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Analysing the Sectoral Impact of Nigeria's Emigration (Japa) in the Post-Pandemic Era: A Focus on IT Professionals and their Destinations (United Kingdom)

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Resumo

Esta investigação analisa o impacto do fenómeno de emigração pós-pandemia conhecido como *Japa* em vários setores, com foco específico nos profissionais de Tecnologia da Informação (TI) da Nigéria que emigraram para o Reino Unido. Utilizando dados secundários provenientes do UK Home Office, da OCDE, do Banco Mundial e do Bureau of Statistics da Nigéria, o estudo examina a migração de profissionais da indústria de TI no período de 2020 a 2025, a partir de um quadro de fatores push e pull. O estudo observa o fenómeno migratório a partir de uma perspetiva multi-teórica que inclui a teoria da fragilidade do Estado, o neoliberalismo e a teoria pós-colonial. Estas teorias ajudam a compreender as dinâmicas de emigração de uma nação com um aparelho estatal frágil, mercados laborais globais exigentes e dominações trans-históricas. A análise dos dados sugere que a economia do Reino Unido conseguiu atenuar as preocupantes lacunas de competências em desenvolvimento de software, cibersegurança e inteligência artificial, enquanto a Nigéria sofreu com a fuga de cérebros, a redução da capacidade de inovação e mudanças nas suas perspetivas de transformação digital. O estudo também se debruça sobre as dinâmicas não convencionais das remessas e do envolvimento da diáspora, questionando se as remessas recebidas compensam os défices institucionais e económicos incorridos. A investigação demonstra o caso dos especialistas em TI nigerianos que emigraram para o Reino Unido no quadro da economia política global e ilustra como as desigualdades estruturais perpetuam ciclos de dependência e acentuam o estado de fragilidade das economias digitais emergentes.

Palavras-chave: Nigéria, Emigração, Japa, Pandemia de COVID-19, Migração Qualificada, Teoria Push-Pull, Fuga de Cérebros, Impacto Socioeconómico.

Abstract

This research investigates the impact of the post-pandemic emigration 'Japa' phenomenon on various sectors whilst focusing specifically on Nigeria's Information Technology (IT) professionals emigrating to the United Kingdom. Utilizing secondary data derived from the UK Home Office, OECD, the World Bank, and the Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria, the study examines the migration of professionals in the Information Technology industry from the year 2020 to 2025 in a push and pull framework. The study examines the migration phenomenon from a multi-theoretical prism of state fragility, neoliberalism, and post-colonial theory. These theories assist in understanding the emigration dynamics of a nation with a weak state apparatus, demanding global labor markets, and transhistorical dominations. The data analyzed suggests that the United Kingdom's economy has eased the worrying skill gaps in software development, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence, while Nigeria has suffered in terms of brain drain, innovation, and shifts in digital transformation. The study also focuses on the unconventional dynamics of remittances and diaspora engagement and asks the question on whether the gained remittances compensate for the institutional and economic deficits incurred. The study demonstrates the case of Nigerian IT specialists emigrating to the UK in the framework of the global political economy and illustrates how structural inequalities perpetuate cycles of dependence and the emerging digital economies' heightened state of fragility.

Keywords: Nigeria, Emigration, Japa, COVID-19 Pandemic, Skilled Migration, Push-Pull Theory, Brain Drain, Socio-Economic Impact.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent years, Nigeria has experienced a notable surge in emigration, commonly referred to as JAPA, a term derived from Yoruba that translates to "to flee" (Premium Times, 2022). This trend accelerated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among highly skilled workers looking to move abroad for better economic opportunities and working conditions. According to Okunade and Awosusi (2023, p.34), the post-pandemic period exposed the fragility of Nigeria's labor market and public services, prompting a surge in emigration among professionals. IT specialists form a distinct subgroup because of the high international need for technological skills. The United Kingdom, which has espoused progressive policies regarding the immigration and hosting of skilled workers coupled with its deficit of tech talent, has become one of the main destinations for these specialists. According to the *OECD International Migration Outlook 2024*, over 15% of tech vacancies in the UK are now filled by foreign professionals, with Nigerian specialists making up a significant proportion (OECD, 2024). This study intends to assess the impact of this migration trend on Nigeria's IT sector, specifically with regard to the negative effects of the so-called brain drain and the diaspora's engagement (Berger,2022). Furthermore, the study analyzes how the UK is responding to the increasing inflow of Nigerian professionals.

Remote work emerged as a viable option during the pandemic, which in turn affected migration trends. The lifting of travel restrictions in 2021-2023 led to a surge in mobility, particularly amongst the youth population with tech backgrounds in Nigeria. According to the World Bank (2024) report on Africa's Labor Mobility and Digital Transformation, remote work opportunities have significantly enhanced the participation of Nigerian professionals in the international labor market. Destination countries like the United Kingdom implemented aggressive talent acquisition strategies, including the Global Talent Visa program (UK Home Office, 2023), which specifically targeted high-skilled workers in technology sectors. These pull factors converged with worsening push factors in Nigeria, including a shrinking economy (World Bank,

2024), worsening insecurity (International Crisis Group, 2023), and protracted academic strikes (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023), to create the perfect storm for mass migration.

The information technology sector has emerged as particularly susceptible to this "Japa" wave due to its inherently mobile nature. Unlike other professions tied to physical infrastructure or local licensing requirements, IT skills are highly portable and globally marketable (SciDev, 2025). Nigerian tech professionals, many of whom received world-class training at home, find themselves in high demand across developed economies facing digital skills shortages. The UK's technology sector, which needs to fill approximately 100,000 tech vacancies annually (UK Parliament Post, 2023, p.14; OECD, 2024, p.57) has particularly benefited from this brain gain. In 2022 alone, Nigerian nationals received 65,929 study visas to the UK (UK Home Office, 2022), with a substantial number enrolling in STEM-related degree programs. These educational pathways often function as indirect routes into the UK's IT labor market, as graduates frequently transition into post-study work or Skilled Worker visas within the technology sector.

This mass migration of IT students presents a complex challenge for Nigeria's development trajectory. While the country has positioned itself as Africa's leading digital economy, with a dynamic startup ecosystem and a young, tech-oriented population, the rapid loss of its human capital threatens to undermine these achievements (ODBA, 2024). The tech sector, which contributed over $8 billion to Nigeria's GDP in 2023 (NBS, 2024), now faces crucial skills shortages in key areas like software development, data science, and cybersecurity (SciDev, 2025). This evolving context sets the basis for examining the sectoral implications of Nigeria's "Japa" phenomenon, particularly how it affects the country's digital transformation ambitions and the growing demand for tech talent within the United Kingdom. Nigeria has articulated ambitions to become Africa's leading digital economy by leveraging its youthful tech-savvy population, expanding broadband infrastructure, and fostering homegrown innovation through initiatives like the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (2020–2030). The growing attractiveness of the UK as a preferred destination for Nigerian IT professionals is associated with its modern policies as well as language ease and historical ties. Beyond a common language and a colonial history, UK immigration policies actively seek to draw international tech talent through their immigration schemes and salary offers (OECD, 2024). Along with London's position as a leading global fintech center, cities like Manchester and Edinburgh are developing specialized tech hubs

which presents ample opportunities for skilled migrants from Nigeria. This emerging pattern of migration is often framed as a shift in Nigeria–UK relations, from a post-colonial legacy to a form of mutual integration within the global digital economy. However, this interpretation warrants careful scrutiny. Rather than signaling a sophisticated interdependence, the continued outflow of Nigeria's most skilled IT professionals arguably reinforces structural inequalities, enabling the UK to address its tech labor shortages at the expense of Nigeria's own digital development ambitions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The phenomenon of Nigerians moving out of the country for employment opportunities like "Japa" has led to escalating brain drain which threatens Nigeria's capacity for innovation, digital economy, and sustainability of critical technological infrastructure. Recent reports suggest that Nigeria loses around 15,000 skilled tech workers each year, nearly 40% of which head to the UK (NESS, 2024). This trend is leaving domestic startups and tech companies unable to recruit fresh talent for important roles. According to recent data, 52% of Nigerian tech companies identify talent shortages as their most pressing operational challenge (WIPO, 2024). The erosion of skilled labor has stifled the innovation pipeline, reduced productivity gains, and forced many startups to outsource technical work, often at higher costs, further eroding Nigeria's competitive edge in Africa's growing tech ecosystem (ODBA, 2024; Disrupt Africa, 2025; World Bank, 2024).

Exacerbating the brain drain crisis is the deterioration of institutional structures in Nigeria**,** including the higher education system, research and development (R&D) infrastructure, labor market frameworks, and public service delivery, which has made retaining IT talent nearly impossible. Chronic underinvestment in research and development (R&D) is key in this dynamic, particularly when Nigeria allocates only 0.2% of its GDP to research and development (R&D), which is equivalent to roughly $950 million USD, in contrast to the United Kingdom's 1.7% allocation which amounts to over $54 billion USD annually (NUCC, 2025; OECD, 2024). This stark disparity in real investment significantly limits Nigeria's ability to support innovation, fund tech research, and retain skilled professionals (NUCC, 2025). This funding gap has limited career growth for tech professionals. In addition, frequent strikes in higher education, such as the eight-month ASUU strike in 2022, disrupted tech training pipelines, prompting many students to pursue education and employment opportunities abroad (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023 p. 6). Furthermore, poor infrastructure, such as an unstable electric grid and inadequate broadband penetration**,** have

hindered the viability of remote work, further incentivizing relocation to countries with reliable digital ecosystems. According to the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG, 2024), Lagos-based startups spend an estimated $29 million annually on generators due to erratic electricity. Similarly, broadband penetration remains below 45% nationally**,** with rural areas faring far worse (ITU, 2023). These infrastructural deficiencies not only raise the cost of doing business but also constrain productivity and limit the ability of IT professionals to engage in globally competitive work from within the country.

