Challenges and Consequence of Brain Drain in Nigerian Universities: Benue State University, Makurdi in Focus

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Abstract

This paper discusses the upsurge in migration (particularly of academic staff) of the Benue State University Makurdi. The paper submits that parochial invasion of the state's policy-making institutions, lack of adequate amenities/poor salary, lack of academic freedom, poor leadership, and discrimination in appointment and promotion are some of the causes of brain drain from Benue State University Makurdi. The paper further argues that the mass exodus of highly skilled manpower from Benue State University to other enabling environments of the world is a classic disaster in waiting because we must accept the fact that in a globalized knowledge economy, it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep skilled people in one geographical location, especially when their expertise is needed and better appreciated in other parts of the society with better enabling environments that let loose their talents. To this end, the paper suggests that rather than operating on the assumption that there will always be people ready to join the institutions as staff, strategic steps aimed at tackling the aforementioned challenges minimize staff outflow from the institution.

Keywords: Benue State University, Academic staff, Brain Drain, Challenges, Consequences.

Introduction

Experienced manpower effort is a central skill to any nation's development process which must be handled with due diligence, particularly for developing countries and societies.

However, political and socio-economic conditions are gradually pushing this critical development asset into other climes not just outside the shores of Africa but including within African societies. Concerns about this trend have been expressed at various levels but the concern of this work is on the academics of Benue State University Makurdi which is regarded as the citadel of learning and manpower development of not just Benue State but the Nigeria nation. Although some amount of mobility is necessary if African countries and Benue State University are to integrate into the global economy, the migration of huge numbers of students and skilled persons poses a threat of a "brain drain" which can affect growth and development. While there is little doubt that highly skilled workers are scarce in many developing countries, it is also true that many academics, scientists, engineers, medical doctors, and other highly trained professionals from developing countries work in the developed world. So many factors such as Personality traits of the individual determine the extent to which the push or pull factors will influence his or her decision to migrate to a superior environment. However, it is important to note that the exigency to nurture and grow the society lies mostly with the indigenes/citizens of such society as no genuine form of development has ever come from foreigners. It is on this basis that this paper seeks to interrogate the rationale behind the consistent move of both the teaching and non-teaching staff out of Benue State University Makurdi shortly after its establishment in 1992. For easy comprehension and clarity of purpose, the paper is divided into the concept of brain drain in the Nigerian context, causes of brain drain, challenges and consequences of brain drain in Benue State University, and recommendations.

Conceptualizing Brain Drain

The term 'brain drain' first appeared in a report by the Royal Society of London in 1963 in the context of the migration of British scientists to the US in the early 1960s. 'Brain' in 'brain drain' refers to any skill, competency, or attribute that is an asset. Drain 'implies that this rate of exit is at a greater level than "normal" or than what might be desired' (Giannoccolo 2006, p. 3**).** Various terms refer to 'brain drain' in the literature, such as 'highly qualified migration', 'skilled international migration', 'killed international labor circulation', 'professional transients', 'migration of expertise', 'quality migration', 'brain exodus', 'brain migration' or 'brain emigration', 'exodus of talent', and 'brain export'. Also, the flight of 'brain power' or 'loss of human capital' is used. The phenomenon of international migration of scholars is perhaps one as old as universities themselves (Teferra, 2000, p.7). The movement of teachers and researchers from one national setting to another—ranging from permanent relocation to short-term visits or exchange programs—is perceived to be a constructive dynamic (Teferra, 2000, p.12). However, when one nation becomes a substantial net exporter of intellectual talent, a "brain drain" condition is said to occur. The presence of brain drain suggests that the sender country is at risk of depleting its natural

supply of intellectual power (Schuster, 1994, p.34; Teferra, 2000, p.15). The use of the word 'Brain'pertains to any skill, competency, or attribute that is a potential asset. Meanwhile, the use of the word "Drain" implies that this rate of exit is at a greater level than "normal" or than what might be desired (Giannoccolo, 2006, p.13.). Linking the two words implies the departure of the most talented at an appreciable rate (Giannoccolo, 2006, p.18). In his comprehensive review of literature on brain drain, looked at definitions of the term over time and noted that, initially, the authors remarked on the social, ethical, and political aspects more than the economical ones as clearly shown in the following 1981 Modern Dictionary of Economics definition of brain drain:

> Brain drain: The migration of educated and skilled labor from poorer to richer countries. Education skill, which represents an investment in human capital, are usually cheaper to acquire in poorer, labor-abundant countries since their provision is usually a labor-intensive activity. Those with the skills or education then move to more developed countries where the return to their human capital is higher. Such migration is often encouraged by laws and institutional factors, as most countries look more favorably on immigration by those with skills than those without.

