

“We Love Teaching, But Not Like This”: Relocation Intentions and Brain Pain Among Nigerian Teachers

Chidubem Deborah Adamu

*Department of Education Leadership and Management, Faculty of Education,
University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg City, South Africa*

ORCID: 0000-0002-4003-0808

ABSTRACT

This study explores relocation intentions of Nigerian secondary school teachers and introduces "Brain Pain"—psychological distress when leaving feels necessary yet wrong. Using a phenomenological design, 10 teachers were interviewed and 12 participated in two focus groups (six public, six private) across five Nigerian states. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Perceived relocation benefits included professional development, financial stability, and dignity. Drawbacks included harming students, losing STEM teachers, credential devaluation abroad. Most affirmed relocation as a right but expressed guilt and ambivalence. Family considerations weighed heavily. Fears of starting over or visa rejection did not deter them; staying in poverty was worse. The study challenges push-pull theory by showing relocation decisions involve moral reasoning and cultural belonging, not wage differentials. Brain pain extends occupational commitment theory by showing affective commitment conflicts with low continuance commitment. Retention policies in sub-Saharan Africa must address professional dignity and moral anguish, not just salaries.

Keywords: brain Pain, “Japa” syndrome, qualitative research, relocation intentions, teacher migration

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the teaching profession is facing a crisis of retention, with attrition rates reaching critical levels in both developed and developing contexts (OECD, 2023). The International Task Force (ITF) on Teachers for Education 2030 and UNESCO's Global Report on Teachers (2024) show that teacher shortages are widespread. High-income regions, including Europe and North America, struggle to recruit enough staff, while low-income countries face even greater challenges. Recruitment and retention issues lead to staff losses and make it difficult to maintain quality education. In developing countries, the situation is more severe due to economic instability, limited teacher training, and the low social status of the profession (Femi, 2026; OECD, 2023).

Research indicates that despite investments in teacher education, teacher shortages and retention challenges persist globally and in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, UNESCO's Global Report on Teachers (2024) highlights deficits and difficulties in keeping qualified teachers, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Data show that sub-Saharan Africa needs millions more teachers, despite ongoing efforts in teacher preparation and deployment (Bense, 2016; Opoku et al., 2025). Recent evidence further indicates that weak financial returns and labour-market mismatch may encourage education graduates to seek opportunities outside teaching or outside their home countries (Nguyen et al., 2026).

Existing research has extensively documented the structural drivers of this exodus: low pay, poor working conditions, lack of resources, and professional disrespect (Bennell, 2025; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Mohamed et al. 2024). Recent scholarship has also shown that teachers' professional identity, reflective practice, and sense of efficacy shape how educators respond to challenging work environments, suggesting that retention is influenced by psychological as well as structural conditions (Maharjan, 2025). Nigeria's basic education system faces significant staffing and funding gaps, with public primary schools having about 915,913 teachers for over 31 million pupils, resulting in an estimated deficit exceeding 165,000 teachers, particularly in rural areas (Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC], n.d.). This imbalance leads to high pupil-teacher ratios and uneven access to education, with teacher shortages contributing to overcrowded classrooms and disparities between rural and urban schools (Shaoan et al., 2025; Kalindi, 2015).

Furthermore, inadequate education financing hinders teacher recruitment and infrastructure development, exacerbating these challenges (Shaoan et al., 2025). Low salaries, delayed payments, and difficult working conditions also impact teacher retention and contribute to outward migration (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). However, the predominant analytical lens, push-pull migration theory, remains largely descriptive, focusing on what teachers leave rather than how they experience the decision to leave (Carling & Collins, 2018). This framework fails to capture the moral dilemmas faced by teachers who love teaching but struggle with poverty or feel guilty about leaving students behind.

The Nigerian education sector exemplifies the difficulties of teacher retention due to chronic underfunding. Teachers in public schools, including secondary schools, earn low wages that often do not keep pace with living costs, leading to salary delays. Many teachers report challenging working conditions, heavy workloads, and limited resources, contributing to low morale and high attrition rates. Despite ongoing investments in teacher education and recruitment, these systemic pressures continue to deplete the teaching workforce, undermining efforts to provide quality education at primary and secondary levels.

Between 2019 and 2025, reports indicate that over 60 percent of academic staff at some federal universities have left due to eroded purchasing power, repeated industrial actions, and a systemic devaluation of teaching as a profession (Lawal, 2025). While this statistic refers to university staff, it illustrates the broader pattern of academic exodus in Nigeria that also affects secondary teachers. This phenomenon has been termed "Japa"—a Nigerian word meaning to flee or escape, used to describe the mass emigration of skilled professionals (Adepoju, 2022). The term captures a collective urgency, suggesting leaving is not just an individual choice but a shared response to systemic failure. Brain pain relates to Japa in two ways. First, Japa describes the behavior while brain pain describes the feeling; the term Japa does not capture the guilt and ambivalence that accompany relocation, but brain pain adds this emotional dimension. Second, Japa often implies abandonment, whereas brain pain challenges this narrative by showing that teachers do not leave lightly—they struggle with their decision and feel torn between duty and survival. This study proposes that brain pain is the subjective experience of Japa: the inner conflict that accompanies outward movement.

This study aims to investigate the relocation intentions of Nigerian secondary school teachers, focusing on perceived benefits and drawbacks of leaving, the tension between duty to stay and the right to relocate (conceptualized as "Brain Pain"), factors influencing relocation decisions, and fears related to relocation.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What benefits do teachers perceive in relocating abroad?
2. What drawbacks do teachers associate with relocating abroad?
3. How do teachers navigate the tension between duty to stay and the right to relocate abroad, and what emotional distress (Brain Pain) accompanies this tension?
4. What factors do teachers consider when deciding whether to relocate abroad?
5. What fears do teachers hold about relocating abroad?

This study offers a theoretical and empirical response to these questions, drawing on qualitative data from Nigerian secondary school teachers. The concept of "Brain Pain" is introduced as a unique analytical category to capture the psychological and ethical distress experienced when considering relocation. Unlike brain drain, which measures human capital loss at a macro level, Brain Pain focuses on the emotional turmoil involved in relocation decisions, where leaving feels both necessary and wrong. The paper argues that teacher migration decisions in SSA are influenced by a painful calculus of moral responsibility, professional identity, and cultural belonging, challenging the prevailing narrative of teachers as passive victims or self-interested agents. By highlighting this emotional landscape, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the complex factors influencing teacher retention and migration decisions.

Current research on teacher migration has three main limitations. First, most studies focus on economic factors. They ask what teachers gain or lose. They do not ask how teachers feel about leaving. This gap matters because feelings of guilt and duty shape decisions. Second, the literature treats teachers as either victims or self-interested agents. It does not capture the moral struggle of loving teaching but hating the conditions. Teachers are neither passive nor selfish. Third, push-pull theory cannot explain why teachers stay despite low pay. It also cannot explain why teachers leave despite loving their students. The theory misses the internal conflict. This study addresses these gaps by combining two frameworks. The ethics of emigration literature explains the right to leave versus the duty to stay. Occupational commitment theory explains why teachers stay attached to their work. Together, these frameworks capture both the structural pressures and the moral reasoning involved in relocation decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical traditions: the ethics of emigration literature and occupational commitment theory. Neither framework alone is sufficient to explain the phenomenon of Brain Pain; however, their integration provides the analytical leverage needed to move beyond descriptive push-pull accounts.

