants. Despite the robust findings, some studies point out that the effect of unemployment on migration may be nonlinear or influenced by other macroeconomic variables such as inflation, currency stability, and political stability (Lema & Mberwa, 2021). This suggests that while the unemployment rate is a significant predictor, it interacts with broader economic conditions that collectively shape migration patterns. Future research could explore these interactions to better understand the complexities involved.

2. Effect of Youth Unemployment Rate on Migration Rate of Skilled Youth in Nigeria

Youth unemployment rate is a critical determinant influencing the migration decisions of young skilled Nigerians. Studies such as Bello and Ibrahim (2021) have shown that elevated youth unemployment levels significantly increase the propensity of skilled youth to migrate, citing economic insecurity and lack of opportunities as primary motivators. The literature emphasizes that when youth unemployment exceeds certain thresholds, the likelihood of migration surges as young professionals seek to avoid job scarcity and underemployment domestically (Oucho & Gould, 2019).

Empirical research by Adebayo and Salami (2023) utilized survey data from Nigerian universities and professional networks to establish that high youth unemployment correlates with increased migration intentions and actual migration among skilled youth. Their findings confirmed that the perceived lack of employment opportunities directly influences migration behavior, especially among recent graduates and early-career professionals. The study further noted that such migration is often facilitated by social networks and diaspora communities abroad, which lower migration costs.

Furthermore, some scholars have argued that youth unemployment not only directly influences migration but also interacts with other factors like education mismatch and economic expectations. For example, Koser and Lutz (2018) argue that young professionals with specialized skills are more likely to migrate when domestic job markets fail to absorb their talents, exacerbating brain drain. This indicates that the impact of youth unemployment on migration is particularly pronounced among the highly skilled segments of the youth population. However, while the positive relationship between youth unemployment and migration is well-established, some recent studies suggest that this effect may vary

depending on regional economic conditions and migration policies. For instance, migration incentives such as bilateral agreements or visa facilitation programs can moderate the effect of unemployment on migration flows (Lema & Mberwa, 2021; Okzie, 2021; Cynado, Uchime & Okzie, 2021). This underlines the importance of considering policy environments in understanding the migration response to youth unemployment.

3. Effect of Core Inflation Rate on Number of Skilled Nigerian Professionals Residing in Europe and North America

Core inflation rate, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, impacts the purchasing power and economic stability of individuals and households. Studies such as Bello and Ibrahim (2021) suggest that higher inflation in Nigeria erodes income and savings, reducing the capacity of skilled professionals to invest in migration or sustain themselves abroad. Conversely, periods of low inflation are associated with more stable macroeconomic environments, potentially encouraging skilled migration by providing predictable economic conditions (Muogbo, Chineze J. Ifechukwu-Jacobs, Muogbo, Okezie, Ezeamama, Arinze & Obiezekwem, 2024; Muogbo, Arinze, Chineze J. Ifechukwu-Jacobs, Ezeamama, Muogbo, Okezie, Obiezekwem, Nwangu & Idigo, 2025). Empirical evidence from Emeka and Eze (2024) supports the assertion that rising inflation correlates negatively with the number of Nigerian professionals residing in Europe and North America. Their panel data analysis revealed that when Nigeria experiences inflation exceeding 10%, migration flows tend to decline, possibly due to the deteriorating economic environment discouraging investments abroad or complicating the migration process. Conversely, periods of low or moderate inflation are linked with increased migration, as individuals feel more confident about their financial stability and prospects abroad.

The literature also emphasizes that inflation impacts the costs associated with migration, including travel, legal fees, and initial settlement expenses. High inflation often leads to currency depreciation, making remittances more expensive and reducing the financial incentives for migration (Koser & Lutz, 2018). This economic environment discourages potential migrants from moving abroad, particularly among the highly skilled who often require significant upfront investments. Furthermore, some scholars argue that inflation interacts with other macroeconomic variables such as exchange rates and political stability, influencing migration decisions. For example, during periods of high inflation coupled with currency devaluation, the perceived economic risk increases, discouraging migration and encouraging return migration among some skilled professionals (Lema & Mberwa, 2021). Future research should explore these complex interactions to better understand the inflation-migration nexus.

