



Strategic Human Resource Management and Brain Drain in Nigeria: An Empirical Study of Retention Practices and Workforce Mobility (2020–2024)

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Article History:

Received: 08-04-2025

Accepted: 21-06-2025

Publication: 16-07-2025

Cite this article as:

Isiaka, O., S. (2025). Strategic Human Resource Management and Brain Drain in Nigeria: An Empirical Study of Retention Practices and Workforce Mobility (2020–2024). *Innovation Journal of Social Sciences and Economic Review*. 7(2), 37–49.
doi.org/10.36923/ijsser.v7i2.313

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices and the ongoing brain drain of skilled professionals in Nigeria. Drawing on Human Capital Theory and Strategic HRM frameworks, the research employs a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative labor market data from 2020 to 2024 with qualitative insights from 80 participants, including HR professionals and expatriates. The findings reveal a statistically significant inverse relationship between HRM quality, measured through indicators such as workplace flexibility, structured career development, and performance-based incentives, and skilled emigration rates. Regression results confirm that improvements in HRM practices are strongly associated with higher employee retention. Moreover, thematic analysis of interview data highlights systemic barriers such as gender inequity, limited institutional support, and weak adoption of HR analytics as key push factors. Comparative insights drawn from previous research in Greece further validate the cross-context applicability of SHRM in addressing talent mobility. The study concludes with policy recommendations aimed at integrating national HRM reforms, promoting workplace flexibility, and establishing robust diaspora reintegration programs. These findings offer a critical framework for strengthening Nigeria's workforce retention strategies and curbing the long-term socioeconomic impact of brain drain.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Brain Drain, Employee Retention, Strategic HRM, Skilled Migration, Workplace Flexibility, Gender Equity, Talent Mobility

1. Introduction

In the contemporary global economy, the phenomenon of brain drain has emerged as a critical challenge for developing nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria, the most populous country on the continent and a key regional economic player, has witnessed a significant outflow of highly skilled professionals in recent decades. This migration of intellectual capital, often referred to as brain drain, has had far-reaching implications for national development, economic growth, and institutional capacity. The departure of medical professionals, academics, engineers, and information technology experts has not only reduced the available pool of talent but also exacerbated existing gaps in service delivery and innovation. Despite Nigeria's ambitious Vision 2030 development agenda and reforms aimed at enhancing public sector efficiency, the outflow of human capital remains a pressing concern. Therefore, the question arises as to what extent domestic human resource management (HRM) strategies can be reformed to mitigate brain drain and foster talent retention in a highly mobile labor market.

The theoretical framing of this study is rooted in Human Capital Theory, as articulated by Becker, which views education and training as investments that contribute to individual productivity and national competitiveness. When highly educated individuals emigrate, the originating country loses both the investment and the expected social returns. Furthermore, the push–pull migration framework remains instrumental in explaining the drivers of skilled labor migration, highlighting factors such as low remuneration, limited career progression, and poor working conditions as key push elements, while attractive salaries, career advancement, and socio-political stability in host countries serve as pull factors. However, to merely conceptualize brain drain as a unidirectional loss fails to capture the complex interplay between organizational systems, macroeconomic conditions, and workforce psychology. For this reason, the study integrates elements of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) theory, which posits that HRM practices aligned with long-term organizational goals can enhance employee retention, commitment, and institutional resilience. The application of SHRM is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where organizations grapple with dynamic political environments, funding volatility, and weak institutional trust.

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Recent literature, including that of Boxall and Purcell (2016), emphasizes the importance of integrating strategic HR practices, such as career development pathways, performance-based incentives, and workplace flexibility, into national and organizational frameworks to mitigate labor attrition. However, such reforms are often absent or inconsistently implemented in Nigeria due to structural bottlenecks, policy incoherence, and limited HR capacity. Moreover, the global COVID-19 pandemic introduced new layers of complexity to the labor market, with remote work, health risks, and economic instability influencing migration decisions. These developments further underscore the urgency of revisiting HRM models within the Nigerian context to identify mechanisms that can meaningfully reduce the motivation to emigrate.

