
“Japa” Syndrome: Causes, Effects and Solutions for Sustainable National Development

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijdes.13/vol11n58795>

Published December 02, 2023

Citation: ‘Olumoyo, A.E., and Abiri, O.C. (2023) ‘Japa’ Syndrome: Causes, Effects and Solutions for Sustainable National Development, *International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability*, Vol.11, No.5, pp.87-95

ABSTRACT: *It is no longer news that the ‘JAPA’ syndrome is a national issue which has paralyzed virtually all sector of the economy nationwide. The study assessed ‘Japa’ syndrome causes, effects and solutions for sustainable national development. ‘Japa’, means to run, to flee or to escape. This is coined from Yoruba language which is used to describe the massive exodus of Nigerians to other countries and search of greener pastures. The causes identified includes bad governance, unemployment, insecurity which has resulted into terrorism, banditry, kidnapping for ransom. Incessant strikes in tertiary institutions and poor working conditions. The effects of the mass migration include Brain- drain, lack of expertise or competent hands in various field such as health, education, technology, artisans among others. In other to find solutions to the problems of JAPA syndrome it was recommended that the government should brace up with improving the economic situation of the country by providing employment opportunities, by also encouraging entrepreneurship by giving loans with little interest to willing entrepreneurs. The government should improve the security of the nation so as to encourage investors and expertise to develop the nation’s economy. By providing infrastructural facilities and making the work environment conducive for work and the workers thereby reducing Brain-drain among others.*

KEYWORDS: japa syndrome, security, unemployment, terrorism, work environment.

INTRODUCTION

‘JAPA’ means to run, flee or escape. It is a Yoruba word which takes its root in the aspiration that young Nigerians have to leave the nation for good. it means the Emigration of Nigerians in mass usually for greater economic opportunities. Relocation is a natural human experience, there are various reasons for relocation which includes Medical, Education, Visitation, Tourism among others. However, in Nigeria, it’s a serious situation mostly caused by Economic hardship.

Recently, the pursuit for a better quality of life overseas has taken on an anxious, nerve-tingling quality known as ‘‘JAPA’’ as earlier said, it’s a Yoruba word meaning To run, Flee or Escape. There has been a general concern in Nigeria about the increasing desperation of people (old and young) seeking greener pastures abroad by any means possible. It has also been observed that a lot of professionals in the field of Education, Health, Technology and some artisans preferred to travel abroad to better their lives. The Japa movement is also seen beyond the desire for a better life, many Nigerians are fleeing the country in response to the failure and corruption of the public institutions that should serve them. Japa is a continuous mass exodus of the citizens to other countries of economic benefits to Nigerians. For instance, Nigeria’s economic downturn has been observed to be the key reasons that drove many Nigerians out of the country to survive. The health sector crisis which includes (unpaid wages, endless strike, and poor infrastructural facilities) are observed as reasons for brain-drain in the health sector.

For some people, their decision to leave the country was sealed after the Lekki shooting in 2020. Where peaceful demonstrations against police brutality led to several young protesters gunned down by soldiers. Odugbemi (2023) asserted that the future of the country is dependent on the youth population building the country their creative energies, innovations and capacities. The japa syndrome is seen as a response to the impunity and lawlessness in the country. It is also observed that there is a dislocation in our educational system. A lot of the young ones now go to Ghana because of educational stability. It is also observed that it is not only people with specialized skills in medicine, education, law and information technology that are migrating for better opportunities. We now have Nigerians of all kinds who do so in some cases using irregular means to work as cleaners, cab drivers, labourers, hairdressers and mechanics among others who put their lives at risk by crossing the Sahara Desert or the Mediterranean Sea into Europe. It was reported in the Nigerian Tribune, Thursday 22nd June, 2023 that a Tunisian fisherman, Osama Al-Dabibi told the BBC that he was hoping for a big catch as he cast his net in the waters of the Mediterranean only to find 15 lifeless bodies of drowned immigrants. Why should nervousness to Japa incline into such a enormous humanitarian catastrophe? This is too ugly for our beautiful world.