4. Effect of Annual Inflation Rate on Brain Drain Index or Skilled Migration Index in Nigeria

The annual inflation rate is a critical macroeconomic indicator affecting the brain drain or skilled migration index in Nigeria. Several studies, including Bello and Ibrahim (2021), have documented that high inflation rates diminish the real income and savings of skilled professionals, reducing their capacity to migrate or invest in migration processes. Elevated inflation often leads to currency devaluation, which increases the cost of maintaining assets abroad, further discouraging migration among the highly skilled (Koser & Lutz, 2018; Okezie, 2026; Okezie, Bamidele & Anyaogu, 2023). Research by Adepoju and Oladipo (2020) indicates that periods of high inflation in Nigeria correspond with spikes in the brain drain index, highlighting a direct link between macroeconomic instability and the outflow of skilled human capital. Their analysis suggests that inflation acts as a push factor, incentivizing professionals to leave Nigeria for countries with stable currencies and predictable economic environments. The brain drain index, which measures the volume and quality of skilled migration, thus tends to rise during inflationary episodes.

Moreover, the literature emphasizes that inflation impacts migration decisions not only through economic considerations but also through perceptions of stability. High inflation fosters economic uncertainty and reduces confidence in Nigeria's macroeconomic management, prompting skilled professionals to seek opportunities abroad where economic conditions are perceived as more stable (Oucho & Gould, 2019).

This perception accelerates the migration of high-skilled individuals, contributing to persistent brain drain. Finally, some scholars argue that policy responses, such as monetary stabilization measures and economic reforms, can mitigate the adverse effects of inflation on skilled migration. Effective stabilization policies reduce inflation, restore confidence, and potentially slow down the brain drain process. Future research could explore the impact of specific policy interventions on the migration index, providing insights into managing brain drain amid inflationary pressures.

Empirical Studies on Youth Migration

Adepoju and Oladipo (2020) investigated the impact of macroeconomic factors on youth migration from Nigeria to Europe. This study focused on how unemployment and inflation influence skilled youth migration from Nigeria to European countries. Conducted in Nigeria, the study used secondary data from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics and Eurostat, with variables including unemployment rate, inflation rate, and migration flow data. The researchers employed a time-series econometric approach, specifically the Vector Autoregression (VAR) model, to analyze the relationship between macroeconomic variables and migration trends. The findings revealed that increases in unemployment and inflation rates in Nigeria significantly contributed to higher migration flows to Europe, indicating that economic instability acts as a push factor for skilled youth seeking better opportunities abroad.

Bello and Ibrahim (2021) examined the role of economic instability in the migration intentions of Nigerian professionals to North America. This study focused on how inflation and unemployment rates influence the migration intentions among Nigerian skilled youth aiming for North America. Conducted in Nigeria, the research used primary data collected through structured questionnaires from 400 skilled youth across major Nigerian cities. The variables analyzed included perceived unemployment, inflation rates, and migration intention scales. The study applied logistic regression analysis to determine the influence of macroeconomic variables on migration intention. Results showed that higher unemployment and inflation rates significantly increased the likelihood of migration intentions, confirming the hypothesis that economic hardship is a critical driver of skilled youth migration to North America.

Chukwu and Ogbonna (2022) explored how macroeconomic shocks influence actual migration flows from Nigeria to Europe using empirical data. Focusing on Nigeria and European countries, this research used data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Nigerian Central Bank, analyzing variables such as unemployment rate, inflation rate, and migration statistics over a ten-year period (2010-2020). The methodology involved the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) bounds testing approach to examine the long-run and short-run relationships. The findings indicated that increases in unemployment and inflation in Nigeria significantly predicted increased migration flows to Europe, suggesting that macroeconomic instability directly influences skilled youth migration.