Conversely, the UK's tech sector has derived substantial benefits from the increasing influx of Nigerian IT professionals**.** Nigerians now occupy over 15% of tech-related vacancies in the UK**,** (OECD, 2024, p. 15), which allowed it to address critical skill gaps in software development, cybersecurity, and Artificial intelligence, areas where Nigerian migrants are overrepresented (OECD, 2024, P. 15). Major tech hubs like London, Manchester, and Edinburgh now host thriving Nigerian expatriate networks, contributing to productivity gains estimated at £2.3 billion annually (TechNation, 2023). However, this dynamic also brings into focus the ethical dilemma of "brain gain" disparities**,** where developed nations benefit from the systemic failures of developing economies like Nigeria.

The core problem**,** therefore, is threefold:

1. Nigeria struggles to retain IT professionals due to structural shortcomings (low wages, poor R&D, institutional instability).
2. Disproportionate advantages for the UK, which leverages Nigeria's persistent outmigration of skilled professionals to address its own tech labor gaps and sustain economic growth.
3. Long-term consequences for Nigeria's digital transformation, as talent loss slows and stifles innovation and the possibility for startup scalability.

This study seeks to investigate these interrelated dynamics by unpacking the socio-economic, institutional, and transnational forces shaping this migration trend, to contribute to a deeper understanding of how global digital labor flows affect both origin and destination countries.

1.3 Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the key factors influencing the emigration of Nigerian IT professionals to the United Kingdom in the aftermath of the pandemic?
2. What effects does this migration have on Nigeria's IT sector, particularly regarding workforce availability, productivity, and innovation?
3. In what ways is the United Kingdom gaining from the arrival of Nigerian IT specialists, particularly in terms of skill enhancement and industry development?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the factors influencing the emigration of Nigerian IT professionals following the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. To analyze the impact of their migration and absence on Nigeria's IT industry.

3. To assess the economic and workforce contributions of Nigerian IT experts in the United Kingdom.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is crucial for:

1. Academia - It advances research on skilled migration and brain drain in Nigeria’s tech sector.
2. Government - It guides policies to retain IT talent and leverages diaspora engagement.
3. Global Partners - It informs ethical recruitment practices and bilateral cooperation.

By addressing these dimensions, the study seeks to critically explore the socio-economic and institutional implications of "Japa" particularly as it pertains to IT labor migration

from Nigeria. The research emphasizes a comprehensive understanding of the forces driving this trend and its impact on both national development and global digital labor dynamics.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

This research focuses specifically on analyzing the migration patterns of Nigerian IT professionals to the United Kingdom during the post-pandemic period from 2021 to 2024. The study examines the push factors driving this skilled emigration from Nigeria, the pull factors attracting these professionals to the UK, and the subsequent impacts on both countries' technology sectors. The scope is deliberately narrowed to IT professionals - software developers, data scientists, cybersecurity experts, and other tech specialists - as they represent a critical segment of Nigeria's skilled workforce that has been disproportionately affected by the "Japa" phenomenon.

Some limitations must be acknowledged in this study. To start with, the study solely addresses the migration of Nigerian tech migrants to the UK, not considering other prominent destinations like the US, Canada, and Germany. This focus may provide richness in understanding UK-specific dynamics but affords limited ability to draw broader comparative conclusions about global migration patterns. Also, in the context of the study period (2021-2024), this period is likely to capture the post-pandemic migration surge, but may not consider the long-term trends that emerge after this period.

Many existing studies on Nigerian skilled migration rely heavily on self-reported data gathered through interviews or small-scale surveys, which often lack detailed demographic disaggregation such as distinctions by gender, professional status, or current country of residence. This methodological limitation restricts the ability to generalize findings to the broader population of Nigerian IT professionals. By contrast, this study employs a secondary data approach, drawing on large institutional datasets and published reports to provide a more comprehensive, sector-focused analysis of migration patterns and impacts, which is prone to recall social desirability biases. While this study provides a comprehensive overview of the sectoral impacts of Nigerian IT migration using national-level data, it does not capture the full diversity of experiences across Nigeria’s varied tech ecosystems. In particular, regional differences—such as those between established hubs like Lagos and emerging clusters in Abuja or Port Harcourt—may not be adequately represented in aggregate statistics. As a result, some localized dynamics,

entrepreneurial ecosystems, and specific community challenges within Nigeria's tech sector might not be fully reflected in the findings. Furthermore, the constantly evolving nature of the two countries' immigration policies and the tech industry means that some of the findings might become outdated with the emergence of new deregulations and economic conditions.

The study also faced challenges related to the availability of official migration statistics, particularly because there is no comprehensive tracking of Nigerian IT professionals as a distinct category. While broader migration figures are available, specific data isolating IT specialists, who nonetheless constitute one of Nigeria's most significant outbound skilled groups remain limited, making precise tracking of this professional group difficult. In addition, this research doesn't focus enough on the influence of remote work arrangements that allow professionals to contribute to both countries simultaneously, which represents an emerging but important dimension of contemporary tech migration. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into a critical period of Nigeria's digital economy development and offers a foundation for future research to build upon, particularly in understanding sector-specific brain drain dynamics in developing economies.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Empirical Review

This section reviews relevant scholarly literature that examines the growing emigration of skilled Nigerian professionals, particularly in the IT sector, while highlighting the socio-economic consequences for both Nigeria and the United Kingdom. Special attention is given to studies that explore migration motivations, digital labor flows, and the economic role of diasporas. Recent empirical work on post-pandemic skilled migration supplies a number of concrete patterns that bear directly on this study's focus. First, administrative data and policy briefs consistently register an overall surge in non-EU skilled work entries to the UK during 2021–2023, followed by a partial

contraction in 2024. Several authors attribute this pattern to a combination of demand-side shocks in the UK (labour shortages after Brexit, sectoral expansion in fintech and cloud services) and intensified push factors in origin countries (economic stagnation, insecurity, and constrained professional opportunities) (Migration Observatory, 2023; OECD, 2024). These studies confirm the macro-trend used in this thesis while also underscoring the limits of aggregated statistics for sector-specific analysis. Second, occupation-level studies reveal an uneven distribution of migrant roles across the tech ecosystem. Where occupational disaggregation is available (notably in the UK Home Office 2024 occupational tables), practitioners and analysts find that a plurality of entries are concentrated in software development, digital design, and analytics, while narrower specialties (for example, senior cybersecurity architects or IT managers) feature in much smaller numbers. This heterogeneity matters empirically because it changes the type of capacity loss felt in sending countries: losing junior and mid-level programmers affects pipeline depth differently than losing senior systems architects or R&D leaders. Several case studies of Lagos and Abuja startups provide qualitative evidence that vacancy substitution (hiring freelancers or outsourcing) has been a common short-term response to such losses, but with longer-term consequences for product roadmaps and in-house capability building (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023; Adegboyega, 2022).

Okunade & Awosusi (2023): The Japa Syndrome in Context

In their comprehensive study, Okunade and Awosusi (2023) explore the *Japa* phenomenon as an evolving migration strategy among young Nigerian professionals, particularly in the post-COVID era. Their findings reveal that deteriorating governance, insecurity, unemployment, and unstable academic institutions are key push factors driving the exit. The authors also identify postgraduate education in the United Kingdom as a strategic pathway many professionals use to permanently migrate. While their analysis offers deep insight into the general structure of skilled migration, it does not focus on the specific sectoral impact on IT professionals which is a gap this current study seeks to address by narrowing the lens to Nigeria's tech ecosystem. The post-pandemic context further amplified Japa dynamics. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the weaknesses present in the health and digital systems of Nigeria. Moreover, it revealed the risks associated for not investing in technologies and research (Afolabi, 2022). The resulting economic shrinkage alongside the lockdowns brought about new push factors, and in the meantime, developed economies such as

the United Kingdom expanded the Skilled Workers visa programs to fill the health and technology gaps. The combination of all push and pull factors resulted in unprecedented 'perfect storm' for mobility, with Information Technology workers being amongst the fastest growing migrant cohorts. This is emblematic of the fact that this migration of Nigerians is the direct result of global structural changes rather than domestically driven. There are, however, new developments, with the narrative concerning Japa is no longer limited to Nigeria as it involves the Nigerian diaspora.

In diaspora, participation in online forums, networks of former students, and even LinkedIn groups has popularized the idea of emigration as the new standard of career progression. Okunade and Awosusi (2023) state that the narrative surrounding Japa has transformed into both an explanation and source of inspiration for why people are leaving the country, rationalizing emigration as the only viable way to achieve success. The importance of this cultural narrative lies in the fact that it not only influences the emigration decision, but it also affects the mindset of the people who choose to stay, often building up the aspiration not to trust local opportunities. With the case studies and primary findings discussed, Japa emerges as a sociolinguistic case study on the phenomenon of mobility, inequality of class, power, and technology as one intersection crisis. While often treated simplistically in public debate, academic engagement demonstrates that Japa is better understood as the intersection of economic precarity, institutional fragility, and global demand for skilled labor.

The Role of Social Media in and Out-Migration Trend in Nigeria

Adegoke's (2023) work emphasizes the instrumental role of social media in shaping migration narratives and behaviors**.** Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and LinkedIn serve as digital arenas where users share success stories, visa tips, and lifestyle comparisons between Nigeria and the diaspora. The study finds that these platforms amplify dissatisfaction with local conditions while glamorizing life abroad, especially in the UK. For IT professionals who already operate in digital spaces, social media becomes both a source of inspiration and information, influencing decisions to pursue opportunities outside Nigeria. However, Adegoke does not explore how these digital migration narratives affect actual sectoral capacity or workforce depletion within Nigeria's tech space which is an area this research expands on. Moreover, the trustworthiness of social media stories is not consistent. Numerous social media success stories,

particularly in the context of migration, tend to tell one-sided tales. They disregard the underemployment, discrimination, or integration challenges migrants face. Such accounts foster what psychologists' term "aspirational bias" – the belief that migration is almost a surefire route to socio-economic advancement. Social media, in the absence of reliable state labor market information, migration policies, and relevant information in countries like Nigeria, acts as a substitute, albeit a misguided one. These tendencies have become worse in the post-pandemic time frame. During lockdowns, access to global job markets was restricted, making social media the primary source of information – and hope – for many Nigerians. The dissemination of information via social media was especially crucial as visa policies changed in the UK and other countries, enabling users to access real-time information. This illustrates the relationship between digital globalization and migration, further deepening the underlying inequalities that fuel Nigeria's Japa phenomenon.