The Right to Leave Versus the Right to Stay

The first theoretical anchor concerns the moral dimensions of migration. Liberal theorists have long defended freedom of movement as a fundamental right, arguing that skilled professionals are not bound by a debt to their societies of origin (Carens, 2013; Kanyeigye, 2026; Oberman, 2011). From this perspective, teachers who relocate are exercising a legitimate choice, not committing an act of abandonment. Communitarian scholars counter that professionals trained at public expense incur an obligation to serve the societies that educated them, particularly in contexts of acute skill scarcity (Brock & Blake, 2015; Stilz, 2016). This debate is relevant for teachers in SSA, where public investment in teacher education is substantial, yet retention mechanisms are weak (Mulkeen, 2010). This simultaneous affirmation of right and duty produces the emotional distress that this study terms Brain Pain. The concept operationalizes, at the micro-level, a macro-level debate that has largely remained philosophical. It asks not whether teachers should leave but how they feel about leaving, and what that feeling reveals about the structure of the profession.

Occupational Commitment and Its Limits

The second theoretical anchor is occupational commitment theory, which distinguishes between three forms of attachment to work. Affective commitment refers to emotional attachment to and enjoyment of the job itself, the love of teaching. Continuance commitment reflects the perceived costs of leaving a job, including the absence of acceptable alternatives. Normative commitment denotes a felt obligation to remain in a profession or organization, often rooted in gratitude, loyalty, or moral principle (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 2002). Teachers may exhibit high affective commitment but low continuance commitment. While teachers may love teaching, international recruitment agencies and digital platforms for overseas placement could reduce the barriers to exit, providing alternative opportunities that were not available a decade ago (OECD, 2023). Normative commitment can arise when teachers feel a sense of obligation towards

their students, employers, or government authorities whom they view as exploitative or neglectful (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). Cognitive dissonance may occur at the crossroads of these various commitments.

Conceptual Framework: Defining Brain Pain

The term "brain drain" entered migration studies in the 1960s to describe the one-way flow of skilled human capital from developing to developed countries (Beine et al., 2001). It is the distress of wanting to stay (affective and normative commitment) while needing to leave (low continuance commitment made salient by the availability of alternatives). While useful as a macro-level indicator, the concept carries three limitations that this study addresses. First, brain drain is aggregate and statistical; it counts bodies but not subjectivities (de Haas, 2021). Second, it implies a linear, irreversible loss, ignoring the possibilities of return, circular migration, or diaspora contributions (Clemens, 2014). Thirdly, it positions emigration as a net negative for the country of origin, a framing that teachers in this study may actively contest (Beine et al., 2001) by presenting relocation as a potential indirect benefit to Nigeria through remittances, virtual linkages, or eventual return.

In this study, brain pain is proposed as a complementary concept that operates at the individual level of analysis. It is defined as the psychological and ethical distress experienced by skilled professionals who contemplate or undertake international relocation while maintaining strong affective and normative ties to their country, community, or students (Carling & Collins, 2018). The concept in this study has three dimensions, each anchored in existing theoretical conversations.

The first is cognitive dimension, which is the recognition that leaving and staying both carry unacceptable costs, a genuine dilemma with no clean solution. This dimension draws on the ethics of migration literature's recognition that skilled emigration creates "moral tragedy" situations where no option is fully justifiable (Stanczyk, 2016). Stanczyk (2016) notes that in contexts of severe global inequality, "there are no solutions that are simultaneously effective and just." The cognitive dimension captures this experience of being trapped between two undesirable outcomes. Second, emotional dimension is the experience of guilt, anxiety, sadness, and ambivalence that accompanies relocation intentions, often expressed in metaphors of drowning, sinking ships, or being torn. Third is moral dimension, which is the active negotiation of justification narratives, through which teachers reframe departure not as abandonment but as delayed contribution, indirect mentorship, or necessary survival.

Brain Pain in this study is not a pathological condition requiring clinical intervention. It is a normal response to structurally produced contradictions. Teachers experience brain pain because the systems in which they work have made

it impossible to practice their vocation with dignity. The concept redirects analytical attention from the fact of departure to the conditions that make departure feel necessary and wrong simultaneously.

Distinction from Related Concepts

Brain pain differs from related constructs in several respects. It is not job dissatisfaction, though dissatisfaction may be its cause (Ingersoll et al. 2018). It is not burnout, though burnout may co-occur (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Burnout refers to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization resulting from chronic workplace stress. Brain pain is different because it involves moral conflict, not just exhaustion. A teacher can love teaching (high affective commitment) and still experience brain pain because they feel forced to leave. This is not captured by burnout.

Brain pain is also different from moral injury. Moral injury occurs when professionals violate their deeply held moral values (Litz et al., 2009). Teachers experiencing brain pain have not yet violated their values. They are struggling with the possibility of doing so. The injury is anticipatory, not retrospective. Brain pain is the distress of considering a morally problematic action, not the trauma of having committed it.

Brain pain is not merely cognitive dissonance either. Cognitive dissonance is the psychological discomfort from holding conflicting beliefs (Festinger, 1957). Brain pain includes this discomfort but also includes grief, anxiety, and shame. It is emotional and relational, not just cognitive. Teachers mourn the loss of their students. They feel shame about leaving aging parents. This is deeper than simple dissonance.

Finally, brain pain is different from migration-related ambivalence. Ambivalence means feeling both positive and negative about a decision (Carling & Schewel, 2018). Brain pain includes ambivalence but is more specific. It is ambivalence with a moral dimension. The tension is not just between good and bad outcomes. It is between duty and survival, right and wrong. This moral dimension is what makes brain pain distinct.

The concept of Brain Pain also challenges the binary of "push" and "pull" (de Haas, 2021; Lee, 1966). In conventional terms, Nigerian teachers are pushed by low pay and pulled by foreign salaries. But Brain Pain reveals that the relationship is not additive. The pull of a UK salary is not experienced in isolation; it is intensified by the humiliation of being called "useless" by a parent whose child the teacher is trying to educate. The push of poverty is not merely material; it is the shame of being a professional who cannot afford to braid a mother's hair or support aging parents. Brain Pain, in other words, is the subjective registration of a system that has made dignity and survival mutually exclusive.

Brain Pain Versus Moral Injury

Moral injury occurs when professionals violate their deeply held values (Litz et al., 2009). Brain pain differs in three ways. First, moral injury is retrospective (harm already done), while brain pain is anticipatory (distress about a future choice). Second, moral injury involves situations with no good option, whereas brain pain involves a painful choice between two undesirable options. Third, this distinction matters for policy: understanding brain pain as anticipatory distress allows intervention before teachers leave, rather than responding after departure. Brain pain is therefore a distinct concept capturing the distress of choosing between duty and survival.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed an interpretive phenomenological design. This tradition aligns with the goal of exploring subjective meanings and experiences (Smith et al., 2022). Interpretive phenomenology acknowledges that researchers actively interpret participants' accounts. It does not assume that there is a single objective reality to be discovered.

The choice of interpretive phenomenology is consistent with the use of Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. Both approaches share key assumptions. Both recognize that meaning is co-constructed between researcher and participant. Both require researchers to reflect on their own position and assumptions. Both value rich, detailed accounts of subjective experience. The study does not follow Van Manen's (2014) hermeneutic phenomenology. This approach focuses on the existential structures of lived experience. While Van Manen's work informed the initial thinking about the phenomenon, the analysis method aligns more closely with the interpretive tradition described by Smith et al. (2022).