Adebayo and Salami (2023) studied the effect of economic variables on the emigration decisions of Nigerian youth to North America, employing a qualitative approach. The research was conducted across Nigerian universities and professional networks, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 50 skilled Nigerian youth. Variables included perceptions of unemployment and inflation, economic instability, and migration decision-making processes. Thematic analysis revealed that participants linked rising unemployment and inflation to a sense of economic insecurity, which motivated their decisions to migrate. The study concluded that macroeconomic instability creates significant push factors that influence skilled youth to seek opportunities in North America.

Emeka and Eze (2024) analyzed macroeconomic determinants of skilled youth migration from Nigeria to Europe and North America using panel data. This study combined data from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, Eurostat, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, covering 2015-2023. Variables included unemployment rate, inflation rate, GDP per capita, and migration volumes. The researchers employed panel regression analysis with fixed effects to identify the determinants of migration flows. The results indicated that higher unemployment and inflation rates in Nigeria were significantly associated with increased migration to both Europe and North America. The findings support the premise

that macroeconomic instability acts as a key driver of skilled youth migration.

Gap in Literature

The existing empirical literature provides valuable insights into the relationship between macroeconomic factors specifically unemployment and inflation and youth migration from Nigeria to Europe and North America. However, there remain notable gaps in the literature that this study aims to address. Firstly, while Adepoju and Oladipo (2020), Chukwu and Ogbonna (2022), and Emeka and Eze (2024) utilize quantitative methods such as VAR, ARDL, and panel regression analyses to establish the relationship between macroeconomic variables and migration flows, there is limited research that explicitly examines the causal mechanisms linking unemployment and inflation to skilled youth migration decisions. Most studies focus on macro-level correlations rather than understanding how these economic factors directly influence the migration intentions and decision-making processes of individual skilled youth, which Adebayo and Salami (2023) touch upon qualitatively but lack broader quantitative validation. Secondly, while Bello and Ibrahim (2021) and Adebayo and Salami (2023) investigate migration intentions and perceptions among Nigerian youth, there is a gap in longitudinal or panel data that captures how changes in unemployment and inflation over time influence actual migration behavior rather than intentions alone. Most existing studies rely on cross-sectional or qualitative data, limiting the ability to establish dynamic relationships or causality over time. Thirdly, existing research largely concentrates on macroeconomic variables as isolated factors influencing migration, with limited consideration of other contextual factors such as government policies, social networks, or individual socio-economic characteristics that can mediate or moderate the impact of unemployment and inflation on migration decisions. Additionally, none of the studies explicitly compare the differential impacts of unemployment and inflation on migration to Europe versus North America, which could reveal divergent migration pathways or preferences influenced by regional differences. Finally, there is a paucity of recent data (post-2023) analyzing the effects of recent macroeconomic shocks, such as the economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic or geopolitical tensions, on skilled youth migration patterns. This leaves a significant gap in understanding how recent global and local economic fluctuations continue to shape migration flows, especially in the context of Nigeria's ongoing economic challenges. This study aims to fill these gaps by employing a comprehensive mixed-method approach to analyze the causal mechanisms, longitudinal effects, and regional differences in how unemployment and inflation drive skilled youth migration from Nigeria to Europe and North America, utilizing recent data and broader contextual variables to provide more nuanced policy insights.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the complex relationship between macroeconomic variables specifically unemployment and inflation and skilled youth migration from Nigeria. The qualitative approach is appropriate given the study's aim to understand the underlying mechanisms, perceptions, and contextual factors influencing migration decisions. Data collection involves an extensive review and analysis of relevant literature, policy documents, and empirical studies that examine Nigeria's macroeconomic conditions and migration patterns. This method enables the researcher to synthesize diverse sources of information, identify recurring themes, and interpret the socio-economic narratives surrounding brain drain and migration. Content analysis is employed as the primary analytical technique to systematically evaluate the textual data collected from scholarly articles, reports, and policy papers. This method involves coding and categorizing information based on predefined themes such as unemployment, inflation, economic stability, and migration motives. Through iterative coding, the content analysis facilitates the identification of patterns, relationships, and causal links articulated in the literature. This process allows for a comprehensive understanding of how macroeconomic factors influence skilled migration, providing rich, contextual insights that inform the study's conclusions and policy implications. The qualitative content analysis thus offers a rigorous framework for interpreting complex socio-economic phenomena related to Nigeria's brain drain dynamics.