SciDev (2025): Tech Migration from Sub-Saharan Africa

A study by SciDev (2025) reveals that Sub-Saharan Africa is undergoing a tech brain drain**,** with Nigeria being one of the worst-hit nations. The report estimates that Nigeria loses approximately 15,000 IT professionals annually**,** with a significant share relocating to the UK. This steady outflow has strained local startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), many of which are unable to compete with international salaries or provide adequate infrastructure. SciDev also notes a growing trend of outsourcing and reliance on junior developers, both of which compromise innovation and scalability. This assertion conforms to the growing reports of the Japa Movement's impact 'within the sector'. This particular thesis ii also seeks to address the loss of productivity,' and the related 'weakness of startups.' Within the Sub-Saharan Africa region, the 2022 Japa report by SciDev.net provides useful context for understanding Japa in the Nigerian region. The phenomenon is such that Sub Saharan Africa is unable to retain tech developers, of which almost 38 percent are employed by foreign companies. Nigeria however, is the largest contributor to the brain drain phenomenon. The most recent data shows that a significant proportion of this talent is captured by the UK's post Brexit Skilled Worker and Global Talent visa routes which targets, specifically, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and cyberspace security.

The data shows that Nigeria is in the 'core' of the suppliers of the 'IT brain' to the UK, thus revealing the 'local' brain drain phenomenon. This particular relationship, as asymmetric as it is, proves that there are strong connections between the two countries. In contrast, Kenya and South Africa's developers suffer from remote work contracts and a diversified global market. The more recent data on Nigeria illustrates how migration has dramatically shifted to the UK and the phenomenon is explained by the colonial relationship, the common language, and the strong demand for skills from the UK (UK Home Office, 2024).

Such statistics regarding the regional counterparts in the visa data to the UK also sheds light on the relative position of Nigerian IT professionals: the UK capitalizes on Nigeria's fragilities such as unstable power supply, low domestic wages, underfunded R&D while Nigerians interpret migration not only as a career strategy but as a survival mechanism. As such, SciDev's regional findings mirror the Nigerian–UK case, where migration is less a matter of choice and more a reflection of uneven globalization.

Brain Gain and Diaspora Economics

Docquier and Rapoport (2012) argue that while advanced economies benefit through cost-effective acquisition of highly trained professionals, sending countries often struggle with persistent skills shortages and weakened domestic innovation ecosystems. By contrast, Kapur (2001) highlights how diaspora networks can facilitate knowledge transfers and cross-border investments, potentially offsetting some losses through remittances and entrepreneurial linkages. In the African context, Berger (2022) underscores that such compensatory effects are frequently overstated, particularly where governance deficits limit the productive absorption of diaspora engagement. Although the OECD (2024) and the World Bank (2024) provide extensive data on migration flows and diaspora contributions, they stop short of analyzing the specific sectoral impacts on Nigeria's digital economy. This underscores a critical research gap that this study seeks to address by focusing on the technology sector and comparing the structural gains to the UK with the institutional losses in Nigeria. Despite the focus on the impact of brain drain on Japa, the emergence of new research highlights the more positive narrative of "brain gain" and diaspora economics. "Brain gain" describes the positive impacts that emigrant professionals may create for their home countries via remittances, investment, the transfer of knowledge, and the establishment of transnational networks (Docquier & Rapoport, 2022). With regard to Nigeria,

remittances surpassed 20 billion dollars in 2022, positioning the diaspora as a crucial foreign exchange earner for the economy (World Bank, 2023). These financial remittances help to strengthen household financial security, provide education, and support local enterprises, thus, partially counteracting the skill drain.

In addition to financial remittances, the IT diaspora, especially the UK based ones, participate through the transfer of knowledge and skills. Programs such as tech mentorship initiatives and digital start-up accelerators have opened ways for Nigerian professionals living abroad to provide training, consultancy, and even venture funding to entrepreneurs back home. As reported by the OECD (2024), Nigerian IT professionals based abroad are participating more in transnational projects such as cybersecurity and fintech innovations, thereby advancing digital partnership between Nigeria and the UK.

However, the empirical evidence suggests that the scale of brain gain remains modest compared to the scope of Nigeria's talent outflow. Scholars such as Clemens (2020) argue that while brain gain can mitigate some effects of brain drain, it rarely compensates fully for the systemic weakening of domestic capacity. In Nigeria's case, the departure of highly skilled IT professionals often undermines institutional development, leaving local firms understaffed and the digital ecosystem dependent on external expertise. The challenge, therefore, lies in transforming diaspora economics from a compensatory mechanism into a strategic driver of Nigeria's digital transformation.

1.2 Conceptual clarifications

Japa

The term *Japa* is derived from the Yoruba language, meaning "to flee" or "to run swiftly," but has evolved into a sociocultural phenomenon to signify the growing trend of emigration of skilled Nigerians, particularly young educated professionals, seeking better opportunities abroad (Falola, 2022). Unlike traditional migration, *Japa* encapsulates connotations of urgency and desperation, reflecting systemic failures in Nigeria's governance, economy, and social infrastructure (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). The term gained prominence post-2020, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated existing push factors such as unemployment, insecurity, and poor

living standards (Adegoke, 2023). Besides the linguistic roots of the term, the "Japa" phenomenon has been addressed in Nigerian publications and media as not just a description but a critique of government incompetence. Scholars and other stakeholders are increasingly of the view that "Japa" is more than mere migration; it indicates a deepening erosion of trust in domestic institutions and lack of opportunities available in Nigeria, especially in the education and employment sectors (Ezeibe et al., 2023). The discourse thus framed is situated in broader theories of youth apathy and the political economy of Nigeria, where exclusion on the basis of class, education, or geography creates a desperate need to escape. The concept also intersects with the global argument of brain drain versus brain circulation. It is argued that while Japa does drain critical talent from Nigeria, it simultaneously generates opportunities for diaspora engagement through remittances, the circulation of technology, and investment (Adebayo, 2023). It is still debatable whether the structural benefits outweigh the losses for Nigeria. For example, while remittances may bolster household income, they do not address long-standing issues like poor infrastructure or limited employment opportunities (World Bank, 2023). The Japa phenomenon also carries cultural implications. As Falola (2022) observes, migration has increasingly been celebrated as a marker of success, and this reinforces the so-called "culture of exit. This cultural normalization of emigration places additional pressure on professionals to leave, further institutionalizing the cycle of skilled migration. In this sense, Japa is not only a reflection of Nigeria's structural weaknesses but also a sociocultural process shaping aspirations and career trajectories.

Brain Drain

Brain drain is a well-established concept of migration referring to the large-scale emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals from a home country, leading to a depletion of human capital crucial for national development (Berger, 2022). In the Nigerian context, brain drain has shifted from being a voluntary pursuit of opportunities to a survival strategy, with the IT sector experiencing extreme, severe losses (SciDev, 2025). The phenomenon is cyclical: as more IT professionals migrate, the domestic sector's ability to train, retain, and leverage digital talent declines, further entrenching the structural conditions that drive continued outmigration, further incentivizing emigration (OECD, 2024). The term brain drain has often been used to refer to the emigration of professional, educated elites from developing to developed countries. For Nigeria,

brain drain has been most pronounced in the critical areas of health, education, and more recently, information technology (Adepoju, 2022). In addition to the direct direct loss of skilled personnel decimating a nation's human capital, the phenomenon generates indirect costs of loss of institutional capacity, disruption of knowledge systems, and decline in potential for innovation (Docquier & Rapoport, 2023). More recently, the literature has shifted from focusing on losses to exploring potential benefits through the lens of diaspora engagement. It has been posited that the emigrants would not be a permanent loss to the country of origin as they can contribute through remittances, investments, skill transfers, and through transnational networks (Mohan & Zack-Williams, 2021). As an illustration, some Nigerian IT specialists in the U.K. are increasingly using their positions to help link UK technology companies with Nigerian startups, fostering the innovation ecosystem of Lagos. Notwithstanding, the advantages of diaspora engagement are not fully accessible for all. These household remittances lack the structure needed to drive long-term economic growth, limiting their developmental impact (World Bank, 2023). In addition, the governance issues in Nigeria make diaspora investment, particularly in high-tech industries that depend on dependable infrastructure and institutional support, more difficult (Adebisi & Oyebade, 2023). Even more complicated is the diaspora's "dual embeddedness." While migrants tend to retain considerable bonds with their home country, their primary loyalty and economic integration is towards their host country. This means that while the UK benefits directly from Nigerian IT specialists through contributions in the labor market, Nigeria's benefits are indirect, postponed, and oftentimes uncertain (Iredale & Guo, 2022). Literature illustrates the paradox: Nigeria faces substantial brain drain with limited compensatory effects while the UK enjoys the stark imbalance of immediate gains. This highlights the stark need to analyze brain drain and diaspora engagement not in isolation but as intertwined processes resulting from global disparity and the failure of domestic policies.

IT Migration

IT migration specifically describes the movement of technology professionals, whose skills are globally transferable and in high demand (WIPO, 2024). Unlike other professions, IT migration is often facilitated by remote work possibilities, multinational job markets, and targeted visa policies like the UK's Global Talent Visa (TechNation, 2023). Nigerian IT migrants are typically young, highly educated, and career growth motivated, enjoying higher salaries and better working

conditions than available at the home country (NESS, 2024). IT migration, as a form of skilled labor movement, holds critical importance with respect to both intra-national value creation and international competitiveness. Unlike other types of migration, IT migration is associated with knowledge economies, innovation ecosystems, and strategies of digital transformation. For Nigeria, the emigration of IT specialists undermines efforts to establish a resilient digital infrastructure and achieve long-term national ambitions such as the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS). For the United Kingdom, IT migration has become fundamental in addressing the chronic digital skills gaps in AI, cybersecurity, and software engineering (OECD, 2024). This frame, then, understands IT migration not only as a labor market phenomenon, but as a fundamental facet of global digital disparity.