Population

The target population included public and private secondary school teachers employed across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The study specifically focused on secondary teachers rather than primary teachers for two main reasons. Firstly, secondary teachers possess subject specializations (chemistry, English, physics, mathematics) that are highly sought after in international recruitment markets (OECD, 2023). Secondly, migration literature indicates that secondary teachers are more likely to consider relocating due to the recognition of their qualifications abroad (Bense, 2016). The accessible population was limited to five

states across four geopolitical zones: Imo (Southeast), Rivers (South-south), Lagos (Southwest), and Niger and Benue (Northcentral). The Northeast and Northwest zones were excluded due to security constraints that made in-person data collection unfeasible (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample consisted of 22 participants. Ten participants took part in individual interviews (five public school teachers, five private school teachers). Twelve participants took part in two focus groups (six public school teachers in one group, six private school teachers in the other). All participants were active secondary school teachers with at least two years of experience. They had all expressed a desire to relocate abroad or had seriously considered it in the past 12 months.

Participants were selected from five states in Nigeria. The researcher recruited initial contacts through the National Union of Teachers (NUT) state chapters in Lagos and Benue. NUT officials verified the study's legitimacy. Initial participants then referred other teachers who met the criteria. This snowball method was necessary because teachers feared being labeled 'unpatriotic' if they discussed relocation openly.

The researcher separated public and private school teachers into different focus groups. This decision was made because their working conditions differ substantially. For instance, while public teachers face salary delays and government bureaucracy, private teachers face job insecurity and arbitrary dismissal (Ojo et al., 2025). Mixing them could have suppressed diverse viewpoints (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Recruitment stopped at 22 participants. Data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged from the final three interviews and the second focus group. This follows Guest et al.'s (2020) guidance on determining saturation in qualitative research.

Instrument for Data Collection

Two instruments were used: a semi-structured interview guide for individual interviews and a separate FGD guide. Both guides were developed from the study's theoretical framework, specifically focusing on the intersection of occupational commitment theory (Meyer & Allen, 1991) and the ethics of emigration literature (Carens, 2013). The interview guide contained 12 open-ended questions organized around five domains: (1) benefits of relocation, (2) drawbacks, (3) duty to stay versus right to leave, (4) factors considered in decision-making, and (5) fears about relocation. Probes were included for each question to encourage elaboration. The FGD guide contained eight broader questions designed to

stimulate group interaction, including two vignettes to reduce social desirability bias (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Both instruments were piloted with four teachers (two public, two private) from Osun State, who were not included in the main study to prevent contamination. The pilot revealed that the question “How do you feel about leaving Nigeria?” was too vague, resulting in simplistic responses. This was revised to “Can you describe a specific moment when you felt torn between staying and leaving?” to elicit richer narrative data. The FGD guide was also shortened from 14 to eight questions after pilot participants reported fatigue. No further changes were made after the second pilot round.

Data Collection Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board before data collection commenced. Individual interviews were conducted face-to-face at locations selected by participants, while focus groups were conducted online to include teachers from different states. Each interview lasted 25 to 35 minutes and was audio-recorded, with handwritten field notes taken to capture non-verbal cues. Online FGDs were also recorded for analysis. This mixed-mode approach was chosen for practical reasons: face-to-face settings were appropriate for sensitive individual interviews, while online focus groups enabled geographic diversity. However, this asymmetry may have affected the findings. Face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to observe non-verbal cues, build rapport, and participants appeared more comfortable. Online focus groups were more convenient but had limitations, including technical difficulties, reduced group dynamics, and participants appearing less engaged due to the absence of body language cues. The researcher acknowledges this asymmetry as a limitation. Findings should be interpreted with this difference in mind, and future research could use a single mode to avoid this issue.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. First, credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with participants. The researcher spent time building rapport before interviews. Member checking was conducted with five participants who reviewed the preliminary findings and confirmed they accurately represented their experiences. Second, transferability was enhanced through thick description. Detailed accounts of participants, contexts, and settings were provided. This allows readers to assess how findings might apply to other settings. Third, dependability was established through an audit trail. This involves keeping records of all decisions made during the research process. An external researcher reviewed the audit trail to confirm that

procedures were consistent. Lastly, confirmability was achieved through the reflexivity journal and independent coding. The researcher documented how their own positions shaped the analysis and sought feedback from colleagues who were not involved in the research.

Ethical Considerations

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical considerations such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and minimizing harm were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Participants were offered counseling resources if needed, and beneficence was upheld by sharing findings with relevant stakeholders.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase approach to reflexive thematic analysis. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the phenomenological aim of exploring subjective meaning while acknowledging the researcher's active role in interpretation.

First, the researcher transcribed all audio recordings verbatim, read the transcripts multiple times, and made initial notes. Second, data were coded systematically. Coding was inductive and data-driven. To enhance rigor, the first three transcripts were coded twice, with a one-week gap between coding sessions. Codes from both sessions were compared. Any inconsistencies were reviewed and resolved by revisiting the original transcripts. An external colleague with qualitative research experience reviewed a sample of coded data to confirm that codes were grounded in the data. Third, the researcher grouped codes into potential themes and reviewed how codes related to each other and to the research questions. Fourth, themes were checked to determine if they worked in relation to coded extracts and the full dataset. While some themes were merged, others were split or discarded. Fifth, the researcher refined the specifics of each theme and identified the essence of what each theme captured. Sixth, the final narrative was written and compelling participant quotes were selected to illustrate each theme. A reflexivity journal was maintained throughout the process, and assumptions, reactions, and decisions were recorded. This helped the researcher stay aware of how their own background shaped their interpretations.

RESULTS

Five themes emerged from participants' accounts of relocation intentions. The themes include benefits of relocating abroad (with three sub-themes), drawbacks of relocating abroad (with three sub-themes), duty to stay versus the right to

relocate, factors considered in relocation, and fears associated with relocation. The five themes and their sub-themes are presented below.

Theme 1: Benefits of Relocating Abroad

Participants described benefits across three levels: personal gains, gains for students in Nigeria, and gains for Nigeria as a country.

Sub-theme 1.1: Personal Benefits of Teachers Relocating Abroad

Professional development was the most cited personal benefit. Participants believed relocation would provide structured mentorship, regular training, skill upscaling, practical teaching tools, learner-centered methods, and cutting-edge skills. A private teacher in the in-depth interview (IDI) said, “I would be current. Technology changes every year. Here, we are 10 years behind. Going there would force me to catch up.” A public teacher in the FGD 1 added, “Teaching abroad would develop my skills because of structured mentorship.”

A better work environment is also featured. Teachers mentioned adequate facilities, less pressure, less stress, and less anxiety. A public teacher in the FGD 1 noted, “Benefit: Using technology to teach geography as it’s meant to be taught. A career culminating in expertise, not exhaustion.”

Financial benefits were another reason. Participants believed they would become financially stable, provide for their families, give children a better future, and send money home. A private teacher in the IDI stated, “We are running out of poverty. We love teaching. We just want to do it in a place that loves us back.” A public teacher in the IDI said, “I earn 70,000 Naira (\$46) a month. After rent and transport, I have nothing left. Abroad, I could save.”

Professional dignity and respect mattered. Teachers felt the profession is more valued abroad. A public teacher in the IDI explained, “A parent here can call a teacher useless, and the principal will side with the parent. I want to teach where my profession is valued.”

Career focus through specialization was mentioned. Unlike in Nigeria where one teacher handles many subjects, relocation allows subject-based specialization. A private teacher in the FGD 2 said, “I could become a true Chemistry education specialist, not a jack-of-all-trades.”