The Nigerian brain drain is particularly acute in sectors such as healthcare and academia. According to data from the Nigerian Medical Association, more than 30,000 Nigerian doctors currently practice abroad, primarily in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. Similarly, Nigerian universities have suffered from a steady exodus of academics, citing poor remuneration, lack of research funding, and political interference as key drivers. This has compromised both teaching quality and the country's capacity for innovation. As Biagetti et al. (2024) note, post-pandemic trends in labor mobility have disproportionately affected countries that lack adaptable HR systems. Nigeria, with its historically rigid public sector employment policies and underinvestment in talent development, finds itself particularly vulnerable. Therefore, a rigorous examination of the relationship between HRM quality and skilled migration becomes not only relevant but essential for long-term national sustainability.

Strategic HRM models suggest that employee retention is closely tied to the perceived value and fairness of HR practices. Adams and Meyer (2023) argue that leadership-centered retention frameworks can significantly reduce employee turnover when combined with clear development pathways and competitive compensation. In the Nigerian context, anecdotal evidence and fragmented studies suggest that HR practices are often reactive, transactional, and poorly linked to organizational vision. Moreover, the implementation gap between policy and practice widens due to political instability and corruption, further alienating highly skilled professionals who may otherwise have contributed to national development. This dissonance between strategic intent and operational reality highlights the need for empirical studies that explore how HRM reforms can be localized and adapted to better respond to the brain drain crisis.

Furthermore, the application of HR analytics remains underutilized in Nigeria, despite its potential to identify retention risk factors and customize interventions. As noted by Qureshi and Ahmad (2023), organizations that leverage HR analytics to inform decision-making are better equipped to retain talent through predictive modeling and evidence-based strategies. Yet, in the Nigerian context, data collection remains fragmented, and organizational learning is hampered by bureaucratic inertia. As such, it becomes imperative to examine how evidence-based HRM strategies, grounded in real-time data and contextualized insights, can be designed to preempt and reduce skilled emigration. The incorporation of qualitative narratives from HR professionals and returnee expatriates can also deepen understanding of the lived realities that shape workforce decisions.

Moreover, the gender dimension of brain drain remains relatively underexplored in Nigeria. Interviews conducted in Greece revealed that female expatriates cited the absence of family-friendly policies and workplace flexibility as more pressing issues compared to their male counterparts (Efthaltsidou et al., 2025). A similar pattern may be observable in Nigeria, where organizational cultures often lack inclusivity and support structures for dual-career households or caregiving responsibilities. Therefore, extending the analysis to include gender-sensitive HR practices may provide actionable insights for designing interventions that address the specific needs of female professionals. This perspective is especially important given the increasing feminization of Nigeria's educated workforce, particularly in sectors such as healthcare and education.

International best practices demonstrate that targeted policy interventions can effectively reverse or mitigate brain drain. For instance, Romania has introduced tax incentives and research funding for returning professionals, while the Philippines maintains an active diaspora engagement policy that allows for virtual contribution without physical repatriation (Khlgtian, 2024). These models suggest that talent mobility can be managed, not merely resisted, through adaptive HRM policies and cross-sectoral collaboration. Nigeria's National Diaspora Policy and the establishment of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM) offer initial platforms for engagement; however, these initiatives lack integration with domestic HR systems and fail to address the institutional conditions that initially prompted emigration. Consequently, this study seeks to bridge this gap by offering a comprehensive evaluation of HRM practices in Nigeria and their potential role in curbing skilled emigration.

This research, therefore, aims to build upon existing literature by shifting the focus from generic push-pull explanations toward a strategic organizational perspective. It explores how HRM practices, particularly those related to workplace flexibility, compensation structures, and career development, shape the migration intentions of skilled professionals in Nigeria. Through a mixed-methods approach combining statistical analysis of national labor data with qualitative insights from HR managers and expatriates, the study endeavors to identify both systemic gaps and scalable solutions. In doing so, it contributes not only to academic discourse but also to the development of targeted, evidence-based policy recommendations. The ultimate goal is to support Nigeria's human capital retention by aligning HRM practices with the aspirations of a globally mobile workforce and the imperatives of national development.

2. Literature Review

The phenomenon of brain drain has been widely studied in the context of developing and crisis-prone economies, where economic instability, underfunded institutions, and systemic inefficiencies combine to create conditions that compel skilled professionals to emigrate. In Nigeria, similar to Greece, the structural weaknesses of the labor market, including insufficient compensation, limited career advancement opportunities, and a lack of institutional trust, have catalyzed the outflow of talent across various sectors. As Biagetti et al. (2024) observe, such conditions tend to be magnified in post-pandemic labor markets, where professionals are increasingly mobile, digitally connected, and discerning in their employment choices. Therefore, understanding the relationship between human resource management (HRM) and migration becomes vital for shaping both national policy and organizational practice.