Causes of japa syndrome

The researcher identified some causes of japa syndrome in Nigeria which are discussed below:

1. Unemployment: Nigeria has experienced a rapid decline in the performance of its economy since early (80s). This has seriously affected its ability to generate employment opportunities for its labour force. Unemployment is a serious social and economic issue that results in a tremendous impact on everything but is often neglected. Unemployment is when an individual who is not employed and is seeking employment cannot find work to do. Unemployment is a key indicator of the health of an economy. It has been observed that unemployment /underemployment is one of the key causes of Japa syndrome. There are cases of artisans who after completing their trainings, doesn’t have economic means of setting themselves up, with the opportunity of ‘japa’

where some people sponsor them to countries like Italy, Dubai, Libya, Omar among others and are given grace to repay their sponsors in installments after working for sometimes in those countries have made lots of Nigerians to leave the country in the last few years. Some of the causes of unemployment is economic recession, security issues, bad governance/poor leadership, corruption and so on.

2. Andow,(2013) opined that unemployment is one of the major problems facing every developing nation which Nigeria is inclusive, statistics have shown that youths and service workers constitute two third (2/3) of the unemployed in the developing nations. Adewumi and Francis (2015) reported that unemployment is an indication of ineffectiveness of resources management, poor resources management which makes the state volatile with frequent social and political crises, brain-drain syndrome among others. Resulting from the foregoing one can therefore conclude that high rate of unemployment is a major factor in the cause of mass emigration of Nigerians abroad.

3. Security issues: another major cause identified by the researcher is security issues ranging from banditry, kidnapping for ransom, terrorism, killing, maiming, burning of properties among others are issues seriously affecting the country in the last 8 years. In a study on security matters and academic staff service delivery in southwest Nigerian universities, Olumoyo (2022) observed that the effect of terrorism to academic staff service delivery cannot be undermine, for instance attack of terrorist on April 29th 2012 at Bayero university Kano where 16 people were killed. Attack in Yobe state college of Agriculture in Gijba on September 29, 2013 where 78 students were killed (BBC Africa, 2012; Vanguard 2013) cases of kidnapped academic staff members are also reported which is also an act of terrorism as members of the terrorist group used the ransom collected from their victim to fund themselves , this act has been observed to create fear in the mind of lecturers thereby discouraging them from attending conferences, and seminars outside their areas thereby reducing their service delivery in terms of research and community services. Trump (2010) concurred that a place where there is security is a place of safety. Adegun (2012) sees security as the assets of every culture, and it unavoidably exists with social, financial, educational, political, and improving development. Security is a common story in the mass media nationally and internationally. Security matters are vital matters that can affect all facets of life.

4.

It is observed that some Nigerians mostly of the middle and high economy class decided to japa due to high rate of insecurity in the country, these group of emigrant move to other more secured countries not really to hustle but to secure their lives and that of their family. Terrorism has severely affected the educational sector in Nigeria as a country. Nigeria is developing country where virtually all segments of the nation are influenced by terrorism; yet the tarnishing consequence of terrorism on education is far more evident. Farah. K. Ghazala. Y., Muhammad .S, and Muhammad U.J (2019) in their work on investigating the implication of terrorism on education sector: A case study of Khyber Pashtunkhwa- Pakistan opined that terrorism is a rapid global cruelty and coercion that crashes the whole entity. Nasim et al (2014) In Farah et al (2019) revealed

that in terms of their education learners have suffered as schools, colleges, and universities have been continuously closed due to the menace of terrorist attacks. Based on the inference of Kazmi and Ali (2015) in a study on school terrorism that “as opposing to the natural or other non-natural disasters, bombing has its special effect in this contextual and among every other multi-dimensional terrorism parts, school terrorism is believed to be worst having drastic and long-lasting effects on represented community.

Khan (2013) also concurred that terrorism disturbs the growth of a country economy by decreasing the foreign reliable venture and resources development which otherwise decreases local venture and increases the business risk perception. It was revealed from the study of Farah et al (2019) that terrorism has brutally obstructed the education at every level. It was also revealed that terrorism affect the spirit of the parents. Thus owing to the dread of terrorism, a number of parents are cautious to send their children to schools, thereby reducing in low enrolment of students in schools and those who have the economic means send their children abroad. Olumoyo (2022) in her study on security matters and academic staff service delivery in universities in southwest, Nigeria, revealed that there is a significant relationship between terrorism and academic staff service delivery.