Other personal benefits included job security, a better future for children, global collaboration with teachers, work-life balance, safety from insecurity, and access to adequate teaching resources. Private teacher 8 in the IDI noted, “In private schools here, you are at the mercy of the proprietor. Over there, there is a union, there is a contract.” Another private teacher in the FGD 2 added, “Intellectual stimulation and collaboration. Teaching literature as a global conversation.”

These findings suggest that teachers view relocation as a pathway to professional legitimacy, not just higher pay. The emphasis on structured mentorship and union protection suggests that Nigerian teachers currently experience their work environment as arbitrary and unsupportive. Participants frame relocation as a move toward professional adulthood, not escapism.

Sub-theme 1.2: Benefits of Teachers Relocating Abroad to Students in Nigeria

Participants believed their relocation would benefit Nigerian students by making them role models of global competition. Female teachers added that it shows young girls that gender is not a barrier. A public teacher in the IDI said, “When teachers go abroad and succeed, they become role models. It shows the students that Nigerians can compete globally.” Another public teacher in the IDI stated, “It shows young girls that you don’t need a husband to have a house in Canada. You can do it yourself.”

In this sub-theme also, teachers justify leaving as a form of indirect mentorship. They believe their absence abroad teaches students more than their presence at home. This reframes emigration as a pedagogical act; a point rarely made in brain drain literature.

Sub-theme 1.3: Benefits of Teachers Relocating Abroad to Nigeria

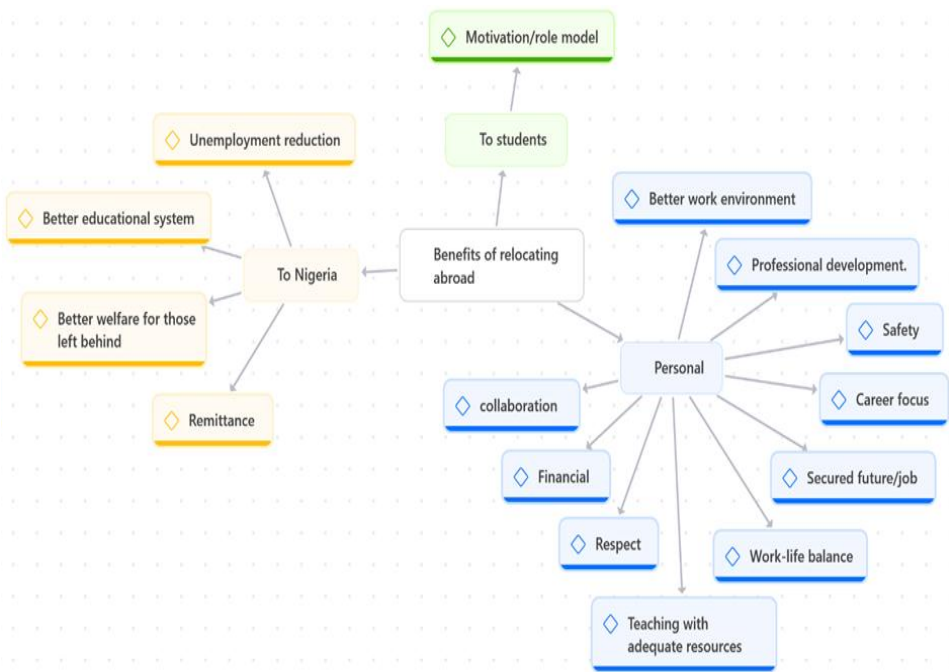
Remittance was the first benefit. Participants said sending money home would improve family finances and contribute to the economy. A private teacher in the IDI said, “Benefits include a real salary to send remittances home and career advancement without 10-year waits for promotion.”

Forming a Nigerian teacher in the diaspora network was another benefit. Teachers could create linkages with Nigerian schools and teach Nigerian students virtually using skills and resources gained abroad. A public teacher in the IDI noted, “We create a Nigerian teaching diaspora. Maybe one day we can link schools in Lagos with schools in London.”

Some participants noted that returnees might bring ideas that benefit Nigeria. Others said relocation reduces unemployment by creating vacancies. One public teacher in FGD 1 said, “Relocation can also reduce unemployment pressures.” A private teacher in the FGD 2 added, “It forces a crisis that might, just might, make the authorities wake up. When private schools start losing their best staff to international relocation, they may be forced to improve conditions to retain others.”

These findings reveal participants construct relocation not as abandonment but as a delayed or indirect form of national contribution. This challenges the conventional brain drain narrative by introducing a diaspora-as-resource framing. However, it also reveals a painful paradox: teachers must leave Nigeria to be able to help Nigeria. Figure 1 summarizes the benefits participants attributed to relocation across personal, student, and national levels.

Figure 1: *Teachers’ personal benefits of relocating abroad*



Overall, these benefits reveal that relocating is not a rejection of teaching or Nigeria. It is a rejection of poverty, disrespect, and professional stagnation. Participants want to teach, just not under current conditions. However, as the next theme shows, this desire comes with significant personal and national costs.

Theme 2: Drawbacks of Relocating Abroad

Participants identified drawbacks related to themselves, their students, and Nigeria.

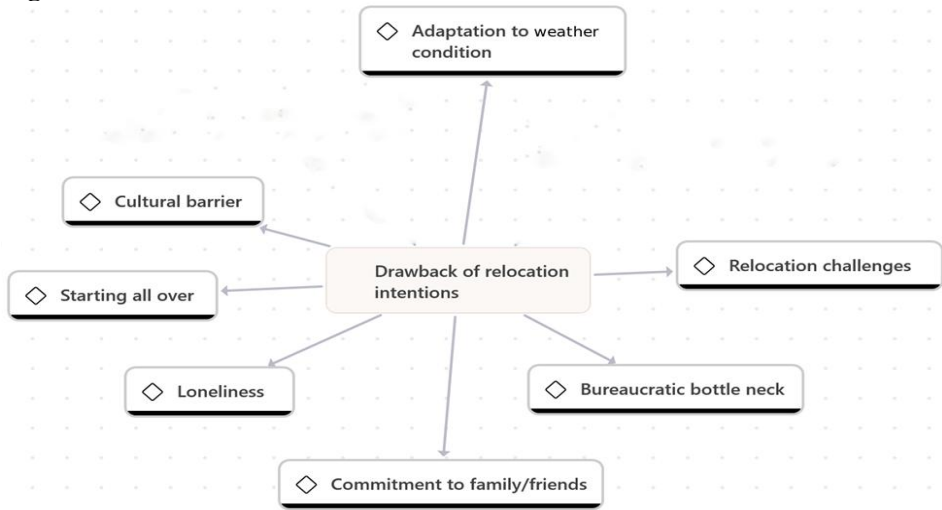
Sub-theme 2.1: Teachers' Personal Drawbacks of Relocating Abroad

Starting over was a major drawback. Teachers feared that their years of experience in Nigeria might not be recognized abroad. A public teacher in the IDI said, "The drawback is ageism. They might view my 18 years of experience as 'non-standard' because it is from Nigeria." Another public teacher in the IDI added, "At 45, I would be considered a 'new teacher' again. Starting fresh in a foreign land would be a blow to my ego."

Loneliness was another drawback, including separation from family and loved ones. A private teacher in the IDI responded, "I also worry about loneliness because you're far from home." A public teacher in the IDI added, "Leaving my parents in Lagos without my monthly support would be emotionally devastating."

Other drawbacks included adapting to weather and a new culture, cultural barriers, commitment to family and friends, bureaucratic obstacles, and challenges with relocation. These drawbacks reveal a deep tension between professional ambition and personal identity. Starting over in midlife threatens not only income but also the dignity earned over years. The fear is not just practical but existential: teachers question whether their Nigerian experience holds any value abroad. Figure 2 outlines the personal drawbacks participants associated with relocation. These include starting over, loneliness, cultural adaptation, and family separation.