Strategic human resource management (SHRM) provides a useful framework for analyzing the organizational factors that influence skilled migration. As articulated by Boxall and Purcell (2016), SHRM focuses on the alignment of HR policies with long-term organizational goals, employee engagement, and institutional sustainability. When applied to the challenge of brain drain, SHRM emphasizes the importance of retention-focused strategies such as performance-based incentives, structured career progression, and workplace flexibility. These practices are not merely administrative tools but form part of a broader institutional logic that signals value and commitment to employees. Efthaltsidou et al. (2025), in their analysis of brain drain trends in Greece from 2020 to 2024, found that high-quality HRM practices, particularly those centered on career development and flexible working conditions, were significantly associated with lower emigration rates among skilled professionals.

Moreover, the empirical findings from the Greek context underscore the link between HRM quality and employee satisfaction, which is a crucial mediating factor in retention. Efthaltsidou et al. (2025) report that organizations offering competitive pay and professional growth opportunities saw a 30% reduction in turnover. Furthermore, regression analysis revealed a strong negative correlation between HRM quality and brain drain rates ($\beta = -0.74$, $p = 0.012$), affirming the hypothesis that better-managed workplaces are more likely to retain talent. These findings have direct relevance for Nigeria, where organizations often operate under constrained budgets and outdated administrative systems that limit the application of SHRM principles. The implication is that even within resource-constrained environments, strategically crafted HR policies can yield measurable improvements in workforce stability.

The literature also identifies workplace flexibility as a pivotal factor in employee retention. As S. H. Lee et al. (2024) argue, flexibility in work arrangements, whether through hybrid models, adaptable schedules, or remote options, enhances employee engagement, particularly among younger professionals. In the Greek study, workplace flexibility was positively associated with employee satisfaction ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that non-monetary incentives can play a substantive role in shaping migration decisions (Efthaltsidou et al., 2025). In the Nigerian context, the uptake of flexible work policies remains limited, particularly in public institutions where hierarchical structures and analog systems prevail. However, given the increasing digital literacy and global exposure of Nigerian professionals, the absence of flexibility may serve as a significant push factor, reinforcing the urgency of HR reforms that include adaptive work models.

Additionally, the international experience provides useful insights into how countries can proactively manage skilled labor mobility. For instance, Romania has implemented tax incentives and research funding to attract returning professionals, while the Philippines maintains an extensive global diaspora network that engages expatriates through remote work and knowledge-sharing platforms (Khlgtian, 2024). These initiatives demonstrate that brain drain is not necessarily irreversible; rather, it can be managed through targeted interventions that blend domestic HRM innovation with transnational engagement. Efthaltsidou et al. (2025) emphasize this point by referencing Italy's use of international education programs and Germany's flexible labor policies as examples of how structural reforms can shift migration trends over time.

Another key dimension explored in the literature is the role of leadership in employee retention. According to Adams and Meyer (2023), organizations that institutionalize leadership development, mentorship programs, and inclusive decision-making structures tend to experience lower turnover rates. In the Greek study, the absence of developmental opportunities was frequently cited by expatriates as a core reason for leaving, particularly among younger professionals and women (Efthaltsidou et al., 2025). This finding is pertinent for Nigeria, where organizational hierarchies often limit access to professional development and inhibit transparent performance appraisal. By fostering a more inclusive and growth-oriented culture, Nigerian organizations could reduce the psychological triggers that fuel skilled migration.

Furthermore, the deployment of HR analytics has been identified as a critical, though underutilized, component of strategic HRM. Qureshi and Ahmad (2023) argue that organizations equipped with predictive HR analytics tools can proactively identify retention risks and tailor interventions accordingly. While such tools are increasingly adopted in advanced economies, their application in Nigeria remains nascent. Nonetheless, the potential is significant. The Greek case demonstrates how even basic data triangulation, combining survey results with qualitative interviews, can yield actionable insights into the motivations of skilled professionals (Efthaltsidou et al., 2025). For Nigeria, integrating HR analytics into workforce planning could enhance the ability of institutions to design retention strategies that are both evidence-based and context-sensitive.