Terrorism is an unexpected, planned violence and intimidation which ruins everything. There is no solid, single, generally accepted definition of terrorism in the dictionary. In fact, terrorism has a long-lasting past and many methods (Nasim, S., Khan, M., & Aziz, S.,l., 2014). The study of Nasim et al. (2014) in their work on the Impact of terrorism on health and hospital anxiety depression scale screening in medical students, Karachi, Pakistan. asserted that “Learners have suffered in terms of their education, as schools, colleges and universities have been frequently closed due to the threat of terrorist attacks. Following these occurrences the educational curriculum then has to be covered in a shorter duration of time and sometimes the educational institutions are opened on holidays, such as weekends to complete the programme in time. This setbacks the routine of all students, their family life and social network.” For the last two decades terrorism has become the threat to the humanity all over the world. However, the word terrorism could means persecution, destruction, suicide attack and killing of people without any reason. It has also been reported in past that terrorism interrupts the inhabitants, destruct infrastructure, effect education, and causes a disappointment in economic well-being. The findings of Shany(2016) revealed that terrorism effect increases with the number of mortalities and decreases with the physical distance between the students and the attack location. One can therefore conclude from the foregoing that insecurity of the nation is one of the reasons for the mass emigration (Japa) of the citizen to other more secured countries.

5. Work environment: Safety at work gives self-assurance and enhances readiness for vocation in several formal societies. The safety degree at the place of work decides the degree to which employees could reach to guarantee the organizations goals and objectives attainment.

To be secure is to be sheltered from any kind of hazard or mischief or to be protected” (Masitsa, 2011). Work safety is thus the lack of terrorization of danger to workers’ life and possessions in the course of performing their tasks. It is as well the nonexistence of menace in the place of work in the course of trailing the organizational goals and objectives for instance the school system

A protected and fit place of work is a major of the success keys. USAID (2008) opined that establishing good health and security exercises in the schools, students and academic staffs are likely to be more stimulated and productive in their academic deeds. As noted by Rio (2011) that a single grievance initiated by a person could have unhelpful implications on the entire society for instance distension originating from science laboratory or loss of students or academic personnel during excursion. Thus, the school has to develop a seeming approach that is really comprehended by students and other stakeholders. This is noted on the reality that when protection and physical condition of a person are assured, job performance will reach the anticipated goals.

Global Health Security offers defence from communicable disease dangers. A disease danger everywhere could mean a hazard all over the place (Mostafavi, 2017). The main task of government is to shelter its inhabitants from health oppression by given protected foodstuff, dirt-free water, to mention but a few. Within the higher institutions of learning, health safety must be perceived as the priority which can improve or retard the service delivery of the academic staff. Health refers to the state of total bodily, psychological and public welfare and not just the ailment or illness deficiency (World Health Organization). WHO opined that a health assisting school is “one that continually strengthening its capability as the healthy background for livelihood, culture and functioning”. The features of a health assisting school should to embrace:

- Nurturing friendly healthy and learning surroundings
- Incorporating health and education executives, parents and the society in the attempt to make the school a dynamic package
- Offering healthy setting, agility – centered health education and school health services
- Aspiring to advance the health of students, workers and the society
- Building capability for safety, concord, refuge, learning, provisions, sexual impartiality, steady bionetwork, communal fairness and sustainable expansion
- Averting main sources of damage, illness and un-capacities in the school neighbourhood for instance, infections, HIV and AIDS, malaria, water borne diseases, injuries, malnutrition and drug and alcohol abuse.

It was observed that most of the work environment are not safe for the staff, to the extent that if an accident occurs at work it may be very difficult to assist the workers on time which may lead to death or maiming of parts of the body mostly in the health and engineering sector and sometimes in the education sector. It was also observed that most of the physical facilities in most of the public institutions are grossly inadequate and/or in a complete state of disrepair which has also resulted into job dissatisfaction which some people stated as one of the reasons people emigrant to

other developed countries. Poor and inadequate safety equipment in the offices, workshop and laboratories which may results into accidents has also been observed to be one of the causes of ‘japa’ syndrome. A lot of Nigerians migrated abroad because of the unsafe working conditions of Nigerian workers.

EFFECTS OF ‘JAPA’ SYNDROME ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Many who are fixed up in the ‘japa’ syndrome say they have lost confidence in Nigeria and trust that the country practically has no promises for them. While many have chosen the education and employment route to ‘japa’, others chose more exceptionally dangerous trips, either crossing the Mediterranean Sea the belief, therefore, is that immigrating to other parts of the world would afford them better education, better career opportunities, better paying jobs, and of course, a safer and more secure future for their children. These benefits, they believe are quite vague in Nigeria at the moment. Whatever the so-called benefits may be, the truth is that the emigration of qualified professionals has a far more damaging impact on Nigeria and sectors of the economy on a large scale.