Figure 2: *Personal drawbacks associated with teachers' relocation intentions*



Sub-theme 2.2: Negative Effects of Teachers Relocating Abroad on Students

Participants expressed concerns that students would lose a teacher who understands their context, a mentor, an experienced and passionate teacher, and a creative teacher. One private teacher in FGD 2 mentioned, "My current students lose a teacher who knows how to navigate the WAEC system to their advantage." Another private teacher in IDI 8 stated, "Experienced teachers know how to handle children. New teachers are fresh and easily irritated. The children feel that."

The findings suggest a sense of guilt among teachers as they recognize the direct harm their departure causes to students. However, they feel that the system leaves them with no choice. The loss is not just instructional but emotional, as students lose adults who know them.

Sub-theme 2.3: Negative Effects of Teachers Relocating Abroad on Nigeria

Teachers pointed out that Nigeria loses manpower, STEM teachers, qualified and skilled teachers, experienced teachers, and young energetic teachers. A public teacher in IDI remarked, "The young ones like Samuel are leaving. Soon,

we will have only exhausted old people and fresh NYSC members. Who will guide the new teachers?" Another public teacher in FGD 1 noted, "Nigeria loses STEM teachers, which is dangerous for development." A private teacher in FGD 2 simply said, "Nigeria loses quality teachers."

This sub-theme highlights participants' awareness of the national cost, describing a depletion of the teaching profession. The impact is not just theoretical but tangible and generational, representing brain drain in its most concrete form. These drawbacks indicate that teachers do not take relocation lightly. They carry guilt about students, anxiety about starting over, and an understanding of national loss. However, as the next theme reveals, most still believe they have the right to leave.

Theme 3: Duty to Stay and Right to Relocate Abroad

Most participants viewed relocation as a right rather than an obligation to stay. They argued that they had endured poverty and disrespect while staying. A public teacher in FGD 1 questioned, "Duty? To whom? To a government that doesn't support me? My primary duty is to ensure my family's survival." A private teacher in IDI 7 stated, "Nobody expects a banker to remain at a failing bank out of duty. Teaching is a profession, not a priesthood."

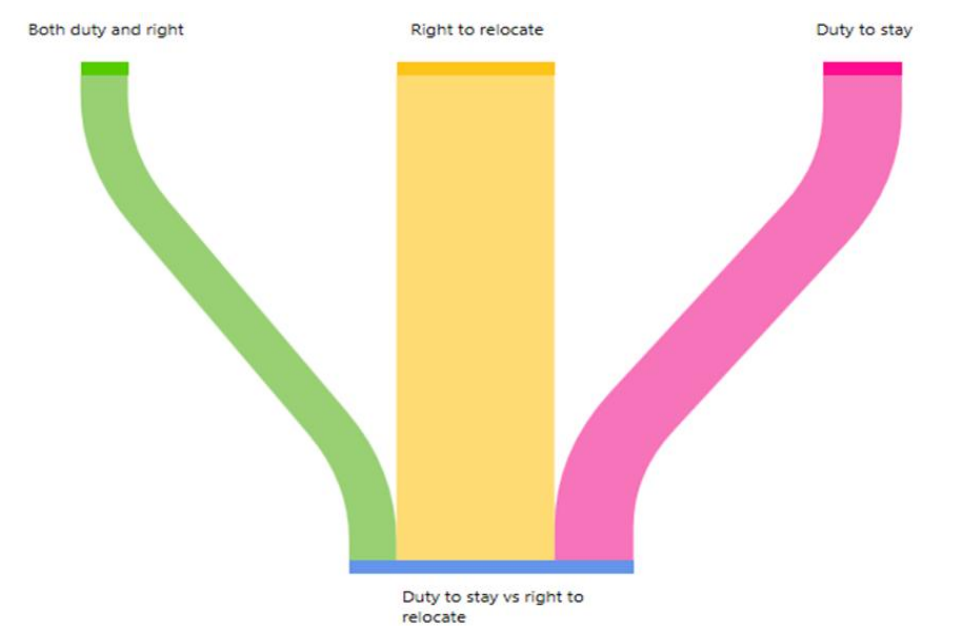
While some teachers felt a sense of duty, making relocation painful, others balanced duty with personal survival. One participant described relocation as "Brain Pain" rather than brain drain, expressing, "It hurts to leave. It is not our first choice, but our last resort." A public teacher nearing retirement in IDI noted, "At my age, the duty feels stronger. I feel like the captain of a sinking ship. I want to stay and steer it, but the water is rising."

Others found a balance between duty and personal aspirations. A private teacher in IDI responded, "I don't feel duty to the proprietor. I feel duty to my students. I told my SS3 class, 'I am planning to travel, but I promise I won't leave until after your WASSCE.' That is my balance." A public teacher in IDI claimed, "I balance it by telling myself I will be a 'teacher ambassador.' I won't forget where I came from."

The results indicated that no participant expressed a definitive decision to remain in Nigeria permanently without considering relocation. All participants were either actively planning to relocate or expressed a desire to do so, indicating a widespread intention to leave among this sample. Figure 3 illustrates participants' views on duty to stay versus the right to relocate abroad. This theme introduces the concept of "Brain pain" - the emotional and moral distress of choosing to leave. Unlike brain drain, which focuses on macro-level loss, brain pain captures the individual anguish of departure. The tension between duty and survival remains unresolved, with most teachers choosing survival but not without feelings of guilt.

Figure 3 presents participants' views on the tension between duty to stay and the right to relocate. Most affirmed the right to leave but expressed guilt about staying.

Figure 3: *Duty to stay in Nigeria and the right to relocate*



This moral tension shapes everything that follows. Teachers do not see themselves as traitors; they see themselves as professionals making a painful choice. Their fears, examined next, reveal just how uncertain that choice remains.

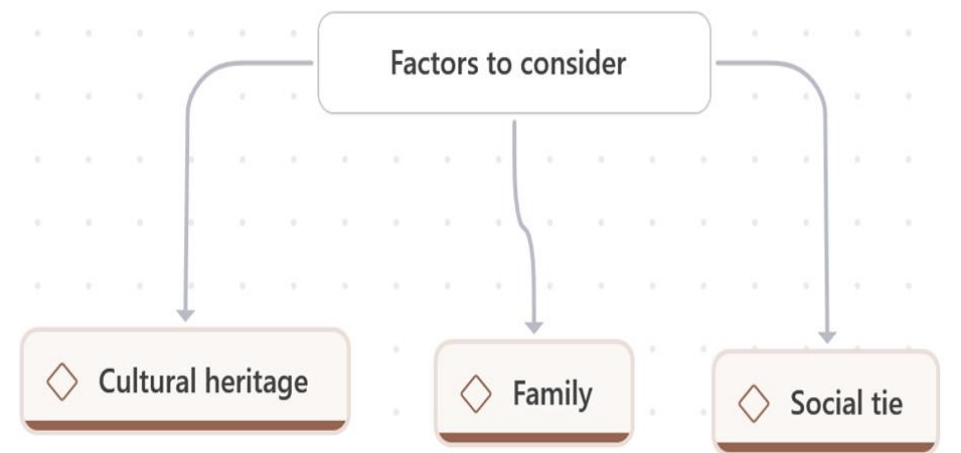
Theme 4: Factors to Consider in Relocating Abroad

Family was the primary factor. Teachers considered leaving family behind, emotional strain, children’s schooling, spousal employment, and children’s upbringing in a different culture. A public teacher in the IDI explained, “My mother. If I leave, who will braid her hair on Saturday mornings?” A private teacher in the IDI commented, “If they grow up there, they will be Canadian. They will lose their Nigerianness. They will call me ‘Mom’ instead of ‘Mummy.’ That small thing hurts.”