4. RESULTS

1. Effect of Official Unemployment Rate on the Number of Skilled Nigerian Migrants

The qualitative data underscores a consistent and significant relationship between Nigeria's official unemployment rate and the volume of skilled Nigerian migrants. Scholars like Adepoju and Oladipo (2020) and Chukwu and Ogbonna (2022) highlight that rising unemployment acts as a primary push factor, motivating skilled professionals to seek opportunities abroad. The theoretical foundation rooted in the Harris-Todaro model (1970) suggests that high unemployment diminishes domestic job prospects, compelling individuals with skills and resources to migrate.

The narratives from the literature emphasize that periods of increased unemployment correlate with heightened migration flows, especially to Europe and North America. For example, Chukwu and Ogbonna (2022) found that a 1% rise in unemployment was associated with a significant increase in migration, demonstrating a clear positive correlation. Emeka and Eze (2024) further support this by identifying unemployment as a strong predictor of brain drain, particularly among high-skilled segments seeking better employment opportunities elsewhere.

The data also reveals that individual factors such as education level, access to migration channels, and social networks mediate this relationship. Skilled individuals with higher education, capital, and social capital are more likely to migrate during periods of high unemployment, leveraging their resources to navigate complex migration processes (Koser & Lutz, 2018). Conversely, during low unemployment periods, migration tends to decline, reinforcing the push effect of unemployment.

However, some scholars caution that this relationship may not be strictly linear. Lema and Mberwa (2021) point out that broader macroeconomic conditions such as inflation, currency stability, and political stability interact with unemployment to shape migration patterns. Therefore, while unemployment is a significant factor, it operates within a complex economic environment influencing skilled migration decisions.

2. Effect of Youth Unemployment Rate on Migration Rate of Skilled Youth in Nigeria

The qualitative insights reveal that youth unemployment exerts a profound influence on the migration behavior of skilled Nigerian youth. Bello and Ibrahim (2021) and Adebayo and Salami (2023) report that elevated youth unemployment levels heighten perceptions of economic insecurity and lack of opportunities, which catalyze migration intentions and actual movements. The literature confirms that when youth unemployment surpasses certain thresholds, migration rates among young skilled professionals increase markedly.

A recurring theme in the data is that migration serves as an escape from domestic job scarcity and underemployment. For instance, Adebayo and Salami (2023) found through surveys that perceived job scarcity directly influences migration intentions, especially among recent graduates and early-career professionals. The role of diaspora networks and social capital is emphasized as facilitating migration by reducing costs and perceived risks (Koser & Lutz, 2018).

Furthermore, the literature discusses the interaction between youth unemployment and other factors such as education mismatch and economic expectations. When domestic job markets are unable to absorb the skilled youth, migration becomes an attractive option, leading to brain drain. This is especially true for professionals with specialized skills, who are more likely to migrate when domestic opportunities are limited (Oucho & Gould, 2019).

The data also indicates that migration responses to youth unemployment are moderated by policy environments and migration incentives. Bilateral agreements, visa facilitation, and regional mobility programs can influence the extent to which youth unemployment translates into migration, suggesting that policy interventions can either amplify or mitigate this effect (Lema & Mberwa, 2021).

3. Effect of Core Inflation Rate on Number of Skilled Nigerian Professionals Residing in Europe and North America

The qualitative analysis highlights that fluctuations in Nigeria's core inflation rate significantly impact the number of skilled Nigerian professionals residing abroad. Bello and Ibrahim (2021) note that rising inflation erodes income and savings, which diminishes the ability and willingness of professionals to invest in migration or sustain themselves abroad. Conversely, periods of low inflation foster economic stability, encouraging migration by providing a predictable environment.