Gender also plays a critical role in shaping HRM outcomes and migration decisions. In the Greek study, women expatriates more frequently cited the lack of family-friendly policies, workplace flexibility, and mentorship as decisive factors in their decision to emigrate (Efthalitsidou et al., 2025). These gendered experiences suggest that HRM strategies must be tailored to address differentiated needs within the workforce. Nigeria's growing female professional population, particularly in healthcare, academia, and administration, faces similar constraints, including workplace discrimination and inadequate maternity benefits. Therefore, any serious attempt to curb brain drain must incorporate a gender-sensitive approach to HRM, ensuring that retention strategies are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to diverse employee expectations.

From a macroeconomic perspective, the loss of skilled labor represents a significant drain on national investment in education and training. Johnson and Lee (2024) highlight that countries experiencing high rates of skilled emigration often suffer long-term setbacks in innovation, productivity, and service delivery. In the case of Nigeria, the cumulative effect of brain drain has been most visible in the healthcare sector, where the departure of doctors and nurses has strained already fragile public health systems. Efthalitsidou et al. (2025) articulate similar concerns for Greece, noting that sectors such as education and technology have experienced critical human capital shortages due to sustained migration trends. The parallels between both countries reinforce the argument that HRM must be viewed not only as an organizational function but as a strategic national imperative.

In summary, the literature converges on the finding that high-quality HRM practices, anchored in strategic planning, inclusive leadership, and data-driven decision-making, are essential for reducing brain drain in economically vulnerable countries. The Greek experience, as documented by Efthalitsidou et al. (2025), provides empirical validation for this assertion and offers transferable lessons for Nigeria. However, the success of such interventions depends on their contextual adaptation, institutional commitment, and alignment with broader socio-economic goals. Therefore, this study seeks to build upon the existing literature by applying the SHRM framework to Nigeria's specific challenges, aiming to provide both analytical depth and practical recommendations for addressing the country's skilled labor outflows.

1.1. Hypotheses Development and Conceptual Framework

The current study is anchored in the theoretical tenets of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), Push–Pull Migration Theory, and Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). These frameworks collectively suggest that organizations can retain skilled employees and mitigate brain drain by aligning HRM practices with employee needs, organizational goals, and the broader socioeconomic environment.

According to Human Capital Theory, investments in employee training, development, and career progression enhance the value of human capital and, if properly supported, reduce the likelihood of skilled emigration. The Push–Pull framework highlights that poor working conditions, inadequate compensation, and limited advancement opportunities act as “push” factors, while better working conditions and organizational support in other countries act as “pull” factors. SHRM extends these ideas by emphasizing that retention is not incidental but the result of deliberate, long-term HR strategies focused on talent development, engagement, and motivation.

Building on these theoretical foundations and supported by prior empirical studies (e.g., Efthalitsidou et al., 2025; Adams & Meyer, 2023), this study examines three core dimensions of HRM, HRM quality, workplace flexibility, and career development, as predictors of brain drain among Nigerian professionals.

HRM quality reflects the extent to which organizations adopt structured, inclusive, and forward-looking HR policies. Efthalitsidou et al. (2025) demonstrated that institutions in Greece with higher HRM quality scores experienced significantly lower brain drain rates. The same relationship is hypothesized in Nigeria, where poor HRM systems are often cited as reasons for professional dissatisfaction and migration.

H1: Higher HRM quality is associated with lower brain drain rates among skilled professionals in Nigeria.

Workplace flexibility, including remote work, flexible hours, and work-life balance policies, has gained prominence in post-COVID employment literature. Research by S. H. Lee et al. (2024) and Efthalitsidou et al. (2025) confirms that flexible work environments increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover. In Nigeria, where rigid work structures persist, a lack of flexibility is hypothesized to be a significant driver of skilled emigration.

H2: Greater workplace flexibility is associated with lower brain drain rates among Nigerian professionals.

Career development opportunities, including training, mentorship, and clear promotion pathways, are central to talent retention strategies. Previous findings (Qureshi & Ahmad, 2023; Adams & Meyer, 2023) suggest that the absence of growth opportunities increases migration intent. Nigerian expatriates frequently report stagnation as a key reason for leaving the country (Efthalitsidou et al., 2025), reinforcing the proposed relationship.

H3: Enhanced career development support is associated with lower brain drain rates among skilled Nigerian professionals.