1. **Loss of Talents:** the ‘japa’ trend has seen Nigeria lose a lot of skilled workers to the labour markets of the United kingdom, the United States, Canada , Netherlands and Australia. Many professionals, especially medical practitioners, bankers, academics and techies are leaving the shores of the country for greener pastures abroad. A report by the government of the United kingdom revealed that approval to Nigeria nationals for its worker visas increased by 11,854 between December 2019 to June 2022. According to the report, this is a 303% level change from 3918 in December 2019 to 15722 in June , making Nigerians the second- highest recipients. The enormous richness of Nigeria’s human resources is evident in the fact that western countries are welcoming large numbers of Nigerians as skilled workers.

2. **Skill Gaps in Organisations:** there’s no doubt that the current ‘japa’ trend is leaving a huge gap in most organisations. As earlier mentioned above, great talents have continued to emigrate from the country as companies are losing a lot of their best hands who take with them years of training and skills to foreign countries. This leaves a gap in many organisations which subsequently has to be filled by newer talents that may not necessarily be as experienced as those who have left these organisations. In other words, organisations have to repeatedly invest in the retraining of staff.

3. **Crippled Industry Growth:** Emigration has stunted the growth of some key industries in Nigeria. Imagine the health sector where the best doctors have emigrated, a tech sector where the best techies are expressing their talents in Europe and America, and an academic system where the best academics have taken their knowledge abroad. Imagine this scenario for every other sector of the economy. The African union stated in its Revised Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of

Action.(2018-2019) , revealed that an estimated 70000 skilled professionals emigrate from Africa each year. According to reports, Nigeria lost over 9000 medical doctors to the united kingdom, Canada, and the U.S.A between 2016-2018. With a depleting number of medical doctors, Nigerian annually spends between \$1.2 billion and \$1.6 billion on medical tourism abroad.

4. High Dollar Demand Depreciating the Naira: due to the surge in the number of Nigerians who need dollars for travel, the united states currency has become scarce, thereby forcing it to exchange for as much as #700 for a dollar in the parallel market. Rising dollar demand has put tremendous pressure on the naira and unfortunately, none of the policies introduced by the Central Bank of Nigeria to save the naira from a continuous fall seems to be working. The alarming exchange rate between the naira and the dollar has caused a rise in almost every imported commodity in Nigeria.

5. Loss of Tax and Funds to other Nations: The chairman of the Nigeria Diaspora Commission(NIDCOM), Abike Dabiri-Erewa had estimated that there are about 15million Nigerians in the diaspora. If we assume that half of the number are of employment age and are currently working, that would mean Nigeria is losing potential tax payments by 7.5million people who could have contributed to its economy. There is also the issue of huge money spents on visa fees and International English Language Testing System(IELTS) exams conducted by the British Council by Nigerians looking to exit the country in exchange for foreign education. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria, Nigerians spent at least \$220.86 million on foreign education between December 2021 and February 2022. Another report showed that Nigerians spent a sum of \$11.6billion (#5trillion) on foreign education between 2019 and 2022.

Though we have more negative effects of japa on national development, there are still some positive effects which cannot be underestimated.

1. The positive effect is the diaspora remittance inflow. Between January and June of 2022, Nigerians received \$10.11 as diaspora remittances, remittance from the diaspora play an important role in the lives of recipients and are one of the most important sources of external flows of capital and forex for developing countries.

2. Nigerians who travelled to foreign lands to work mostly returned to invest their resources in the country which also serve as means of boosting the Nigeria economy.

3. Some Nigerians who travelled through the study route also comes back better in terms of skill acquisition to develop their own sector of the economy.

4. There is room for training of more capable hands to fill the gaps left by those who relocated to other countries.

Recommendations

The following recommendation were made as possible solutions to the problem of ‘japa’ syndrome

1. The government should brace up with improving the economic situation of the country by providing employment opportunities for the citizens, also by encouraging entrepreneurship through giving of soft loans to young graduates and young people who are willing to acquire skills to develop themselves.
2. The federal government should proffer lasting solution to the problems of insecurity in this nation such as terrorism, kidnapping for ransom, killing, banditry, incessant strikes among others which discourage foreign investors from investing in Nigeria, which is also a major reason why lots of people are migrating to a foreign land
3. The government and their agencies and organisations, should improve health, education, technology, engineering among others thereby making the work environment conducive for work and devoid security and safety issues.
4. The working conditions of the workers should be improved upon which includes wages, salaries, training and retraining of staff, giving of medical leave, study leave, making the environment conducive among others to reduce Brain-drain syndrome among specialist in Nigeria.

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