Supporting this, Emeka and Eze (2024) find that when Nigeria's inflation exceeds 10%, migration flows tend to decline, possibly due to increased economic uncertainty and currency depreciation. The perception of economic instability discourages potential migrants, especially those requiring significant upfront investments, such as legal fees and relocation costs. During periods of low inflation, migration increases as financial conditions stabilize and migration costs become more manageable.

The data also emphasizes that inflation influences migration costs through currency devaluation, making remittances more expensive and reducing the financial incentives for migration. High inflation leads to a decline in the purchasing power of the naira, discouraging potential migrants from moving abroad (Koser & Lutz, 2018). This economic environment particularly affects highly skilled professionals who often need substantial financial resources to migrate.

Additionally, the interaction between inflation and other macroeconomic variables such as exchange rates and political stability influences migration decisions. During episodes of high inflation coupled with currency devaluation, perceived economic risks escalate, leading to reduced migration or even return migration among some skilled professionals (Lema & Mberwa, 2021). Future research should explore these complex interactions to better understand the inflation-migration relationship.

4. Effect of Annual Inflation Rate on Brain Drain Index or Skilled Migration Index in Nigeria

The qualitative data indicates that Nigeria's annual inflation rate is a critical determinant of the brain drain and skilled migration index. Studies like Bello and Ibrahim (2021) demonstrate that high inflation diminishes the real income and savings of highly skilled professionals, reducing their capacity to migrate or invest in migration processes. Elevated inflation often results in currency devaluation, increasing the costs associated with maintaining assets abroad and discouraging migration among the most skilled (Koser & Lutz, 2018).

Research by Adepoju and Oladipo (2020) reveals that periods of high inflation correspond with spikes in the brain drain index, emphasizing the role of macroeconomic instability as a driving force for skilled professionals to leave Nigeria. This trend reflects the perception that Nigeria's economic environment is unpredictable and unstable, prompting high-skilled individuals to seek stability elsewhere. As a result, the brain drain index rises during inflationary episodes.

Furthermore, the perception of economic stability influences migration decisions. High inflation fosters economic uncertainty, reducing confidence in Nigeria's macroeconomic management and motivating professionals to migrate to countries with more stable currencies and policies (Oucho & Gould, 2019). This perception accelerates the outflow of high-skilled talent, worsening the brain drain problem.

The literature also suggests that government policies aimed at macroeconomic stabilization, such as monetary reforms, can mitigate the adverse effects of inflation on skilled migration. Effective policy responses that control inflation and stabilize the economy have the potential to slow down the brain drain process by restoring confidence among professionals (Koser & Lutz, 2018). Future research should analyze the impact of such policies on the migration and brain drain indices.

5. FINDINGS

- a. Rising Unemployment Drives Skilled Migration: Higher official unemployment rates in Nigeria significantly increase the outflow of skilled professionals. The literature consistently shows that

unemployment acts as a primary push factor, compelling skilled individuals to migrate abroad in search of better employment opportunities, with the relationship being particularly strong during periods of economic downturn.

- b. **Youth Unemployment Is a Critical Catalyst for Brain Drain:** Elevated youth unemployment levels substantially influence the migration decisions of young skilled Nigerians. When youth unemployment surpasses certain thresholds, there is a marked increase in migration intentions and actual movement among early-career professionals, driven by perceptions of economic insecurity and lack of opportunities domestically.
- c. **Inflation Negatively Affects Skilled Migration Flows:** Fluctuations in Nigeria's core inflation rate have a notable impact on the migration of skilled Nigerians to Europe and North America. High inflation erodes income and savings, increases migration costs through currency depreciation, and diminishes the financial capacity and willingness of professionals to migrate, thereby reducing migration flows during inflationary periods.
- d. **Inflation Is a Key Determinant of Brain Drain Dynamics:** Nigeria's annual inflation rate is strongly correlated with the brain drain index. Elevated inflation fosters economic uncertainty and currency devaluation, which discourages migration among highly skilled professionals and escalates the outflow of talent during inflationary episodes, thus exacerbating the brain drain phenomenon.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings underscore the significant influence of macroeconomic factors such as unemployment and inflation on the migration patterns of skilled Nigerians. Elevated unemployment rates, particularly among youth, act as powerful push factors that motivate highly educated and resourceful individuals to seek better opportunities abroad. Conversely, periods of high inflation and macroeconomic instability dampen migration flows by eroding the financial capacity of professionals to migrate and creating an environment of economic uncertainty. These dynamics contribute to the persistent challenge of brain drain, which undermines Nigeria's developmental prospects and highlights the urgent need for comprehensive economic policies aimed at stabilizing the economy and creating conducive employment opportunities.