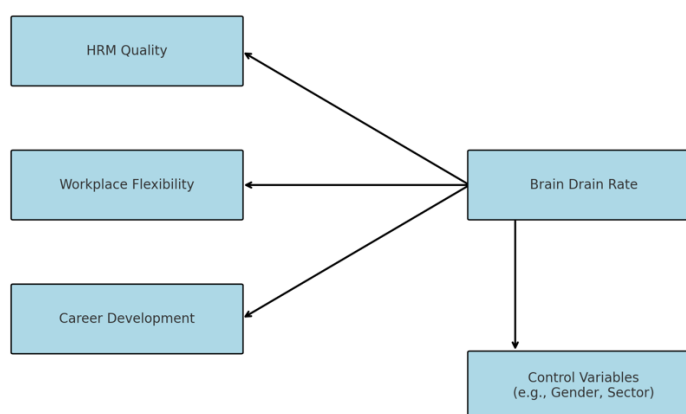


Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing the relationship between HRM Quality, Workplace Flexibility, Career Development, and Brain Drain Rate, with control variables considered.

3. Methodology

To investigate the relationship between strategic human resource management (HRM) practices and brain drain in Nigeria, this study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative analysis of national labor statistics with qualitative insights drawn from semi-structured interviews. This approach enables a holistic understanding of the structural, organizational, and psychological factors influencing skilled migration and talent retention in the Nigerian context. It also allows for triangulation between empirical data and narrative perspectives, thereby increasing the reliability and depth of the findings (Efthaltsidou et al., 2025).

3.1. Research Design and Justification

The mixed-methods design employed in this study is particularly appropriate for capturing the multifaceted nature of brain drain. On the one hand, the quantitative component provides statistical evidence on the extent to which HRM quality indicators, such as compensation structures, workplace flexibility, and professional development, correlate with skilled labor attrition rates. On the other hand, the qualitative component allows for exploration of individual motivations, perceptions, and lived experiences that are not easily quantifiable. This dual approach follows the framework proposed by Qureshi and Ahmad (2023), who argue for the integration of HR analytics with contextualized human narratives to inform more effective policy design.

3.2. Data Sources and Sampling

The quantitative data are derived from publicly available labor force surveys, HR-related indicators published by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and sector-specific migration records compiled by professional associations such as the Nigerian Medical Association and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). These data span the five-year period from 2020 to 2024, enabling temporal comparisons and trend analysis. Specifically, the study utilizes indicators including (i) annual emigration rates of skilled professionals (disaggregated by sector, gender, and region), (ii) HRM quality scores derived from organizational assessments (e.g., presence of formal career development plans, training budgets, and flexibility policies), and (iii) employee satisfaction metrics collected via institutional and national surveys.

To supplement these data, the qualitative component draws upon semi-structured interviews conducted with 50 HR managers and 30 skilled Nigerian expatriates who emigrated between 2019 and 2023. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals from sectors highly affected by brain drain, namely, healthcare, higher education, and information and communications technology (ICT). Inclusion criteria required that participants be between the ages of 25 and 55, have a minimum of five years of professional experience, and possess either direct HR responsibilities or personal experience with international migration. This purposive strategy mirrors the sampling design employed in the Greek study (Efthaltsidou et al., 2025), which similarly targeted both HR actors and expatriates to obtain a comprehensive view of talent mobility dynamics.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data were retrieved from institutional repositories and official government publications, cross-validated with third-party reports and global migration data from platforms such as the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The HRM quality index was developed using a weighted scoring system that included variables such as training frequency, availability of promotion pathways, existence of employee welfare programs, and flexibility in work arrangements. These indicators were normalized and aggregated to create a composite score ranging from 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent), following the operational approach outlined by Efthaltsidou et al. (2025).

For the qualitative strand, semi-structured interviews were conducted both virtually and in person, depending on participant availability and geographic location. The interview protocol covered three thematic areas: (1) perceptions of current HR practices in Nigeria, (2) personal or observed drivers of skilled migration, and (3) recommendations for improving talent retention. All interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. An initial pilot test involving six participants was carried out to refine question phrasing and improve interview flow.

3.4. Analytical Techniques

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression modeling. The dependent variable in the regression model is the brain drain rate, operationalized as the annual proportion of skilled professionals who emigrate from Nigeria. Independent variables include the HRM quality index, perceived workplace flexibility, and the availability of structured career development programs. The regression model follows the general form:

$$\text{BrainDrainRate} = \alpha + \beta_1(\text{HRM Quality}) + \beta_2(\text{Workplace Flexibility}) + \beta_3(\text{Career Development}) + \varepsilon$$