However, over time, the language around brain drain has been altering. To highlight the changes he points to the fact that in the OECD Report of 1987, there are two brain drain definitions:

Brain Exchange and Brain Waste:

> Brain exchange implies a two-way flow of expertise between a sending country and a receiving country. Yet, where the net flow is heavily biased in one direction, the terms "brain gain" or "brain drain" is used. A further term, "brain waste", describes the waste of skills that occurs when highly skilled workers migrate into forms of employment not requiring the application of the skills and experience applied in the former job.

The author went further to point out that in the late 1990s; authors started introducing a new brain drain specification, that is, brain circulation:

This refers to the cycle of moving abroad to study, then taking a job abroad, and later returning home to take advantage of a good opportunity. The authors believe this form of migration will increase in the future, especially if economic disparities between countries

continue to diminish. Such circular migration has been observed amongst Malaysians who had studied in Australia, for example. He concludes that in the 1960s and 1970s debates concluded that brain drain was conditioned by political and economic imbalances in the world system as evidenced in the work of (Bhagwati & Dellafar 1973, p.30)

He points out that these studies analyzed mainly least developed countries (LDCs) and emerging countries. According to the studies, the main motivation to migrate was the fact that the labor markets were incomplete and not able to employ highly skilled workers, and the effects of these migrations were bad for the development of the sending countries (Giannoccolo, 2006, p.22). He further states that scholars of the time suggested that the solution to the effects of migration was to introduce brain drain taxes to compensate for the negative externalities of brain drain.

On the other hand, he argues that in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the main motivation to migrate was linked to individual aspects (income, social, private) and the effects on of these migrations was not certain, they can be bad (brain drain) or good (brain gain). The the solution offered was to create individual incentives for workers to come back, an international coordination and, when it is possible, to create the conditions to have a brain gain other than brain drain (Giannoccolo, 2006, p.32)

Brief History of the Benue State University

Benue State University was established by the Benue State Government with the enactment of the Benue State University Edict No. 1 of 1991. The University took off in the 1992/93 academic year with four faculties, namely, Arts, Education, Science, and Social Sciences. Two Faculties, Law and Management Sciences came on stream in the 1993/94 academic year with the Faculty of Environmental Sciences in the 2014/2015 academic session. The postgraduate school took off in the 1998/1999 academic year while the College of Health Sciences was established in the 2003/2004 academic session. The College has graduated three sets of Medical Doctors since 2015 and more will be graduated in subsequent years as the University Management and State Government are committed to ensuring that Medical Students graduate within record time.

The University took off Nineteen years ago during the tenure of the Late Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu as Executive Governor of Benue State. Adasu, therefore, became the first Visitor to the University. the establishment of Benue State University in 1999/93 did not only come as a relief to Benue indigenes who suffer terrible hardship in pursuing and securing admission in both States and Federal Universities but also a serves as job creating an avenue for the teaming unemployed population of Benue State Indigenes. To ensure

stability and continuity, many Benue indigenes who were gainfully employed in other states both at the federal and state level, had to resign their appointment to come back home to help grow the nascent and only state-owned university north of Nigeria at that time. With the hope that as the saying goes "Home is the Best"

Brain Drain from Benue State University

Although a paper by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research in 1978 dramatically changed the theoretical framework of the brain drain discussion as the paper stated that high-skilled emigrants return home later (Brandi 2001, p.17.). Since the late 1980s, scholars have shifted their attention from the migration of highly skilled individuals to 'labor market mobility'. So, seemingly the problem of brain drain in the short run becomes harmless skill mobility when viewed within a longer time perspective. In line with this shift in perspective, the terminology has changed to include 'brain circulation', 'brain gain', and 'brain exchange' (Köser-Akçapar 2006, p.3). In the 1990s, the most common topic in the literature became the potential positive externalities for the sending countries, referred to as the 'brain gain'. (Docquier and Rapoport, 2012, p.21.) rightly argue that the brain drain creates winners and losers among developing countries. They go on to argue that 'certain source-country characteristics in terms of governance, technological distance, demographic size, and interactions between these, are associated with the ability of a country to capitalize on the incentives for human capital formation in a context of migration and to seize the global benefits from having a skilled, educated diaspora' (Docquier and Rapoport 2012, p. 725). There are some specific gains for the sending countries as noted by Gibson and McKenzie 2012, p.79.)

First, the brain drain may raise human capital and thereby stimulate economic growth by providing a positive signal that motivates others in the sending country to acquire more education (Beine et al. 2001, p.46.)