Digital Diaspora

Digital diaspora denotes the community of technologically skilled individuals from a particular country who are abroad but maintain active ties with their homeland via digital means. This group can play a crucial role in national development through knowledge transfer, investments, remote collaboration (ODBA, 2024)**.** For Nigeria, the digital diaspora represents a potential asset in mitigating the effects of brain drain by serving as a bridge between the local tech ecosystem and global innovation networks. However, the digital diaspora's potential remains underutilized due to weak institutional frameworks (AUDA, 2025). Technological and social changes are more pronounced in the digital diaspora because, for many Nigerian IT professionals in the UK, the mantle of mentoring, collaboration, startup funding, and knowledge transfer occurs remotely. Such a diaspora not only helps to maintain emotional and cultural contact but also offers a more purposeful means to strengthen innovation and development in Nigeria's tech ecosystem. Scholars argue that these transnational digital linkages have the potential to mitigate some negative aspects of brain drain by facilitating the circulation of knowledge, capital, and entrepreneurial opportunities between the host and home countries (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Kusuma & Edwards, 2021)

1.3 Theoretical Frameworks

To analyze the sectoral implications of Nigeria's IT migration to the United Kingdom, this study adopts a multi-theoretical framework grounded in migration theory, political economy, and development studies. This combination is purposefully selected because it allows for a nuanced

exploration of both individual mobility decisions and the broader structural forces shaping them Specifically, the study draws on the following interrelated lenses

1. Neoliberalism

Neoliberal globalization theory stresses the role of market liberalization, deregulation, and global capital flows in shaping labor mobility. Neoliberal policies in destination countries like the UK actively facilitate skilled migration via market-driven immigration systems. The UK's points-based immigration system for instance, the Global Talent Visa employs market-driven immigration schemes that prioritize economic utility over humanitarian considerations. Concurrently, Nigeria's adoption of neoliberal reforms has eroded public sector capacity in tech education and infrastructure, creating a "push-pull" dynamic where:

Pull: The UK has privatized key aspects of its immigration system, outsourcing visa processing logistics to commercial providers like visa facilitation services (VFS) Global to streamline application flows. This administrative outsourcing complements broader state-led strategies to recruit global talent by making skilled migration more efficient and responsive to labor market needs.

Push: Nigeria's allocation of 5.3% of GDP to education falls short of UNESCO's 15% recommendation, making Nigeria's universities underfunded and unable to keep IT graduates (NUCC, 2025). Neoliberalism offers a uniquely useful angle to understand the Japa phenomenon because it highlights the growing tendency to think about migration in economic terms rather than in terms of social, cultural, or humanitarian frameworks. In the Nigerian-UK skilled migration scenario, the IT professionals are not perceived social and cultural beings. Instead, they are regarded as economic assets, or productivity units, capable of servicing the UK labor market. This is illustrated in the UK's Global Talent Visa and its Skilled Worker Visa programs, which accept applicants on a preferential basis owing to their potential economic contribution in specific fields like technology, engineering, and healthcare.

Also, neoliberal globalization changes the purpose of education and skill acquisition in Nigeria to that of merely securing mobility, rather than a means to contribute to the nation's development. Families and individuals now invest heavily in credentialing, international training,

and English proficiency to increase their chances of being absorbed into the UK economy instead of fortifying Nigeria's technology ecosystem. This exemplifies how not only migration policies, but also aspirations are shaped by neoliberal rationality, which turns mobility itself into a form of capital.

2. *The Political Economy of Migration*

This perspective contends that skilled migration is not merely an economic decision by individual actors but also a political outcome deeply rooted in colonial legacies, unequal trade relations, and institutional arrangements that perpetuate global dependency (Wallerstein, 1974; Sassen, 1988; Castles, 2010). Drawing on World-Systems Theory and critical political economy approaches, these scholars argue that labor flows from peripheral economies like Nigeria to core economies such as the UK are structurally embedded in the global capitalist order. Nigeria's long-standing relation to the United Kingdom as a former British colony and a Commonwealth nation, continue to influence migration patterns. Preferential visa categories like the Youth Mobility Scheme continually target former colonies for flexible labor (UK Home Office, 2023). The political economy approach reveals how the UK benefits structurally from Nigeria's underdevelopment by situating migration within a broader system of global capitalist relations. Drawing on Wallerstein's (1974) World-Systems Theory, the UK operates as a "core" economy that continually extracts high-value human capital from "peripheral" economies like Nigeria, reinforcing global hierarchies. This process allows the UK to address domestic skill shortages and reduce training costs by importing already-educated professionals, while Nigeria bears the sunk cost of educating talent only to see it migrate. Sassen (1988) further argues that such labor flows are integral to how advanced economies maintain their competitive advantage in global industries — in this case, technology — without directly investing in or resolving the structural challenges of sending countries. Thus, Nigeria's persistent institutional weaknesses and underinvestment become functional elements of a global system that systematically channels skilled IT labor to economies like the UK. This dynamic reflects what Mignolo (2007) describes as the enduring **"**coloniality of power**,"** where the structures of global capitalism sustain asymmetrical relationships originally forged through colonial domination. Under this lens, globalization is not a neutral process of interconnectedness but a continuation of colonial hierarchies that allow developed nations to reap the productivity benefits of skilled labor without bearing the educational or social reproduction

costs. Nigeria invests in the formation of human capital — through its universities, families, and informal tech ecosystems — only to see these investments extracted by advanced economies, which in turn consolidate their technological dominance. This rearticulates the post-colonial critique that globalization often masks historical patterns of exploitation under new, market-oriented narratives. Results shows that approximately 58% of Nigerian IT professionals in the UK attended Nigerian public universities subsidized by the state (NBS, 2024), effectively outsourcing training costs to Nigeria. Additionally, English-language proficiency and familiarity with British institutions lowers integration barriers, making Nigerian talent a "plug-and-play" scheme for UK employers (Adeyanju & Oriola, 2011). Mignolo's (2007) theory of *coloniality of power* deepens this analysis by emphasizing how globalization perpetuates colonial hierarchies under the guise of modern labor mobility. While formal colonial administrations have ended, ex-colonial powers like the United Kingdom continue to economically benefit from the structural vulnerabilities of their former colonies. In the case of Nigeria, the systematic extraction of IT talent under the banner of skilled migration mirrors what Mignolo terms the "colonial matrix of power"—a global structure in which wealth and knowledge continue to flow toward the Global North, while the Global South remains dependent and institutionally weakened.

3. State Fragility Framework

Rotberg's (2003) state fragility index is a framework used to evaluate a government's ability to deliver essential public goods such as security, political stability, economic opportunity, and effective institutions. Applying this framework to Nigeria, several fragility indicators become evident in the tech sector:

Fragility Indicator	**Nigeria's Tech Sector Impact**
Security	Kidnapping threats to tech entrepreneurs' sponsors emigration (RSIS, 2023).
Legitimacy	78% of IT professionals distrust government's digital economy policies (Punch, 2024).

Service Delivery	Unstable electricity costs Lagos startups $29M annually in generator expenses (NESG, 2024).

Table 1- State Fragility Framework

By applying this framework, the study assesses how institutional decay catalyzes the migration of skilled IT professionals and undermines national capacity to compete in the global digital economy. State Fragility Theory is particularly relevant for explaining the outflow of Nigerian IT professionals in the post-pandemic period. The theory states that where a country is unable to provide basic functions like essential services, security, or an environment conducive to economic activity, citizens seek alternatives beyond borders. (Rotberg, 2003). In Nigeria, there are electricity shortages, corruption, underfunded universities, and poor broadband infrastructure—all of which hinder skilled professionals and showcase the country's institutional shortcomings. The emigration of IT professionals illustrates just how these weaknesses can perpetuate out-migration. Take the tech hubs in Nigeria. The government's failure to provide stable electricity has made it nearly impossible to sustain local tech hubs, Yaba in Lagos for example. Instead, many of these entrepreneurs and programmers are forced to either outsource work to other countries or migrate entirely. Additionally, inconsistent government policies and a lack of investment in R&D stifle innovation, driving technically skilled professionals to relocate to more accommodating surroundings.

Moreover, State Fragility Theory Migration can help explain this out-migration as a result of institutional weaknesses. Nigeria suffers from a lack of institutional capacity to enforce and digitally transform policies. Every IT Professional that leaves the country means that capacity diminishes further and further. This creates a cyclical effect, reinforcing instability and ensuring that out-migration remains a consistent element of the socio-economic landscape in Nigeria.

4. Anomie Theory

Originally developed in sociology, adopting Merton's (2010) anomie theory explains how Nigeria's systemic dysfunction drives IT professionals toward migration patterns, creating a gap between widespread aspirations for professional advancement and the limited legitimate opportunities

available within Nigeria's domestic economy. This tension, as Merton (1938) theorizes, manifests in several adaptive responses, including conformity to existing structures, innovation through alternative means, and deviance when legitimate opportunities are blocked. Many technology professionals still bear substantial personal costs when pursuing formal UK work visas. While employers typically pay the statutory sponsorship and skills charges, applicants often cover visa filing fees, national health system (NHS) surcharges, travel, and relocation expenses. For many Nigerians, this can total around ₦4 million — equivalent to roughly five years' salary for an entry-level developer in Nigeria — representing a significant financial barrier despite the long-term earning potential abroad. However, some professionals navigate the high costs and competitive barriers by leveraging alternative legal pathways. These include enrolling in relatively inexpensive postgraduate courses as a means to obtain a student visa, which later allows them to switch to a post-study work visa (Graduate Route) and eventually secure sponsorship under the Skilled Worker program. Others may capitalize on the less stringent requirements of certain short-term tech consultancy visas or intra-company transfer schemes that bypass stricter labor market tests. While entirely within legal bounds, these strategies exploit flexibilities in UK immigration policy to achieve long-term settlement with lower initial thresholds. Although the UK has proactively sought to recruit skilled workers through the Global Talent Visa and Skilled Worker routes, many Nigerian IT professionals still encounter considerable logistical and financial obstacles in trying to obtain these opportunities. Sponsorship requirements, combined with the need to pay application fees, demonstrate substantial personal savings (proof of funds), and sometimes secure internationally recognized certifications, often make these migration pathways inaccessible to early-career professionals. Many lack the financial resources or work experience necessary to meet these stringent criteria, effectively limiting such opportunities to more established or financially privileged IT workers.