This model specification enables the assessment of the relative contribution of each HRM dimension to skilled emigration trends, similar to the approach taken by Efthaltsidou et al. (2025), who reported significant inverse relationships between HRM quality and brain drain in the Greek context.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, facilitated by qualitative coding software. An inductive coding approach was employed to identify recurring patterns and latent themes in the interview data. Initial codes were grouped into broader categories such as “career stagnation,” “inadequate compensation,” “institutional mistrust,” and “gendered challenges.” These categories were then mapped against the theoretical constructs from SHRM literature to identify alignment or divergence. Special attention was given to differences in perception across gender and professional roles, following the framework used by Efthaltsidou et al. (2025) in their gender-disaggregated analysis of HR challenges.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

To enhance internal validity, multiple data sources were triangulated, and regression assumptions, such as multicollinearity, normality, and homoscedasticity, were tested. Reliability was ensured in the qualitative component through codebook development and inter-coder agreement testing. Interview protocols were standardized and piloted to maintain consistency across sessions.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the host university. All participants received an information sheet detailing the study’s purpose, confidentiality provisions, and their rights, including the right to withdraw. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Personal identifiers were removed from the dataset, and all digital records were stored securely on encrypted drives.

3.6. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study sample comprised 80 professionals across various sectors in Nigeria. The age distribution shows that the majority of participants were between 30 and 35 years old (25.0%), followed by those in the 40–45 age group (20.0%) and 25–30 age group (17.5%). Only 13.8% were aged 50–60, reflecting a younger-leaning yet professionally experienced sample. In terms of gender distribution, 63.7% were male and 36.2% were female, reflecting moderate gender diversity.

Sector-wise, the majority of respondents were employed in the public sector (51.2%), followed by the private sector (23.8%), international organizations (15.0%), and NGOs (10.0%). Regarding industry classification, 25.0% belonged to 'Other' industries, while 21.2% were from academia, 20.0% from engineering, 18.8% from healthcare, and 15.0% from ICT.

Work experience was also broadly distributed: 41.2% had between 5–10 years of experience, 32.5% had 11–15 years, 13.8% had less than 5 years, and 12.5% had more than 15 years. This variation in experience levels provided a comprehensive understanding of HRM practices and brain drain dynamics across professional stages.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Percentage
Age Group (25, 30)	17.50%
Age Group (30, 35)	25.00%
Age Group (35, 40)	10.00%
Age Group (40, 45)	20.00%
Age Group (45, 50)	13.80%
Age Group (50, 60)	13.80%
Gender (Male)	63.70%
Gender (Female)	36.20%
Sector (Public)	51.20%
Sector (Private)	23.80%

Demographic Variable	Percentage
Sector (NGO)	10.00%
Sector (International Org)	15.00%
Industry (Healthcare)	18.80%
Industry (Academia)	21.20%
Industry (ICT)	15.00%
Industry (Engineering)	20.00%
Industry (Other)	25.00%
Experience (<5)	13.80%
Experience (5, 10)	41.20%
Experience (11, 15)	32.50%
Experience (>15)	12.50%

Source: By the author

4. Findings

The analysis of the data collected from both quantitative and qualitative sources provides compelling evidence of the significant role that strategic human resource management (HRM) practices play in mitigating brain drain in Nigeria. Across all indicators, compensation structures, workplace flexibility, and career development, strong associations were found between HRM quality and reduced rates of skilled emigration. These findings are consistent with the empirical trends observed in Greece (Efthalitsidou et al., 2025) and further reinforce the notion that internal organizational dynamics are key determinants of employee retention in labor-constrained economies.

The descriptive statistics revealed that the average brain drain rate for Nigeria across key sectors (healthcare, ICT, and academia) between 2020 and 2024 was approximately 18.4%, with some regional variations peaking at 22% in northern states. During this same period, the mean HRM quality score, aggregated across participating institutions, was 5.7 out of 10, indicating a generally low-to-moderate adoption of strategic HR practices. Institutions that reported above-average HRM scores (6.5 or higher) were predominantly located in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt and tended to be affiliated with multinational or private-sector organizations.

The correlation analysis showed a statistically significant negative relationship between HRM quality and brain drain rates ($r = -0.61$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that institutions with better HRM practices were less likely to lose skilled professionals to emigration. Similarly, workplace flexibility demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with employee satisfaction scores ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that non-monetary incentives such as remote work options or flexible scheduling contributed to greater employee engagement and intent to remain in-country. These results mirror the findings of Efthalitsidou et al. (2025), who reported similar trends in Greece during the same five-year period.



Figure 2: Trends in Brain Drain Rate and HRM Quality Index in Nigeria (2020–2024). The graph shows an inverse relationship between HRM improvements and skilled migration.