Social ties and cultural heritage also mattered. Leaving the community and loved ones was painful. One private teacher in the IDI asked, “Do I choose my career or my relationship?” Another private teacher (IDI with Private Teacher 8) said, “If we go to Canada, they will forget my language and culture. They will forget how to greet elders properly.”

These factors reveal that relocation decisions are not purely individual calculations of salary and career. They are deeply relational and cultural. Teachers weigh the cost to their parents, children, and cultural identity. The fear of cultural loss, of children becoming "Canadian" instead of Nigerian, is as powerful as the fear of poverty. Figure 4 shows the factors teachers consider when deciding to relocate. Family considerations, cultural heritage, and social ties were most important.

Figure 4: *Factors to consider in relocation intentions*



These relational and cultural considerations directly contribute to the fears that will be examined next. What teachers fear is not just failure abroad, but also the loss of identity, connection, and dignity at home.

Theme 5: Teachers' Fears of Relocating Abroad

A common fear was starting from scratch. A public teacher in the IDI described, "I have 15 years of experience, but over there, I am a fresh applicant." A private teacher in the IDI added, "I see videos of teachers in the UK sharing rooms. I am a professional. I am 27. I don't want to live like a student again."

Fear of adapting to a new educational system and expectations also emerged. A public teacher in the IDI remarked, "What if I get there and I can't adapt? Coming back to Nigeria with your tail between your legs is shameful." Another public teacher in the IDI continued, "I worry I will look stupid during my first year because I haven't used a smartboard."

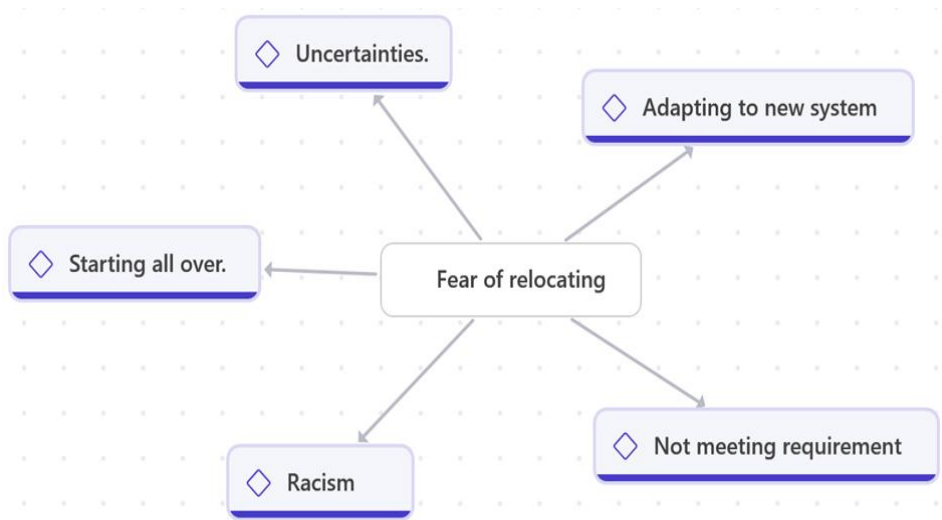
Expressed fears also included not meeting requirements. A private teacher in the IDI observed, "I have a B.Ed. But will they accept it? Some countries want you to do a top-up course. I am tired of school." Fear of visa rejection was also present. A public teacher in the IDI described, "I have spent almost 2 million naira

on IELTS, TRCN, WES evaluation, and applications. What if I don't get the visa? That is my life savings."

Other fears included uncertainty in the relocation process, getting stuck in a low-paying job, failing and being ashamed to return, racism, and being treated as a second-class professional. A private teacher in the FGD 2 reported, "Not making it. Failing and coming back with nothing. Or getting there and finding it too difficult, being stuck in a low-paying job, and being too ashamed to return." Another public teacher in the FGD 1 continued, "Racism and being treated as a second-class professional despite my qualifications and experience."

These fears reveal that relocation is not a guaranteed escape; it is a gamble. Teachers risk their life savings, professional identity, and cultural belonging. The fear of returning as a "Japa Returnee," mocked and ashamed, is particularly striking. It creates a trap: staying is poverty, leaving is risk, and returning is humiliation. Figure 5 presents the fears teachers expressed about relocating abroad. These include starting over, system adaptation, visa rejection, and the shame of returning.

Figure 5: *Teachers' fears of relocating abroad*



When considering these five themes collectively, a complex picture emerges. Teachers in Nigeria are not relocating abroad without careful consideration. They are facing a dilemma between poverty and risk, duty and survival, identity and opportunity. Their intentions to relocate are not solely driven by potential gains or losses, but rather by a difficult and painful calculation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

Before interpreting the findings, one limitation must be stated clearly. This study examines relocation intentions, not actual migration behavior. Intentions do not always translate into action. Teachers may intend to leave but stay due to visa issues, family obligations, or changing circumstances. Therefore, the discussion that follows describes what teachers say they want and fear. It does not predict what they will actually do. Conclusions about retention should be read with this in mind. This study explores the relocation intentions of Nigerian secondary school teachers through the concept of Brain Pain—the psychological and ethical distress that arises when leaving is deemed necessary but feels wrong. The study's findings are discussed in alignment with its five research questions.

Benefits of Relocating Abroad

Participants highlighted personal benefits (professional development, financial stability, dignity), benefits to students (role modeling), and benefits to Nigeria (remittances, diaspora networks). This challenges the brain drain narrative that portrays emigration as solely negative (Beine et al., 2001). The focus on professional development and structured mentorship indicates that teachers are seeking professional recognition, not just higher salaries. This corresponds with affective commitment, the emotional attachment to the teaching profession itself (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Participants express a love for teaching but reject conditions that hinder effective pedagogy. The notion that relocating benefits students through role modeling reflects the justification narratives, a component of brain pain in the conceptual framework. Similar findings have been observed in Ghana, where leaving is seen as a future-oriented contribution (Bennell, 2025). However, participants' optimism regarding diaspora networks needs to be tempered. Mulkeen (2010) found that remittances from teachers are inconsistent, with many sending money home sporadically in amounts insufficient to address systemic education challenges. Virtual connections are also constrained; many Nigerian schools lack reliable internet access, making online mentorship difficult. Participants' optimism is not unfounded. Some diaspora networks have succeeded elsewhere—the Ghanaian Teachers in Diaspora Network has facilitated resource sharing, and the Kenyan diaspora has contributed to curriculum development. These examples suggest potential, but they require investment and coordination. This study does not dismiss diaspora contributions but cautions against relying on them as a solution without addressing infrastructure and institutional support.

Drawbacks of Relocating Abroad

Participants pointed out personal drawbacks (starting over, loneliness, ageism), harm to students (loss of experienced teachers), and national loss (STEM teacher exodus). The concern about the devaluation of Nigerian qualifications, labeled as "non-standard," reflects Bauder's (2015) work on skilled migration. African teachers in the UK and Canada face similar devaluation issues (Bense, 2016). The acknowledged loss of STEM teachers aligns with UNESCO's (2024) report identifying STEM shortages as a hindrance to sub-Saharan Africa's development. Participants also acknowledged that students lose teachers who understand their context. This represents the moral dimension of Brain Pain: teachers are aware that their departure directly impacts students, yet they feel trapped by the system.