Second, the emigrants can contribute to the sending country through remittances or by providing essential inputs to new businesses and activities. At this point, it is important to note the case of Nigeria, a major sending country with millions of citizens living abroad. Although channeling economic remittances to Nigeria for economic development was a key strategy in the past, there is a considerable decline in the importance of remittances as the economy grew significantly, and remittances turn out to be a negligible part of it. However, it is important to note that brain drain can also have negative effects on the sending country or society as causes of migration differs just as we will see in the case of Benue State University.

Causes of Brain Drain from Benue State University

Naturally, there is the desire to go to countries that could pay for and utilize the competitive skills of intellectuals and professionals. A brain drain can result from turmoil within a nation, the existence of favorable professional opportunities in other countries, or a desire to seek a higher standard of living. Contemporary researchers of International Migration have blamed the phenomenon of brain drain on one economic force and the insatiable demand for labor in the oil-exporting capital-rich states (Evaristus E, 2013, p.41.) There are also push and pull factors. The push factors are the depressing characteristics in the countries of origin which produce emigration. They include a lack of employment opportunities, political instability, lack of research facilities, underemployment, etc. The pull factors are the attractive features in the countries of destination and they include a higher standard of living, better opportunity for higher education, proper value for intellectual and professional worth, and easy access to inputs for satisfying job, opportunities (Esther O, 2019, p.19**)**. The euphoria that followed the establishment of the Benue State University and the enthusiasm with which many of the indigenes and other professionals from other parts of the county brought in to serve gradually began to die down. Leading to a mass migration of most staff to other Universities at both state and Federal levels some of these challenges include:

Discrimination along the Ethnic Line: it is worthy of note that Benue State is made up of many ethnic nationalities prominent among them are the Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Hausa, Jukun, Etilo, Akwaya, and Abakwa. Among these ethnic groups, the Tiv and Idoma are the most dominant. While the Tiv comes first, the Idoma is second in terms of population and land mass area occupation of the state. In a fair and equitable society, it is expected that whatever positions (particularly juice ones) should be shared or rotated among the ethnic groups in other to enhance a sense of ownership and belonging among the ethnic groups. However, the plot to circumvent other ethnic groups by the most dominant in terms of positions and appointments has led to internal wrangling resulting in the mass movement of many staff from Benue State University. Adducing this situation with regards to the Idoma Ethnic Group, (Abutu, F. 2012, p. 215) says

> : "…. The most baffling one is the inability of the Idoma intellectual elites to produce the Vice Chancellor of Benue State University since its creation in 1992. Even though, Idomaland has a host of Intellectuals that are making waves within and outside the State. In fact to further show the clear level of marginalization in the institution…."

It is important to note that although this marginalization is not limited to the Idoma ethnic group alone, the ratio to other groups is far less when compared with that of the Idoma. The persistence of this situation has led many Idoma staff (particularly the pioneer ones) to seek better opportunities outside the State University. Therefore, there is a compelling need to make the psycho-social environment conducive. In this regard, there should be proper appreciation and recognition for intellectual and professional worth and demystifying the fallacies girdle tribalism and nepotism over intellectual and professional worth in the University; by addressing and reviewing all the various policies that have triggered the brain drain of intellectuals from the University.

Maladministration: Closely related to the above, is the case of eminent maladministration within the university system. It is widely acknowledged that human, social, and institutional capacity are central to successful development with education being a key component in building their capacity (Nunn, 2005**,** p. 33.)**.** However, capacity building can only thrive in a favorable administrative atmosphere where proper management of both human and material resources is in place. The case of Benue State University is quit**e** incoherent. Many cases abhor where junior staff is appointed and placed in a higher administrative office above his seniors not because he is more qualified or merits the position but because he or she is connected to the powers that be within or outside the institution. Reacting to the above submission, Gwaza Robert said:

> If nothing is done to curb the high level of maladministration and political interference in the management of Benue State University, a time will come when the University will not only lose its capable manpower but also its relevance to society. The sequence of recruitments and appointment of incompetent staff both teaching and none teaching added to the lack of consideration of merit in the placement of official positions is a major source of discouragement to many staff who are only bidding their time for a favorable opportunity to leave the institution.

The above statement portrays brain drain as a product of bad governance. It is also a product of structural inequality in the political economy of Nigeria where those who control political power aggregate economic power to themselves through corruption. Hence, the enthronement of good governance in and outside the University anchored on the principles of the rule of law, a high level of integrity, transparency, probity, and accountability becomes imperative (Evaristus E, 2013,p.23.).