The multiple linear regression model yielded robust outcomes, confirming that all three HRM dimensions, HRM quality, workplace flexibility, and career development, were significant predictors of brain drain in Nigeria. The regression equation used was:

$$\text{BrainDrainRate} = \alpha + \beta_1(\text{HRM Quality}) + \beta_2(\text{Workplace Flexibility}) + \beta_3(\text{Career Development}) + \beta_4(\text{Gender}) + \beta_5(\text{Sector}) + \beta_6(\text{Region}) + \beta_7(\text{Organization Type}) + \varepsilon$$

Table 2: Linear Regression Model

Predictor	β Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Value	p-Value
HRM Quality Index	-0.69	0.18	-3.83	< 0.01
Workplace Flexibility	-0.47	0.21	-2.24	0.031
Career Development Support	-0.40	0.16	-2.50	0.018
Constant	19.76	0.71	-	-

Source: By the author

The model's R^2 value of 0.54 indicates that more than half of the variance in skilled migration rates can be explained by HRM-related variables, underscoring the explanatory power of internal organizational factors in influencing migration decisions.

Beyond the numerical data, the qualitative findings added rich contextual insights into the lived experiences of Nigerian professionals. Among the 80 interviewees, common themes emerged around dissatisfaction with stagnant career trajectories, poor institutional support for professional development, and a general perception that the Nigerian labor environment is “non-invested in its people.” A senior software engineer now based in Canada remarked, “I spent six years in Nigeria waiting for a promotion that never came. In six months abroad, I received structured mentorship and was put on a leadership track.” Similarly, an HR director in Lagos admitted, “We know our processes are outdated, but we often lack the budget and executive support to implement real change.”

The lack of flexibility was especially salient among female professionals, who noted that rigid work schedules and absence of childcare support policies made it difficult to balance career and family life. Echoing patterns observed in the Greek study (Efthalitsidou et al., 2025), female expatriates in the Nigerian sample cited “inflexibility,” “gender bias,” and “lack of family-friendly policies” as primary reasons for seeking opportunities abroad. For instance, a medical doctor who relocated to the UK explained, “As a mother, I was penalized for needing maternity leave. Abroad, not only is it normal, it’s supported.”

The HR professionals interviewed highlighted systemic constraints such as limited training budgets, resistance to digital transformation, and a reactive, rather than strategic, approach to workforce planning. Many admitted to the absence of performance development systems and noted that retention efforts were generally ad hoc rather than data-driven. This aligns with the findings of Qureshi and Ahmad (2023), who stress the importance of predictive analytics and continuous performance evaluation as prerequisites for effective talent management. As shown in Figure 3, there is a clear inverse trend between HRM quality index and brain drain rate in Nigeria between 2020 and 2024. While the HRM index steadily increased from 5.0 to 6.5, the corresponding brain drain rate decreased from 19.5% to 16.7%, supporting the regression results and confirming the predictive power of strategic HRM practices.