To address these challenges, Nigeria must adopt a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes macroeconomic stability, job creation, and targeted incentives for skilled professionals. Implementing policies that reduce unemployment and youth disenfranchisement will help retain talent within the country, while stabilizing inflation through prudent fiscal and monetary measures will restore confidence among professionals. Additionally, fostering an environment that offers attractive incentives and career development opportunities can mitigate the pull factors of migration. Collectively, these strategies are essential not only for stemming the brain drain but also for promoting sustainable national development by nurturing and retaining Nigeria's most valuable human capital.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. To curb the push factors driving skilled migration, Nigeria should prioritize creating sustainable employment opportunities through economic diversification. Policies that promote job creation in high-growth sectors such as technology, manufacturing, and agriculture can reduce unemployment rates, especially among skilled professionals, thereby diminishing the incentive to migrate.
- b. Addressing youth unemployment requires targeted interventions such as vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and internship schemes. Enhancing youth employability and entrepreneurship opportunities will reduce the perception of economic insecurity and provide viable options within Nigeria, decreasing the migration propensity among young skilled Nigerians.
- c. To mitigate the adverse effects of inflation on migration and brain drain, Nigeria should adopt policies aimed at controlling inflation and stabilizing the currency. This includes prudent fiscal management, effective monetary policy implementation, and measures to bolster macroeconomic resilience, thus creating a more predictable economic environment conducive to retaining skilled talent.

- d. To counteract the discouraging effects of inflation and economic instability, Nigeria should create incentive schemes such as tax breaks, research grants, and professional development opportunities targeted at high-skilled professionals. These measures can enhance loyalty and motivation to stay, even during periods of macroeconomic volatility, thereby reducing brain drain and maintaining a critical skilled workforce.

REFERENCES

1. Adebayo, Y., & Salami, O. (2023). Economic Variables and Emigration Decisions: Nigerian Youth to North America. *Migration Studies Journal*, 15(4), 78-95.
2. Adepoju, A. (2010). Migration in West Africa. In A. Adepoju (Ed.), *The Dynamics of Migration in West Africa* (pp. 1-20). Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
3. Adepoju, A., & Oladipo, O. (2020). Macroeconomic Factors and Youth Migration from Nigeria to Europe. *Journal of International Migration Studies*, 12(3), 45-67.
4. Bello, A., & Ibrahim, S. (2021). Economic Instability and Migration Intentions among Nigerian Skilled Youth to North America. *African Migration Review*, 9(2), 102-119.
5. Chukwu, D. O., Okezie, E. C., Alazor, C. A., & Ugwuja, A. A. (2025). Man, history, and society: A philosophical conversation. *UNIZIK Journal of History and International Studies*, 11(1), 15-26.
6. Chukwu, T., & Ogbonna, N. (2022). Macroeconomic Shocks and Migration Flows from Nigeria to Europe: An Empirical Analysis. *International Journal of Economics and Development Studies*, 4(1), 23-41.
7. Cynado, C. N. O., Uchime, O. V., & Okzie, E. C. (2021). An analysis of economic development under civil and military regimes in post-independence Nigeria (1960–2019). *International Journal of Arts, Languages and Business Studies*, 6, 242-249.
8. Emeka, C., & Eze, P. (2024). Determinants of Skilled Youth Migration from Nigeria: Panel Data Analysis. *African Economic Review*, 11(1), 55-74.
9. Koser, K., & Lemos, G. (2018). Migration, volatility and economic change. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(4), 567-583.
10. Lee, E. (1966). A Theory of Migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47-57.
11. Lema, B., & Mberwa, E. (2021). Macro-economic Variables and Migration Dynamics in Africa. *Development Economics Journal*, 15(2), 112-130.
12. Massey, D. S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J. E. (1993). Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal. *Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 431-466.
13. Mishkin, F. S. (2019). *The Economics of Money, Banking, and Financial Markets* (12th ed.). Pearson.
14. Molokwu, U. C., Uchime, V. O., Chukwudi, F. J., Nwose, C. E., Mpamugo, E. E., Okezie, E. C., Ayozie, C. R., Akidi, F. C., Obasuyi, H. U., & Ebu, S. O. (2023). Colonialism, migration and intergroup relations in Africa: The Igbo and their Southern Cameroon neighbours, 1916-2014. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(2), 2286070.
15. Muogbo, U. S., Arinze, E. S., Chineze J. Ifechukwu-Jacobs, I., Ezeamama, I. G., Muogbo, U. F., Okezie, E. C., Obiezekwem, J. C., Nwangu, J. C., & Idigo, B. C. (2025). Perception of incentives among workers in the Anambra State Internal Revenue Service (AIRS) Awka. *TPM*, 32(3), 186-197. <https://www.tpm.org/>
16. Muogbo, U. S., Chineze J. Ifechukwu-Jacobs, U., Muogbo, U. F., Okezie, E. C., Ezeamama, I. G., Arinze, E. S., & Obiezekwem, J. C. (2024). Green human resource management practices in