Duty to Stay versus Right to Relocate

This question yielded the study's central contribution. Most participants affirmed relocation as a right, not a violation of duty. One teacher questioned, "Duty? To whom? To a government that doesn't protect me?" This aligns with liberal theorists who advocate for freedom of movement (Carens, 2013; Oberman, 2011). However, participants who recognized the right still expressed guilt—a "moral tragedy" as termed by Stanczyk (2016), where no option seems entirely justifiable.

Brain pain encapsulates this tension at the individual level. Unlike brain drain, which measures overall loss, Brain pain captures the subjective struggle of being torn. Participants used metaphors like drowning and sinking ships. Notably, no participant definitively decided to stay permanently. This near-universal intention within the sample suggests significant retention challenges, though the findings may not be broadly applicable. Some participants balanced duty and right through conditional promises: "I won't leave until after your WASSCE." This indicates that retention policies acknowledging this moral dilemma may be more effective than just salary increases.

Factors Considered in Relocation

Family emerged as the primary factor. Participants considered aging parents, children's education, spousal employment, and cultural heritage. One teacher pondered, "If I leave, who will braid her hair on Saturday mornings?" Another worried that her children might lose their Nigerian identity if they moved. These findings demonstrate that relocation decisions are not solely based on economic factors (de Haas, 2021). They are influenced by relationships and culture, challenging push-pull theory. The fear of cultural loss, such as children losing

language and traditions, is an underexplored aspect in migration literature (Carling & Schewel, 2018). Future research in SSA should delve into how teachers balance cultural preservation with economic opportunities. These relational factors also explain why some teachers stay despite low salaries. Normative commitments to family and community keep teachers in Nigeria, even as they witness colleagues leaving, which normalizes emigration and reduces the perceived cost of leaving (Adepoju, 2022).

Fears Associated with Relocation

Participants feared starting anew, adapting to new systems, visa rejection, and the stigma of returning as a "Japa Returnee"—mocked and ashamed. These fears depict relocation as a risky endeavor, not a guaranteed escape. The fear of returning is particularly poignant. Participants expressed being "too ashamed to return" if they failed abroad. This creates a dilemma: staying means poverty, leaving means risk, and returning means humiliation. Similar findings have been observed in Ghanaian and Kenyan studies (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007).

The fear of visa rejection and credential devaluation highlights the structural barriers African teachers encounter. Participants invested significant resources in IELTS exams and WES evaluations without any assurance of success. This aligns with Bauder's (2015) observation that international mobility is not equally accessible. Despite these fears, participants still intended to leave, indicating that the push factors in Nigeria are perceived as more detrimental than the risks associated with relocation. One teacher remarked, "It is not our first choice. It is our last resort."

Brain Pain Dimensions in the Findings

The concept of brain pain has three dimensions. Each dimension appears in the findings.

1. Cognitive Dimension

Participants recognized that leaving and staying both have unacceptable costs. They demonstrated this when they described the tension between duty and survival. They knew that leaving would hurt their students, staying meant poverty, and felt trapped between two bad options.

2. Emotional Dimension

This dimension involves feelings of guilt, anxiety, sadness, and ambivalence. Participants expressed these emotions throughout the interviews. They used metaphors like 'drowning' and 'sinking ships.' They described being 'torn' and 'conflicted.' The emotional attachment teachers expressed toward their

schools also resonates with emerging evidence that a sense of belonging influences leadership commitment and professional persistence (Padhan, 2026).

3. Moral Dimension:

Participants justified departure by framing leaving as delayed contribution, indirect mentorship, or necessary survival. They said they could support Nigeria from abroad. They said they would be role models for their students. These justifications show that teachers are not abandoning their duty. They are redefining it. Together, these dimensions show that brain pain is not just a theoretical concept. It is a lived experience that emerged consistently in participants' accounts.

Teacher Agency and Structural Constraints

Teachers in this study are not passive victims. They actively weigh options and strategize about survival. However, their agency is constrained by structural forces they cannot control—salaries, working conditions, and disrespect from parents. This tension is central to Brain Pain: teachers exercise agency by choosing to relocate, but they are forced into this choice by constraints. Retention policies should recognize this agency by addressing the structural issues that make staying unattractive.

Conclusion

This study introduced the concept of brain pain to describe the psychological and ethical distress experienced by Nigerian secondary school teachers who are contemplating relocation abroad. Unlike brain drain, brain pain captures the subjective experience of wanting to stay while feeling the need to leave. Teachers see relocation as an opportunity for professional growth, financial stability, and personal dignity. They also acknowledge that leaving would harm their students and deprive Nigeria of STEM teachers. While most teachers affirmed relocation as a right, they also expressed feelings of guilt, fear, and ambivalence. Family considerations and fears of starting over weighed heavily on their decision-making process, but the alternative of staying in poverty seemed even worse.

The study contributes to migration theory in three significant ways. First, it operationalizes the ethics of emigration debate at the individual level, demonstrating that teachers experience both the right to leave and a duty to stay simultaneously. Second, it extends occupational commitment theory by showing how affective and normative commitments conflict with low continuance commitment. Third, it challenges push-pull theory by revealing that relocation decisions are influenced by moral reasoning, cultural belonging, and relational ties, in addition to wage differentials. For SSA, the findings suggest that retention

policies cannot be successful by addressing salaries alone. Policies must acknowledge the moral dilemmas associated with leaving and create conditions where teachers can work with dignity.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Practical Implications

Four practical implications emerge from this study. These are divided into immediate institutional actions and broader national policy directions.

Immediate Institutional Implications

Schools and local education authorities can act quickly. This recommendation is consistent with evidence showing that instructional leadership and supportive school environments enhance educational resilience and strengthen teachers' professional commitment during periods of uncertainty (Dhandapani & Kaur, 2026). Two actions are suggested. First, address disrespect from parents and administrators. Participants mentioned this as a significant reason for wanting to leave. Principals should enforce policies that protect teachers from verbal abuse. School boards should create grievance procedures that teachers can use when they are disrespected. These actions cost little but signal that teachers are valued. Second, provide structured mentorship for new teachers. Participants said they felt unsupported and isolated. A formal mentoring program could help. Experienced teachers could guide new ones through the challenges of the profession. This would build a sense of community and professional growth.

Broader National Policy Directions

Government action is needed at the policy level. Two directions are proposed. First, consider 'stay bonuses' for teachers. Participants said they delayed departure to complete examination cycles. This suggests they are open to staying if conditions improve. Governments could offer bonuses to teachers who commit to remaining for specific periods. For example, a teacher who agrees to stay for two years could receive a lump sum payment. This approach has been tried in South Africa with mixed results. Rigorous evaluation would be needed to test if it works in Nigeria. Second, formalize diaspora teacher networks. Participants believed they could support Nigeria from abroad. They mentioned remittances and virtual mentorship. The Nigerian Teachers in Diaspora Network currently exists informally. The government could formalize and fund this network. Diaspora teachers could mentor Nigerian teachers through video calls. They could share resources and teaching strategies. However, infrastructure limitations must be

addressed. Reliable internet access is needed in many Nigerian schools. Without this, virtual mentorship is not feasible.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has four limitations that should guide interpretation of the findings. First, the study did not collect demographic data from participants. Age, gender, subject specialization, and years of service were not recorded. This limits the findings in two ways. It prevents analysis of how STEM teachers' experiences might differ from humanities teachers. It also prevents examination of how age or gender shapes relocation intentions. These are important distinctions that the study cannot address. Future research should collect demographic data to explore these variations.