This approach highlights a response to an exclusionary system - one where the formal pathways available are obscured by procedural red tape or obscured by suffocating financial constraints.

The trends of the most desperate people suggest resorting to deviant behavior, as shown by the upsurge of 15% in fraudulent IT certifications in 2023 reported by UK Visas and Immigration, as desperate applicants intentionally choose to fabricate documents in order to bypass

stringent migration prerequisites. All of these adaptive actions also reflect deeper systemic strains, serving as indicators of the weakening social contract in Nigeria—where formal education and professional skills no longer reliably guarantee upward mobility or economic security. Scholars have noted how persistent underemployment, institutional instability, and rising inequality have eroded public confidence in the state's ability to deliver on this implicit promise (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023; Falola, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2023) but in reality, despite a persistent shortage of highly skilled, industry-ready tech professionals within Nigerian firms, the country simultaneously faces a troubling 33% unemployment rate among tech graduates (NBS, 2024). This paradox reflects a profound skills mismatch, where the output of domestic universities often fails to align with private sector demands for advanced, practical expertise. Combined with stagnant wages, limited career growth, and a fragile business environment, this drives many talented individuals to seek opportunities abroad. As a result, Nigeria's labor market increasingly rewards exit—offering greater economic returns to those who migrate—rather than to those who remain and attempt to build the local digital economy. The anomie framework captures the moral ambiguity of Japa, where survival strategies start to enter the territory of systemic betrayal and expansionism, as instead of channeling their skills aimed at transforming Nigeria's digital sector, professionals focus on navigating the county's systems to escape its dysfunction.

1.4 Research Gaps

Although the current body of work examines the intricacies of skilled migration from Nigeria as a whole, some critical gaps still exist, especially regarding the Information Technology (IT) sector as well as the migratory flows between Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

Firstly, I observed the absence of substantial regionally focused work on the emigration impact within the technology industry in Nigeria. In particular, many works, including Okunade and Awosusi's (2023), consider a broad range of skilled professionals from the health, academic, and engineering fields which creates a rather metropolitan view and ignores these more marginal or under-resourced segments of Nigeria's tech landscape, whether geographically distant startups or informal digital training centers which are nominally part of the country's Digital Economy and its National Innovation System. However, their limited access to capital, infrastructure, and policy support often leaves them operating on the fringes, with minimal integration into formal innovation

pipelines. This is particularly striking since the IT industry is vital for Nigeria's Digital Economy and its National Innovation System (WIPO, 2024; NESS, 2024).

Secondly, cross-national analysis comparing host and origin countries takes on an unbalanced view. From OECD (2024) and TechNation (2023) they highlight the unique economic value that Nigerian IT specialists add to the UK economy, especially with regards to filling existing skill gaps and boosting productivity. Nonetheless, literature on skilled migration frequently concentrates on individual remittance flows or global labor mobility efficiencies, while rarely interrogating the broader socio-economic costs to sending countries like Nigeria. Classic analyses of brain drain (Bhagwati & Hamada, 1974; Docquier & Rapoport, 2012) largely emphasize international welfare gains or diaspora remittances without systematically accounting for how sustained outflows weaken domestic institutions, reduce national capacity for innovation, or impose financial burdens on states that invest heavily in training professionals who ultimately emigrate. More recent work on African skilled migration (Awumbila, 2017; Berger, 2022) has begun to highlight these imbalances, yet comprehensive evaluations of the developmental trade-offs for origin countries remain limited. This strain of debate tends to consider the phenomenon of brain drain predominantly as a gain for receiving countries, highlighting how advanced economies alleviate critical skill shortages by importing already-trained professionals, thus reducing domestic education costs and sustaining sectoral competitiveness. For instance, Docquier and Rapoport (2012) argue that skilled migration enhances global efficiency by reallocating talent to where it is most productively employed, often emphasizing welfare gains in destination economies. Similarly, Sassen (1988) and Castles (2010) document how migration flows reinforce the economic dynamism of core nations, with little substantive analysis of the compounded institutional or fiscal costs borne by the sending states. Overlooking the more profound impact on developing economies and the structural dynamics within Nigeria's tech ecosystem. Therefore, the discourse on the international migration of skilled labor continues to predominantly highlight the "brain gain" advantages for developed countries, such as alleviating labor shortages, enhancing innovation capacity, and reducing domestic training costs (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Sassen, 1988). In contrast, the profound long-term economic and institutional losses faced by developing nations like Nigeria, including weakened local industries, reduced tax bases, and the erosion of critical human capital needed for digital transformation, remain comparatively underexplored in mainstream migration scholarship (World Bank, 2024; Berger, 2022). This imbalance underscores

the importance of analytical frameworks that examine the developmental trade-offs and structural dependencies sustained by global labor flows.

In addition, the Nigerian digital diaspora's potential is still uncharted. There is scant empirical research on the contribution of Nigerian tech migrants in the UK to the knowledge transfer, startup investment, or collaborative innovation with institutions back home, even though Adegoke (2023) and the World Bank (2024) underscore the importance of transnational networks and diaspora remittance for development.

The study of migration patterns in Nigeria is of special interest considering the socio-structural disadvantages that are becoming increasingly pronounced in a post-pandemic world. The literature on skilled migration is notably more developed with respect to international labor flows into the United Kingdom. Recent studies have examined how the UK's points-based immigration system, sector-specific visa regimes, and post-Brexit labor strategies continue to position it as a global hub for high-skilled migration (Findlay et al., 2021; UK Parliament POST, 2023; OECD, 2024). These analyses go beyond general migration trends to explore the deliberate policy mechanisms the UK employs to attract and integrate foreign talent, particularly within its technology sector. On the other hand, research that focuses specifically on Nigerian migration remains relatively limited and often takes a broad-brush macroeconomic perspective. Studies such as Awumbila (2017) and Berger (2022) tend to amalgamate diverse skilled categories—including healthcare, engineering, education, and general STEM—without systematically disaggregating the migration patterns or impacts by distinct sectors like information technology. Even more targeted works on Africa's brain drain, such as SciDev (2025), primarily highlight aggregate talent flows and the implications for national human capital, offering minimal analysis of sector-specific effects on Nigeria's digital economy.

Okunade and Awosusi (2023) highlight governance failures, insecurity, and economic decline as strong sociodemographic push factors alongside the highly publicized, hopeful spins attached to the "Japa" phenomenon. Important as SciDev (2025) is in regard to the brain drain data of Sub-Saharan Africa, the study overlooks the reciprocal implications of the labor market between Nigeria and other significant endpoints, chiefly the UK.

Very few existing studies directly tackle the distinct consequences of emigration for the technology sector in Nigeria. While reports such as NESS (2024) and SciDev (2025) acknowledge talent outflows in ICT alongside other professions, they often do so only within broader analyses of skilled migration. Okunade and Awosusi (2023) provide insights into institutional fragilities driving professional migration but do not isolate the technological domain's specific losses. This underscores the originality of examining sectoral impacts on Nigeria's digital economy as a standalone focus. These studies seem to treat the class of professionals in healthcare, education, and engineering as a single grouping, paying little attention to disaggregating the subtleties, traits, and susceptibilities within the tech ecosystem. This is particularly troubling in light of the role of digital innovation towards Nigeria's economic growth and the vital role IT specialists play in national development, productivity, and the growth of start-ups.

There is a marked absence of studies employing a single migration system approach that systematically examines both sides of the equation, namely the specific institutional and economic costs for Nigeria and the corresponding sectoral gains captured by the United Kingdom's technology industry. Existing literature tends to either focus on the drivers and impacts of skilled emigration from Nigeria (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023; NESS, 2024) or on the benefits to destination countries such as the UK in alleviating digital skill shortages (OECD, 2024; UK Parliament POST, 2023). However, few, if any, integrate these analyses into a unified framework that interrogates the interconnected dynamics between sending and receiving states. This unbalanced perspective puts decision-makers and stakeholders at a loss concerning the comprehensive and complete understanding of the issues on the migration of skilled workers from the perspective and direction of the developing country, and the strategies that are proactive and equitable in nature.

Additionally, the literature tends to overlook the specific role of the diaspora and in particular the potential contribution of Nigerian IT professionals in the UK for national development through knowledge, investment, and innovation transfer partnerships (NESS, 2024; Okunade & Awosusi, 2023; Berger, 2022). This represents a missed opportunity for harnessing global Nigerian talent as a resource, rather than solely framing migration as a loss.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a desk-based qualitative approach, supported by systematic processing of publicly available primary data such as official migration statistics, labor market reports, and institutional datasets. It also incorporates secondary analysis of existing scientific literature to contextualize and critically interpret observed migration patterns and sectoral impacts. The objective is to analyze the migration flow of Nigerian IT specialists to the United Kingdom from 2021 to 2024, focusing on the effects of such migration on Nigeria's digital economy and what advantages were gained by the UK.

The emphasis on qualitative aspects permits flexible interpretation while quantitative elements enrich analysis with measurable metrics. The use of methodological triangulation for cross-validation by comparing trends from surveys with insights gained from interviews bolsters the study’s credibility and trustworthiness.