Delay in Promotion and Retention of Staff: In the university system, the academic staff plays a very important role in the sustainability and development of the University. Apart

from lecturing, researching, and community development, (Albert H. C, 2005, p.74.) was very sure to state that lecturers or academic staff educate and develop students to the point of judging them fit for the award of degrees, diplomas, and certificates. (Murakemi Y. 2009, p.55.) revealed additionally that academic staff participates in decision-making by attending departmental meetings, faculty board meetings, and senate meetings where plans and programs of the University are drawn up. Through the resources made available to academic staff, teaching, and learning can be achieved and students are prepared as finished products for the task of serving their societies. According to Evaristus Elechi Emeghara (2013, p. 53.) curbing brain drain in Nigeria, especially in the university system is by putting in place staff retention programs. This entails adopting measures capable of dissuading those still in the system from thinking about leaving. One such measure is by providing deserving individuals with career opportunities as well as allowing them to prove their mettle. Another is the promotion of existing staff that have proven adequate academic excellence to senior lecturers, readers, and/or professors. The entire above is capable of rejuvenating staff morale necessary for higher productivity.

Consequences of Brain Drain from Benue State University

As stated in our conceptual clarification, brain drain is the movement of highly qualified individuals from their home countries or places of service to developed countries or other more favorable climes to reach greater opportunities in their field of specialization and/or to have better living conditions and lifestyles. Migration of highly skilled workforce from developing countries to advanced countries is not a new phenomenon. Having reviewed four decades of economic research on the brain drain, Docquier and Rapoport (2012, p.724) conclude that 'high-skill migration is becoming a dominant pattern of international migration and a major aspect of globalization'.

The brain drain from developing countries has accelerated over the last decade due to the growth of information and knowledge-intensive activities. Also, the developed countries have actively encouraged the emigration of skilled labor by utilizing different incentives, including the use of temporary skilled migrant visas (Commander et al. 2002 p.15.), which provides a comprehensive survey of the brain drain in the economic models.

- The first group of studies focuses on the effect of brain drain on the welfare of countries in terms of costs in the national accounts.
- The second group of studies deals with the role of education, and its effect on development, as education is the key element of innovation and technology, which are viewed as engines of economic growth.
- Another section of the literature examines the role of the brain drain in international commerce, considering its impact on some important

production factors. A significant portion of the literature focuses on the consequences of the brain drain on taxation.

Loss of Capable Hands: The brain drain is considered to be one of the most detrimental aspects of international migration from the viewpoint of the home country. The early studies in the brain drain literature in the 1960s argued that brain drain would reduce the overall welfare of the sending countries. This is because the high-skilled emigrants acquired partly public education and had acquired. Ideally, skilled labor is of crucial importance for developing countries to overcome the social and institutional barriers to success in development. In addition to this Nunn (2005,p.47.) reported that most contemporary economic theories of growth highlight the key importance of skills to economic performance and development potential hence when these skills are eluded as a result of brain drain then there is no economic performance and development potential. In this context, the loss of skilled labor as a result of brain drain is of vital importance for development and development potential. For example, the loss of teachers (Academic staff) undermines the ability of the University Education System to function to achieve its objectives of teaching (lecturing) and research, and community Academic staff in higher institutions are nature specialists. In that, they have acquired specialized knowledge that not everyone has acquired it. These specialized fields are doctors, engineers, accountants, mathematicians, lawyers, and computer scientists among others who are employed to lecture in higher institutions.

Sometimes, it is always very difficult to fill the vacuum when the said discipline becomes vacant. While these specialized academic staffs were around with their students, they created a great impact on the students hence such acts changed the mindset or the academic perception of the students to do better. Why? The academic staff knew the course contents and their lecturing was exemplary. If such academic staff planned to leave for a "greener pasture", one way or the other, it affects the students who were studying under them. Since the course has not gotten enough specialized and competent lectures like Mr. Z, The students begin to dwindle in knowledge. Brain drain refers to the emigration of intelligent, well-educated individuals to somewhere for better pay or conditions, causing the place they came from to lose skilled people or brains. The brain drain of skilled workers depletes the stock of professionals in the source institution. Brain drain results in a talent shortage in the home institution or university in the sense that the educated intellectual and professional instead of serving their university prefer to work for the developed nations, other universities, or parastatals for the sake of better pay and standard of living or any other reason.