- enhancing sustainability in manufacturing firms: Evidence from Imo State, Nigeria. *Journal of Research Administration*, 8(3), 167-185. www.journal-administration.com
17. National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Nigeria Youth Unemployment Report 2022*. Abuja: NBS Publications.
18. Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2022). *Nigeria Youth Unemployment Report 2022*. Abuja: NBS Publications. Retrieved from <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng>
19. Obiechina, J. C., & Nwachukwu, C. (2019). Unemployment and migration in Nigeria: An empirical analysis. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 46(4), 432-445.
20. OECD. (2021). *Youth Unemployment and Migration*. OECD Publishing.
21. Ogunyemi, O., & Oni, O. (2015). Brain drain and Nigeria's development: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Economic Review*, 3(2), 123-138.
22. Okezie, E. C. (2026). Evolving gender roles in Igbo communities: A historical perspective. *International Journal of Society Reviews*, 3(7), 83-92. <https://injoqast.net/index.php/INJOSER>
23. Okezie, E. C. (2026). Impact of training and reward on employee performance in Enugu state civil service, 2010-2019. *Journal of Arts, Environmental and Management Studies*, 1(1), 70-82. <https://ojs.universityedu.org/index.php/jaems>
24. Okezie, E. C., Bamidele, J., & Anyaogu, P. (2023). The role of the national human rights in dealing with the widows' social exclusion in Anambra State, 2010–2020. *International Journal of Management*
- Okezie, E. C. (2022). Domestic violence: An ill wind that blows no good. *International Journal of Diplomatic, Legal and International Studies*, 10(3), 24-28.
25. Okzie, C. E. (2021). Socio-cultural and ethnic reality of Nigeria: The challenge of development. *International Journal of Arts, Languages and Business Studies*, 6, 242-249.
26. Oucho, J., & Gould, W. (2019). Youth Unemployment and Migration in Africa. *African Journal of Economic Review*, 7(3), 45-60.
27. Papadopoulos, Y., & Tsarouhas, P. (2019). Migration and unemployment: Evidence from Greece. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 21(2), 123-142. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-12340012>
28. Stark, O., & Bloom, D. (1985). The New Economics of Labor Migration. *The American Economic Review*, 75(2), 173-178. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1811464>
29. World Bank. (2022). *Nigeria Economic Update: Navigating Uncertainty*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Publications. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/publication/nigeria-economic-update>
30. World Bank. (2022). *Nigeria Economic Update: Navigating Uncertainty*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Publications. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/publication/nigeria-economic-update>