This approach offers an insight into the structural, institutional as well as individual factors influencing post-pandemic digital labor migrations globally. As a more descriptive view, this research design can be considered exploratory, as it looks into a specific understudied facet of Nigerian migration, the information technology professionals. Unlike most research that combines diverse healthcare, engineering, and academic professions, this study focuses on information technology, providing deeper understanding into intra-sectoral shifts.

This research design is also longitudinal in nature, as it looks at the post-pandemic period from 2021 to 2024. This period makes it possible to track the evolution of migration and observe the migration of people in relation to the Nigerian economic stagnation, policy changes in the United Kingdom, and the post-pandemic recovery in the rest of the world. The use of multiple theoretical frameworks, such as state fragility, neoliberalism, globalization, and political economy, also strengthens the design, as it shows that the results will not be analyzed from one single angle, but rather, they will be contextualized politically, socially, and economically.

Finally, the desk-based qualitative approach to the research design aligns well with the organized collection of primary and secondary datasets. By employing official statistics (UK Home Office, OECD, World Bank) alongside peer-reviewed literature, the research design ensures both empirical grounding and theoretical depth, striking a balance between descriptive analysis and critical interpretation.

2.2 Population and Sampling

As this study does not involve direct sampling of individuals, it relies solely on secondary data as its primary source. The sample population is operationally delimited to Nigerian IT migrants relocating to the United Kingdom within the stated time frame in addition to several affiliated entities, policies, and migratory labor systems.

Instead of gathering primary data, the study resorts to existing reports, statistical bulletins, scholarly articles, and institutional datasets which describe or quantify population movement and distribution. Data from the UK Home Office, OECD, World Bank, and Nigerian Bureau of Statistics have been used. These universes enable coverage of both trends over time as well as impact analyses for specific sectors without direct participant involvement. While the study does not conduct interviews or surveys, there are clearly defined conceptual populations. It includes Nigerian IT professionals living in the United Kingdom under the Skilled Worker visa, as well as those within Nigeria's domestic Labor market, waiting to migrate. This dual population ensures that the two extremes of the migration continuum departure from Nigeria and absorption into the UK economy are captured for analysis.

In this case, sampling is in reference to the availability of secondary data sources. For example, the UK Home Office immigration statistics record Skilled Worker visas by nationality and occupation, which serves as a proxy for the "sample" of Nigerian IT professionals for a particular year. Also reports from Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and sectoral surveys provide context for the home country. Aligning these datasets allows the study to capture the scale of migration and its sectoral impacts to ensure the results go beyond isolated case scenarios to population-level trends.

The emphasis of the population focus is more on the gaps in collecting headcounts and more about refined robust processes to determine relevant groups of professionals by the former through secondary data. This approach provides a structured lens for analyzing migration flows, while acknowledging the limitations that come with reliance on administrative records and institutional reporting.

2.3 Data Collection

This study exclusively relies on secondary data to support the analysis of migration trends and sectoral impacts. There is confidence in the information available through secondary sources as they contain reliable documents on record which can be accessed by the public regarding evidence to support description or comparison between countries and institutions. The study draws on secondary data, including official government records such as migration statistics from the United Kingdom's Home Office and labor force surveys from Nigeria's Bureau of Statistics. It also utilizes institutional datasets from organizations like the OECD, World Bank, and AUDA-NEPAD, as well as scholarly publications from peer-reviewed journals. These data sources provide the empirical foundation, while the broader academic literature is used to contextualize and critically interpret the observed migration patterns and sectoral impact. These materials facilitate comparative analyses between narratives from individuals and overarching geopolitical shifts in migration trends focusing specifically on UK-Nigerian labor markets. The framework for this study's data collection strategy is based on data that is publicly accessible and institutionally authoritative. For example, the UK Home Office Immigration Statistics provides an in-depth issuance divided by nationality and occupation for the Skilled Worker visas, which captures the migration stream of Nigerian IT professionals to the United Kingdom. For the Nigerian data, authoritative data comes from publications by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and federal policy documents by the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation, and Digital Economy that relate to the domestic workforce supply and the integrated National policy on digital transformation.

Moreover, data from international bodies like the OECD and the World Bank is also included to capture international dimensions of skilled migration, and for offering Nigeria UK migration some comparative perspective. These publications enable this study to contextualize the IT professional migration from Nigeria to the UK within the frameworks of international IT

migration. Also, academic publications from journal articles enrich the data set with conceptual and empirical explanations about the Japa phenomenon.

Since the study relies on secondary data exclusively, the focus of the study shifts to data reliability. In this case, data reliability would mean looking at data from varying institutions and comparing different figures to enhance accuracy. For example, visa issuance numbers from the UK Home Office are cross-checked against parliamentary reports and independent think-tank analyses to validate trends. Similarly, Nigerian Labor statistics are compared with global indices to provide a more holistic view.

This approach ensures that the data used is not only reliable but also sufficiently comprehensive to reflect both the quantitative dimensions which is number of visas granted and the qualitative implications such as the sectoral skill shortages and governance challenges

2.4 Data collection Instruments

Collection of secondary data is sufficient for coding, summarizing and even visualizing through tables, charts, and graphs and interpreting the trends, Microsoft Excel serves as the primary tool for this analysis.

Data is extracted from reputable and publicly available sources, like international development reports, labor concern indicators, government documents, and peer-reviewed articles. So its credibility is not a problem. Most notable include: The World Bank, The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, UK Home Office, and Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, TechNation which tackle topics concerning digital labor migration, brain drain and diaspora economy

Excel's was used to manage and analyze data into manageable portions and to create comparative visuals trend lines and sector specific breakdowns which paint a clearer picture of what happened with migration flow and change in employment dynamics between Nigeria to UK during that period. This study utilizes Microsoft Excel for data management and analysis. Excel streamlines the cleansing and organizing of visual datasets from secondary sources. With the program's graphical representation tools, raw numerical data can be transformed into line graphs,

bar charts, and even pie charts. These graphical representations elucidate trends in skilled migration over an extended period and across various occupational categories.

As an additional measure of credibility, the study also applies systematic document analysis as a research instrument. Official datasets from the UK Home Office, Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, and OECD migration outlook reports are systematically coded and thematically organized for visa issuance, occupational distribution, and sectoral impact. This ensures that there is integration of both statistical and policy-oriented perspectives within a singular analytical framework.

Furthermore, institutional reports and scholarly articles are subjected to content analysis. This research instrument aids in the identification and extraction of frequently recurring concepts, such as “brain drain,” “diaspora engagement,” and “talent flows.” These concepts are subsequently employed within the study’s theoretical frameworks. Employing Excel as a quantitative tool in addition to the qualitative instruments of content and document analyses provides the research with numerical rigor and a wealth of concepts

With this framework, the study is able to show how secondary data on IT migration from Nigeria to the UK is not only described but also analyzed in relation to Nigeria's institutional, economic, and social reality.

2.5 Drawbacks of methodology

Alongside other issues concentrated on in this research, some gaps in methodology cannot be ignored. One key issue is the availability and level of detail within data. Current datasets on migration trends, employment statistics and remote work often do not break down disaggregated by profession, gender, skill level or channel of migration which limits comprehensiveness regarding the IT migration phenomenon.

In addition, the accuracy and synchronicity of data publicly available for a specific time frame poses another challenge. These datasets are often released during differing periods or based on tech related occupations which is troublesome for precise national comparisons and longitudinal analyses.

In addition, not having any direct contact with professionals or organizations means that informal migration processes along with motivations, institutional grievances, or frustrations, are not captured within the data. Therefore, some interpretive depth may be lacking as a result.

The study also attempts to overcome these issues by employing authoritative sources alongside sophisticated analytical methods guaranteeing clarity, consistency, and credibility in interpretation spanning all sets of data. The use of secondary data can be a double-edged sword: it provides efficiency and a wealth of data, but also comes with its own limitations. Firstly, the research is limited to the data and structure of the official data sets available, which at times, does not break down data to the level of IT professionals across several years. This is less efficient than primary data collection, but the analysis is not as deep as it could be.

Additionally, secondary datasets can have overdue reporting, undercount, or classifications inconsistencies from the UK Home Office, OECD, and Nigerian statistical agencies. These data gaps and reporting inconsistencies could affect the accuracy of the comparisons made.

As an example, the use of Excel as a primary analytic tool, while convenient, would be lacking in comparison to other more specialized tools such as SPSS and Stata. Excel would be limited to the most basic of analysis such as visual and description while the more complex tasks of predictive and inferential modelling are not possible.

As a final example, the analysis of documents and contents run the risk of bias due to the coding and categorizing of materials as findings. In an effort to widen the gaps and bias from the findings, a mix of multiple data sources have been applied to the fetched data to ensure trust and correctness of the fetched data.

CHAPTER 3

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Data Presentation Overview

The key findings will be discussed as well as presented in this chapter. Constructed from primary information from development agencies and other international bodies alongside scholarly

sources, the analysis outlines the migration trends of Nigerian IT specialists to the UK between 2021 and 2024. Patterns in migration alongside the flow of skills and institution's impact are depicted using tables and graphs for clearer illustration. This section examines the emigration of Nigerian IT professionals to the UK between 2021 and 2024, emphasizing the trends of the Skilled Worker visa. The primary source of data for this study includes UK Home Office immigration statistics, supplemented by reports from other relevant institutions such as OECD and World Bank.

The analysis starts by presenting the overall trends of skilled emigration among Nigeria nationals, and later provides a detailed examination of IT occupations within the Skilled Worker visa framework. Year-on-year changes, as well as the distribution across different sectors, are graphically represented, while the further breakdown of occupations is explained in the accompanying tables.

The analysis is both descriptive and interpretive, using relevant theoretical concepts such as state fragility and neoliberal globalization. This is done to not only illustrate migration trends, but also to explain the factors and consequences of such migration on Nigeria's digital transformation agenda.