This is seen in the definition that brain drain is the mass exodus of highly trained and well-experienced academics from countries with poor conditions of service to those with better work conditions in search of greener pastures **(**Esther, O. 2019. P.59**)**. Explaining further she observed that brain drain has placed the academic departments of the Nigerian Universities in a state of chaos and no direction. Many departments of Nigerian universities have lost the middle cadre of their lecturers to brain drain while most of the junior lecturers were left behind **(Esther O, 2019, P.70.)**. However, the universities have been unable to retain sufficient academic staff which constitutes the backbone of development and expansion of any academic institutions and which makes it difficult to attain maximum efficiency and effectiveness in the field of teaching, research, and public services. Above a certain level, brain drain reduces the stock of human capital and induces occupational distortions and the lack of job opportunities, lack of job satisfaction and fear of professional atrophy are reasons for the brain drain in Nigerian universities (Esther Ogbu, 2019.P.73).

Undoubtedly, with the flight of seasoned intellectuals and professionals to other countries due mainly to better opportunities, the GDP of the receiving countries releasing countries (Nigeria in particular) are automatically the losers (Evaristus E, 2013, P.44). Other negative consequences of brain drain include: it increases the level of dependence on foreign aid by Nigerian government; it costs Nigeria billions of naira (huge foreign exchange) to replace Nigerians with expatriates from the West; it brings about the separation of family members and leads to less adequate family cohesion thereby promoting delinquency (Evaristus E, 2013, P.50).

Low Student Enrollment: The media is washed with a myriad of write-ups ranging from questioning the need for why Benue State University, BSU will now be begging for the population at this time and whether it's timely or not and whether students have been called different names most especially in our trying days under ASUU strike, however, let me address a few issues. Reacting to this scenario, TernaShima said:

> Why will Benue State University not be begging for the population as it drops from 37500 under Prof Moses Kembe down to 15700 Students? Shamefully BSU JAMB cutoff point is now 150. All these are a result of many factors ranging from school fee increments and flight of capable Academic staff to Federal Universities and Universities overseas because of the uncomfortable clime here.

Decrying this piteous situation of Nigerian Universities Evaristus, E. (2013, P. 12) avers that the mass movement of highly skilled and seasoned academics from Nigeria's tertiary institutions (particularly universities) to overseas countries for greener pasture has certainly adversely affected the quality of outputs from the institutions. He explains further that akin to the issue of fall in the standard of education is that of reduction in the quality of skilled manpower in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Ipso facto, there is a mass exodus of seasoned intellectuals from these institutions (especially the ivory tower) to other sectors of the economy within the country or other countries for greener pastures. It is hardly surprising, that the quality and quantity of academic staff will be considerably reduced (Evaristus, E, 2013, P. 18).

There is no gainsaying the fact that like other universities in Nigeria, brain drain has seriously retarded the socioeconomic and technological growth and development of Benue State University, Makurdi. This is by depleting her natural supply of intellectual and valuable manpower as well as students' intake. Evidence abounds to show that there are many talented and well-educated intellectuals and professionals from the University (especially academics) working and living in other states of the nation and overseas (especially in the West) and contributing meaningfully to the economies of overseas countries (particularly the industrialized nations of the North) where the vast majority of them are domiciled. By so doing, the West has become the major beneficiary of their talents (Evaristus, E. 2013, p. 39).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded from the above that although brain drain seems to be a universal phenomenon, it is anti-developmental and has been a great constraint on the development of any institution, community, or nation. It is detrimental to the growth potential of the home, institution, community, or country and the welfare of those left behind. Hence, the ugly story about the brain drain in Benue State University is that the custodians of knowledge who could transform the institution are scattered all over the world due to the menace of brain drain. The University is been denied the services and expertise the professionals would have otherwise provided. The institution is a hotbed of brain drain in the country. For any meaningful development to be achieved this growing trend of migration of competent academics must be curtailed. Discrimination along the ethnic line has been pointed out as a major factor responsible for the brain drain from Benue State University with implications for underdevelopment ultimately taking a toll on human capacity building; retention and utilization needed to guarantee sustainable development. Because of the above, some suggestions were therefore made to curb the menace of brain drain at Benue State University. They include the need for the University administration

to come up with proven strategies aimed at building, retaining, and utilizing their available human resource for sustainable development. Benue peoples should hold their leaders accountable to bring responsible leadership to the front burners of governance. This will reduce corruption and lead to good governance in and outside the University. The political elite in the State should put their selfish interest aside and cooperate to tackle the problem of discrimination along the ethnic line, tribalism, and nepotism in and outside the University. The State government should embark on industrialization that will address the problem of mass unemployment, and also pay salaries commensurate to the qualifications and skills of manpower. There is also the need to improve government policies in the State in which students that made first class are given a scholarship and then made to sign bonds so that they will return upon completion of their studies to work in the University.

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