Second, the sample of 22 teachers from five states excluded Nigeria's Northeast and Northwest zones. Security constraints made in-person data collection impossible in these regions. The findings may not reflect the experiences of teachers in these zones. Future multi-country studies could compare experiences across different regions and policy environments.

Third, the study focused on intentions rather than actual migration behavior. Intentions do not always lead to action. Longitudinal research tracking teachers over time would reveal whether intentions translate into actual relocation. This is especially important given that participants expressed fear of visa rejection and credential devaluation.

Fourth, self-reported data may be affected by social desirability bias. Teachers may have underreported their intentions or feelings to appear more patriotic. The use of vignettes in focus groups helped reduce this bias. However, Future research could develop a scale to measure Brain Pain. This would allow larger quantitative studies. Such a scale could test whether Brain Pain predicts actual migration. It could also examine which school-level factors reduce Brain Pain. The three dimensions identified in this study (cognitive, emotional, moral) could serve as the foundation for scale development.

REFERENCES

- Adepoju, A. (2022). *International migration and development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. In *The Routledge Handbook of African Demography*. Routledge.
- Bauder, H. (2015). The international mobility of academics: A labour market perspective. *International Migration*, 53, 83–96.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1468-2435.2012.00783.X>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. London: SAGE.

- Beine, M., Docquier, F., & Rapoport, H. (2001). Brain drain and economic growth: Theory and evidence. *Journal of Development Economics*, 64(1), 275–289. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-3878\(00\)00133-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-3878(00)00133-4)
- Bennell, P. (2025). Dissatisfied but nowhere to go: Teacher attrition in the context of mass unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 23(4), 959–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2023.2233481>
- Bennell, P., & Akyeampong, K. (2007). *Teacher motivation in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia*. London: Department for International Development (DFID) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08be640f0b652dd000f9a/ResearchingtheIssuesNo71.pdf>
- Bense, K. (2016). International teacher mobility and migration: A review and synthesis of the current empirical research and literature. *Educational Research Review*, 17, 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.12.001>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*, 9(1), 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000196>
- Brock, G., & Blake, M. (2015). *Debating brain drain: May governments restrict emigration?* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carens, J. H. (2013). *The ethics of immigration*. Oxford University Press.
- Carling, J., & Collins, F. (2018). Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), 909–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134>
- Carling, J., & Schewel, K. (2018). Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), 945–963. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384146>
- Clemens, M. A. (2014). Does development reduce migration? IZA Discussion Paper No. 8592, Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), Bonn: Germany.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- de Haas, H. (2021). A Theory of migration: The aspirations-capabilities framework. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9(8), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00210-4>
- Dhandapani, S., & Kaur, K. (2026). Leading through crisis: Understanding instructional leadership and educational resilience in India. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 15(1), 163–182. <https://doi.org/10.32674/306ezr71>
- Femi, E. (2026). *Nigeria and the global teacher shortage crisis*. Leadership (Nigeria), April 8, 2026. <https://leadership.ng/nigeria-and-the-global-teacher-shortage-crisis/>

- Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLoS ONE*, 15(5), e0232076. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076>
- Human Rights Watch. (2025). *Nigeria: events of 2025*. In World Report 2026. New York: Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/nigeria>
- Ingersoll, R. M., Merrill, E., Stuckey, D., & Collins, G. (2018). *Seven trends: The transformation of the teaching force*. CPRE Research Reports. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/108
- International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 and UNESCO. (2024). *Global report on teachers: addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession*. Paris: UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-addressing-teacher-shortages-and-transforming-profession?>
- Kalindi, S. C. (2015). *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*. In International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (2nd ed.). Edited by James D. Wright, 7: 198–209. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Kanyesigye, M. R. (2026). Rethinking brain drain in Africa: Factors driving the exodus of the highly educated and the role of higher education in reversing the trend. *Migration and Development* 15(1), 120–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21632324251352312>
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Lawal, I. (2025). *Nigerian lecturers among least paid in Africa, says Ex-VC*. The Guardian (Nigeria), December 25, 2025. <https://guardian.ng/education/nigerian-lecturers-among-least-paid-in-africa-says-ex-vc/>
- Lee, E. S. 1966. A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3, 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2060063>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.
- Litz, B. T., Stein, N., Delaney, E., Lebowitz, L., Nash, W. P., Silva, C., & Maguen, S. (2009). Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29(8), 695–706. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.07.003>
- Maharjan, B. ., Sunar, P. K. ., Dahal, N., Pant, B. P., & Manandhar, N. K. (2024). Connecting the dots: Teachers’ reflective practices for developing self-efficacy, emancipation, and empowerment. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 14(2), 66–89. <https://doi.org/10.32674/dyp4kv17>
- Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2016). Understanding the burnout experience: Recent research and its implications for psychiatry. *World Psychiatry*, 15, 103–111.

- Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resource Management Review*, 1(1), 61–89. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1053-4822\(91\)90011-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/1053-4822(91)90011-Z)
- Meyer, J. P., Stanley, D. J., Herscovitch, L., & Topolnytsky, L. (2002). Affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization: A meta-analysis of antecedents, correlates, and consequences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 61(1), 20–52. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2001.1842>
- Mohamed, A., Dasoo, N., & Israel, H. (2024). South African expatriate teachers in the Gulf Arab States: Push and pull factors for leaving. *Migration and Development*, 13(2), 274–288.
- Mulkeen, A. (2010). *Teachers in Anglophone Africa: Issues in teacher supply, training, and management*. The World Bank: Washington, DC.
- Nguyen, T., Nguyen, A., Tran, A., Vu, L., & Lu, O. (2026). Job–education mismatch and wage penalties: Evidence from graduates in educational science and teacher education in Vietnam. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 15(4), 221–248. <https://doi.org/10.32674/5pn56353>
- Oberman, K. (2011). Immigration, global poverty and the right to stay. *Political Studies*, 59, 253–268. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2011.00889.x>
- Ojo, S. S., Ayesoro, S. A., & Peter, D. I. (2025). Underpaid and overworked: The challenges of private schools’ teachers in Ado-Ekiti Metropolis, Nigeria. *Annals of Management and Organization Research*, 7(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.35912/amor.v7i1.2477>
- Opoku, P. M., Nketsia, W., Belbase, S., Side, A. S., Jiya, A. N., & Gemed, F. T. (2025). A cross-national study of teacher retention and job satisfaction in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Preventing school failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 69(2), 137–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2024.2361874>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023). *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/rtd/items/813116/>
- Padhan, G. (2026). Exploring the school leaders’ sense of school belongingness through systematic grounded theory. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 15(5), 269–298. <https://doi.org/10.32674/tfm64096>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: theory, method and research* (2nd ed). London: SAGE.
- Stanczyk, L. (2016). Managing skilled migration. *Ethics & Global Politics*, 9(1), 33502. <https://doi.org/10.3402/egp.v9.33502>
- Stilz, A. (2016). *Is there an unqualified right to leave?* In Sarah Fine, and Lea Ypi (eds), *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership* Oxford University Press: UK. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199676606.003.0004>

- Shaoan, M. M. R., Namanyane, T., Feng, M., & Arif, M. (2025). A systematic literature review on the importance of teacher recruitment and retention in global educational reform. *Frontiers in Education* 9, 1447752. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1447752>
- Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). n.d. 2022/2023 National Personnel Audit (NPA) Report. Abuja, Nigeria: Universal Basic Education Commission. <https://ubec.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/2022-NPA-REPORT.pdf?>
- Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315422657>