3.2 Migration Trends from Nigeria to the UK (2021-2024)

3.2.1 Skilled Worker visas issued to Nigerian nationals

Nigeria ranked among the fastest-growing origin countries for UK work visas following the 2020 points-based system rollout.

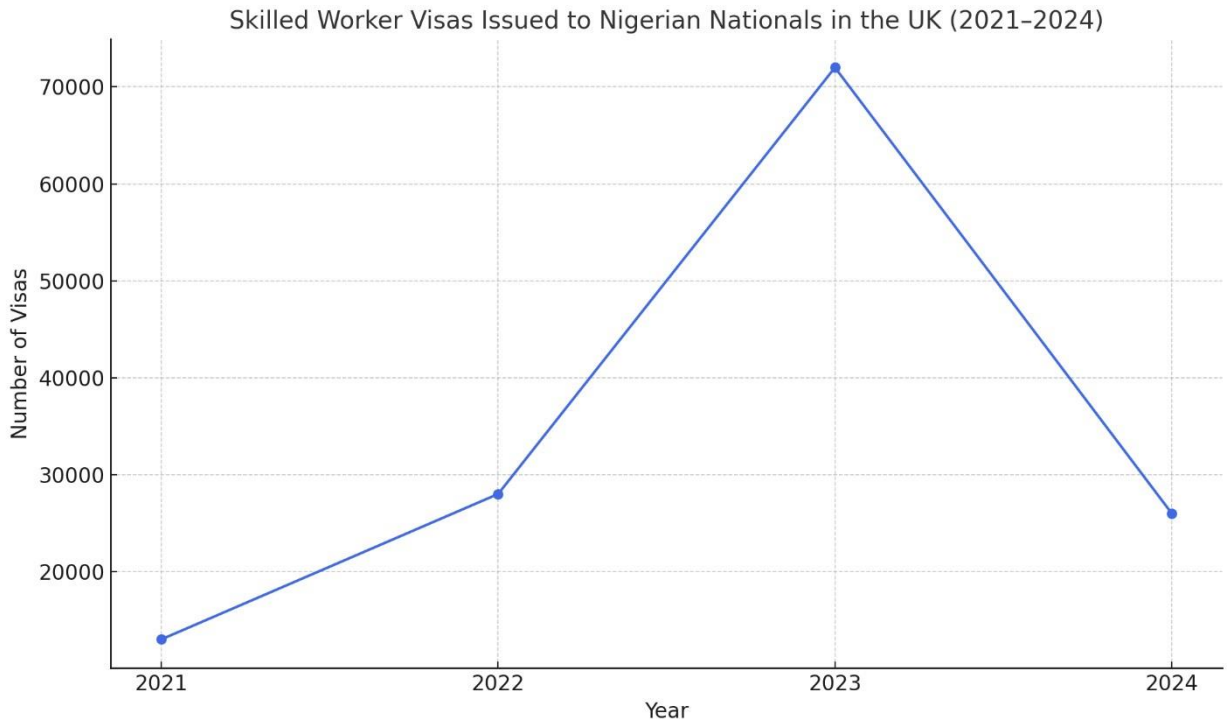


Figure 1Nigeria-UK Migration Line graph (UK Home Office, 2024)

The period between 2021 and 2024, the United Kingdom saw a marked rise in skilled migration from Nigeria. According to the UK Home Office immigration statistics (2024), the total number of Skilled Worker visas granted to Nigerian nationals rose from approximately 8,600 to a peak of 72,000 in 2023, before declining to around 26,000 in 2024 (UK Home Office, 2024). While this figure includes a wide range of professions—such as health, construction, and education—information technology remains one of the key sectors attracting Nigerian professionals. The interplay between structural constraints in Nigeria and evolving UK immigration policies underpins this migration surge, even though precise IT-specific visa data for 2024 remains relatively modest in official occupation-level records.

Rotberg's proposition under State Fragility Theory (2003) suggests that mass out-migration is an indicator of failing institutions. During this period lack of electricity, inadequate digital infrastructure as well as little funding for research projects likely added toward the spike for migrating IT workers. Peak migration in 2023 could suggest during peak frustration of IT professionals focused on enduring stagnating economy coupled with rampant insecurity and erratic government policies finally reached a breaking point.

Simultaneously Kotz (2015) highlights the insights derived from globalization theory - that focus on foreign human capital explains how developed countries aim to maintain international economic relevance. The UK's post Brexit policy changes which comprised widening eligibility for accepting migrants by extending Skilled Worker Visas created new opportunities allowing countries like Nigeria access into developed economies.

The 2024 decline may signal either a shift in UK immigration policy, increased barriers to entry, or changing risk perceptions among potential migrants. Nonetheless, the data illustrates how structural inequality between source and destination countries fuels asymmetric talent flows, reinforcing dependency cycles that disadvantage emerging digital economies like Nigeria's.

3.2.2 Skilled Worker visas for Nigerians



Figure 2 Skilled Worker Visa (UK Home Office, 2024)

Figure 3.2.2 presents a breakdown of Skilled Worker visas granted to Nigerian IT professionals by occupational category in 2024. The most significant portion was received by software developers and computer programmers (32%); with graphic and multimedia designers at second place (24%) followed by IT business analysts and architects (12%). Remaining shares such as cybersecurity, network professionals, and IT managers had far less proportion of total visa grants.

While this study focuses broadly on the post-pandemic migration of Nigerian IT professionals between 2021 and 2024, detailed occupation-level visa data by job category like software developers and cybersecurity experts is only available and disaggregated for 2024 through official UK Home Office occupational breakdowns. Earlier years typically report aggregate figures without sector-specific breakdowns. Therefore, 2024 serves as a representative snapshot to explore the distribution of IT migration roles and trends, while the broader migration volume from 2021 to 2023 is used for contextual and comparative analysis.

The figure stands testament to the sort of candidates being sought after from Nigeria, which corresponds with worldwide demand patterns. This also showcases why the UK sees such value in Nigerian talent: there is a clear stratification of skill level used to control migration schemes. It helps bolster the claim that professionals most able to compete internationally are getting absorbed into sectors overseas that need them most, thereby aiding sectorial brain drain in Nigeria.

3.3 Distribution by Technology Role



Figure 3 Distribution of Technology Role

Figure 3.3.1 illustrates the distribution of UK Skilled Worker visas granted to Nigerian IT professionals by job role in 2024. As earlier mentioned, the most dominant professions such as programmers and software developers hold 32% of issued tech visas along with graphic and multimedia designers constituting 24%. Other roles include business analysts, system architects covering rest alongside web designers and cybersecurity technicians. Notably, programmers and software developers account for the largest share at 32%. This dominance reflects the global demand for software engineering talent, particularly in areas such as application development, cloud infrastructure, and digital services—all of which are central to the UK's expanding digital economy.

Other roles such as graphic and multimedia designers (24%) and IT business analysts (12%) also feature prominently, highlighting the need for creative and analytical skills in tech-related industries. Less represented roles like cybersecurity professionals, IT managers, and network engineers appear in smaller percentages (4–8%), possibly because these positions are more specialized, require additional certifications, or are more likely to be filled by local or EU workers already in the UK system.

In the wake of Brexit and the pandemic, the UK's economy has faced significant labor shortages, particularly in key sectors. This has intensified the country's demand for skilled foreign workers to fill critical gaps in its workforce. Nigerian with a professional background, especially those educated in local tech centers such as Lagos's Yabacon Valley, are gaining prominence for their value and affordability.

The UK Home Office data (2024) shows that migration flows are not random but rather targeted towards specific sectors and shaped by recruiting policies. From a policy perspective, this reveals how urgent it is for Nigeria to retain its digital talent, reinvest in the country's innovation ecosystem, or risk losing innovation capabilities at home.

3.4 Sectoral Impact on Nigeria's Tech Ecosystem

The shift of skilled IT professionals from Nigeria to places like the United Kingdom has significantly impacted the local technological environment. Perhaps one of the first effects noticed is the lack of adequate qualified human resources. As stated by WIPO (2024), more than 50% of Nigerian technology firms struggle to acquire and keep mid-level software developers,

cybersecurity specialists, and systems engineers. This lack is both quantitative and qualitative in nature because many highly competitive professionals tend to migrate.

Consequently, the sheer number of outsourced projects significantly increases as Nigerian startups attempt to hire international consultants or teams in an effort to complete complex tasks which need advanced skills. This drives up operational costs while pushing project completion dates further away. Some startups have even opted to move their operations or incorporated status overseas so as to gain access to stable tech talent and funding networks, effectively draining Nigeria's homegrown innovation base.

Combined with the migration wave, these trends are creating a negative feedback loop in academic and training institutions. With senior people exiting, mentorship pathways stagnate and the quality of instruction declines. This is further exacerbated by persistent STEM underinvestment, obsolete curricular design, frequent university strikes, and other structural factors which make it easier for institutions to attract new talent.

In general, the focus on losing tech professionals has been narrowed down too much—this goes beyond simply workforce issues. For Nigeria attempts at digital transformation, this represents a systemic disruption. The departing talent reduces Nigeria's innovation capacity, increases competitiveness drag in Africa's digital market economy and undermines the resilience of its startup ecosystem investment lifecycle.

3.5 Economic Disparities and Institutional Agility

The disparity between countries' digital infrastructural facilities is equally important. Broadband penetration within Nigeria sits below attaining less than 45%, limited and unsteady power supply forces many startups to spend a disproportionate amount on diesel generators along with backup systems (ITU, 2023; NESG, 2024). On the contrary, UK's stable electric grid paired with almost universal high-speed internet allows easy working conditions for remote jobs, research as well as tech innovations.

The absence of stable administration adds a distinctly disturbing problem, including in the ASUU case. For instance, in Nigeria there is constant change and ASUU strikes for eight months. These strikes not only delay graduation but also tech training pipelines. Furthermore, domestic investment has been prompted due to policies lacking clearly defined frameworks

concerning support towards tech entrepreneurship which limits growth potential for digital start-ups because of compound barriers stemming from policy chaos interwoven with red tape.

Combining these inequalities reveals the fundamental principles of State Fragility Theory where it is assumed that failure to provide vital public services like education, safety, and job opportunities, reduces a country ability to capture and hold skilled workers. Nigeria loses out while the UK gains: a system strategically positioned to effortlessly absorb high-skilled migrants devoid of incurring the costs their initial training or development.

3.6 Discussion in Light of Theoretical Framework

The findings presented in this chapter reinforce and enrich the concepts that have guided the study, specifically State Fragility Theory, Neoliberal Globalization, as well as the Political Economy of Migration. Such theoretical frameworks are essential not just for describing the migration flows of Nigerian IT professionals to the UK but also for interpreting the consequences of these movements for both countries. For example, applying state fragility theory illuminates how institutional weaknesses in Nigeria create persistent push factors, while political economy and post-colonial perspectives help explain how the UK structurally benefits from this talent inflow, reinforcing global asymmetries. This theoretical lens makes it possible to critically understand why migration numbers peaked in 2023 and why the largest shares of Skilled Worker visas were concentrated in software and design roles.

To begin with, there is an exceptionally pronounced trend of outward migration, with a peak in 2023 and a reduction by 2024. This pattern strongly reinforces assumptions under State Fragility Theory. Nigeria's lack of basic infrastructural support or institutional frameworks—reliable electricity, internet availability, and long-term sustenance for research—and clear funding limits within its skilled professional retention regions dramatically impairs advanced professional retention. Loosely coupled funding models extended to higher education institutions along with pervasive administrative dysfunction have created conditions where emigration emerges as alluring; actually, vital for most people.

Additionally, immigration policies used by the UK like Graduate Routes or Scheme X as well as Skilled Worker Visa Gateways showcase signs of neoliberal ideology where human capital is viewed as a mobile asset who can shift borders over easefully compete for employment

internationally. The UK's reach to absorb offshore IT professionals without having to reallocate resources directly aimed at training local experts is striking in their initial training exemplifies how developed economies capitalize on global inequality to meet local labor demands.

This dynamic also reflects the Political Economy of Migration, where migration is shaped not only by individual aspirations but by structural imbalances between sending and receiving countries. The flow of IT professionals from Nigeria to the UK serves as a form of resource extraction—similar to natural or financial capital—with long-term consequences for innovation and competitiveness in the origin country.

These findings underscore a key paradox: while migration offers individual opportunity and supports the UK's tech sector, it simultaneously depletes Nigeria's institutional capacity to achieve its digital transformation goals. Addressing this imbalance requires more than immigration controls or diaspora appeals; it necessitates systemic reform in Nigeria's governance, education, and innovation ecosystems.

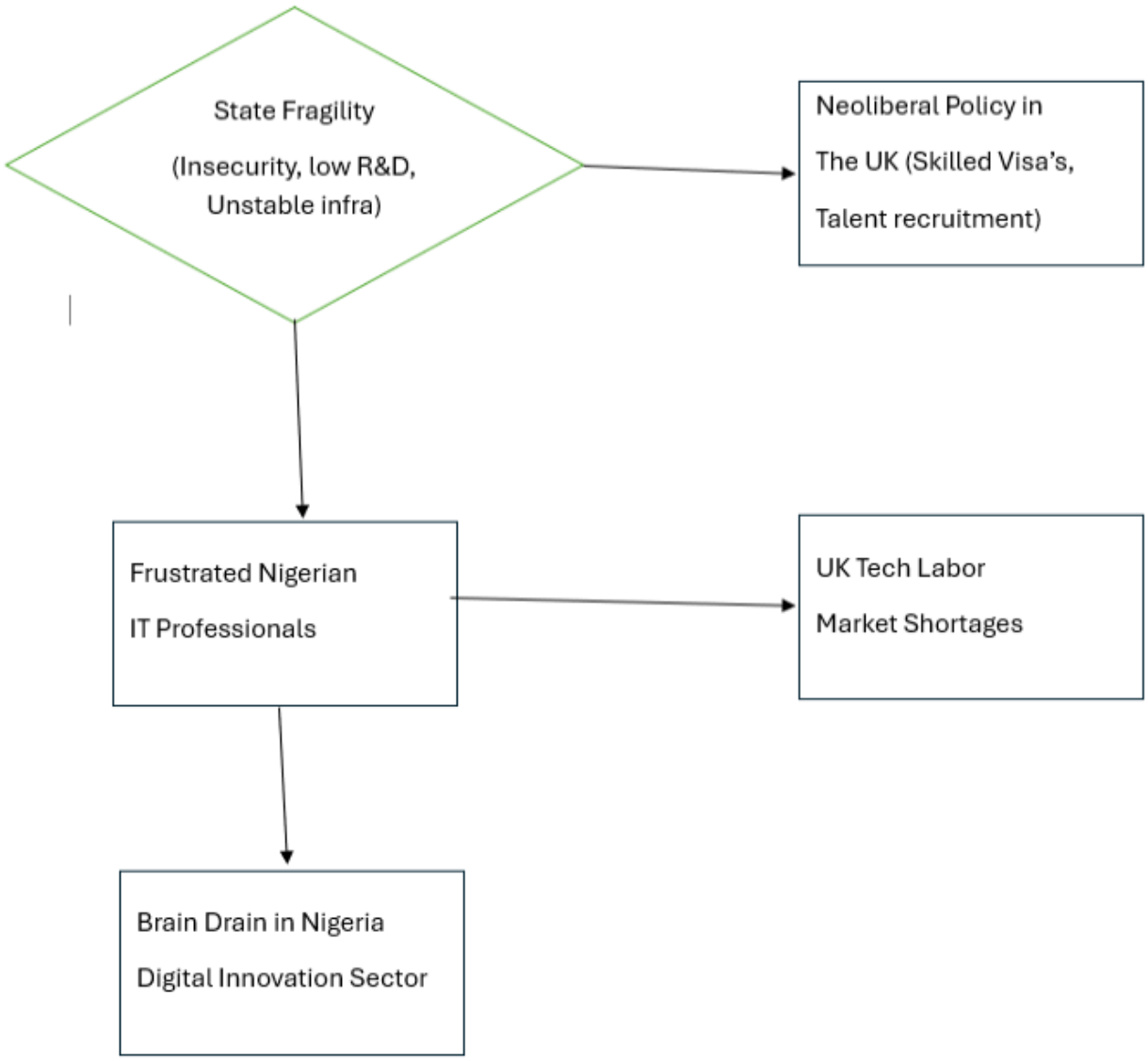


Figure 4 Institutional Weakness

Figure 3.6.1 illustrates the interaction between institutional weaknesses in Nigeria and policy-driven demand in the United Kingdom that collectively drive the emigration of Nigerian IT professionals. This dynamic reflects core assumptions from both State Fragility Theory and Neoliberal Globalization Theory, showing how structural inequality and targeted policy converge to shape migration outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATION

This study examined the sectoral impacts of post-pandemic IT professionals' emigration from Nigeria, also known as Japa, to the UK. Findings suggest that relentless and extensive digital brain drain IT professionals are increasingly relocating due to neglect and structural failures back home coupled with aggressive recruitment from other countries like UK. This has drastically affected areas such as software engineering and data analysis while simultaneously accelerating the growth of UK's technology industry and decelerating the progress of Nigeria's digital ecosystem**.** Keeping both Nigeria and the United Kingdom in mind, this study suggests a multipronged strategy based on the conclusions of the study. In the case of Nigeria, the immediate concern is improving the educational and digital infrastructure institutional capacities to curb the assertive factors of outward migration. In Nigeria, IT professionals would be provided with more favourable conditions to thrive if innovation hubs, venture capital access, and public-private partnerships were heightened. Furthermore, the Nigerian government can increase bilateral arrangements with the UK to promote regulated knowledge transfer systems to ensure that migration is a balanced exchange and not a one-sided loss.

As for the United Kingdom, the employment of Nigerian professionals in the IT industry helps to bridge the skill gap; however, ethical recruitment standards must be observed. The return of Nigerian professionals is also possible if the UK invests in joint digital education initiatives, creating pathways for them to work in Nigeria and abroad, thus aiding in the country's human capital development.

From the evidence provided, these strategies are recommended:

1. Policymakers from Nigeria need to address specific retention challenges through improved working environments, enhanced R&D spending, stable electricity and internet, streamlined bureaucracy for advancements in non-government sectors in order to better serve digital professionals.

2. It is equally important that policymakers design strategies aimed at engaging the diaspora remotely with mentorships programs at pre-set timelines designed for eventual return or direct impact on local innovation ecosystems.
3. Psychosocial factors around brain gain must be acknowledged by UK decision makers alongside providing support towards development collaborative initiatives like circular migration or skills-transfer partnerships along with sending countries like Nigeria
4. Academic institutions and development agencies should invest in more detailed sector-specific migration data collection to inform long-term workforce planning and policy design in both origin and destination countries.

In conclusion, Nigerian IT professionals' migration to the UK signifies domestic institutional weakness and asymmetric global labor markets. While individual migrants may reap opportunities, collectively this undermines Nigeria's capacity for innovation, weakening its ability to foster scalable startups and lead Africa in the region's digital development. To address this challenge requires multi-faceted approaches focusing on long-term solutions is grounded in structured reform, ethical recruitment beyond short-term fixes that stagnant talent mobility without national standstill. Without these actions, Nigeria risks deepening its disadvantage within the global knowledge economy. This report highlights that Nigerian IT professionals' "Japa" migration symbolizes a more profound systemic inequality of the global economy. The UK receives immediate benefits in labor market productivity, while Nigeria is confronted with the long-term consequences of a potential erosion of sectoral capacity and delayed digital transformation. However, by reframing migration as a circular and collaborative process, rather than a permanent loss, both countries stand to benefit. The broader implication is clear: managing skilled migration in a way that aligns with national development goals requires coordinated policy action, cross-border collaboration, and a deliberate effort to transform brain drain into brain circulation.

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