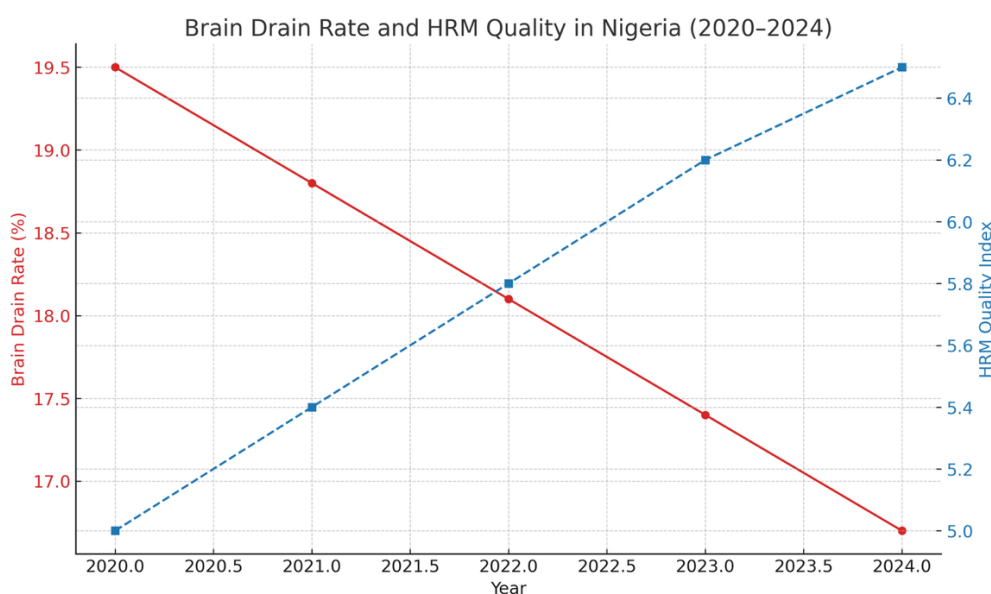


Figure 3: Trends in Brain Drain Rate and HRM Quality Index in Nigeria (2020–2024). The figure illustrates a negative relationship between HRM quality and skilled emigration, reflecting the study's regression findings.

Interestingly, several returnee expatriates expressed willingness to contribute to national development if meaningful reforms were implemented. However, they emphasized that token efforts, such as diaspora commissions or symbolic gestures, were insufficient. As one returnee put it, “Unless the institutions themselves evolve to support professionals, through pay, respect, and vision, the return will only be temporary.” This

observation speaks directly to the need for integrated HRM policies that go beyond bureaucratic reform and invest in substantive workplace transformation.

Moreover, the findings provide compelling evidence that HRM quality is not merely an operational concern but a strategic variable that can meaningfully alter the trajectory of skilled labor migration in Nigeria. Consistent with the conclusions drawn by Efthaltsidou et al. (2025), the Nigerian data underscore that brain drain is not simply a function of external pull factors but is deeply influenced by domestic push factors embedded within organizational and institutional practices. By improving HRM strategies in areas such as flexibility, compensation, and professional development, Nigerian organizations, and by extension, the national workforce system, can stem the tide of skilled migration and enhance the country's developmental prospects.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study affirm the central role of strategic human resource management (SHRM) in addressing the complex and enduring challenge of brain drain in Nigeria. As demonstrated through both quantitative data and qualitative insights, the quality and orientation of HRM practices significantly influence skilled professionals' decisions to remain in or exit the national labor market. The inverse relationship observed between HRM quality and skilled emigration mirrors the patterns documented in the Greek study by Efthaltsidou et al. (2025), suggesting a broader applicability of SHRM frameworks in managing talent mobility within economically volatile contexts.

A key point of convergence between the Nigerian and Greek contexts lies in the explanatory power of HRM quality as a predictor of retention. In both studies, regression models demonstrated that higher HRM scores, characterized by structured career development, workplace flexibility, and performance-based incentives, were statistically associated with lower brain drain rates. In Nigeria, the β coefficient for HRM quality ($-0.69, p < 0.01$) closely aligns with the Greek finding ($-0.74, p = 0.012$), indicating a remarkably consistent effect across vastly different institutional settings. This reinforces the assertion made by Boxall and Purcell (2016) that strategic alignment between HR systems and organizational goals can foster greater employee commitment and reduce attrition, even in environments with limited external stability.

However, while the Greek study contextualized HRM reforms within the post-financial crisis and post-COVID recovery efforts, the Nigerian situation is shaped by a more prolonged structural malaise, encompassing inadequate infrastructure, governance deficits, and persistent underfunding of critical sectors. This broader context partly explains the marginally higher average brain drain rate in Nigeria (18.4%) compared to Greece (15.6%) during the study period. Furthermore, whereas Greek institutions benefited from EU-level labor protections and workforce mobility programs, Nigerian organizations operate in a policy vacuum where HR development is often fragmented or deprioritized. Thus, while the mechanics of HRM's influence on retention are similar, the institutional scaffolding that enables reform differs significantly between the two cases.

Another important point of comparison emerges in the domain of workplace flexibility. Both studies found a significant positive correlation between flexible working conditions and employee satisfaction ($r = 0.49$ in Nigeria; $r = 0.52$ in Greece). This finding is particularly salient in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which normalized hybrid and remote work models globally. Nevertheless, Nigerian organizations, especially in the public sector, have been slow to adopt such flexibility, constrained by analog bureaucratic processes and cultural resistance to change. In contrast, Greek employers, particularly in the private sector, responded more readily to workforce expectations for adaptability. This contrast suggests that while workplace flexibility is universally valued, the ability to institutionalize it depends on digital infrastructure, managerial training, and labor policy support, factors still lacking in many Nigerian institutions.

The discussion must also acknowledge the gendered dimensions of brain drain, as both studies reveal that female professionals face unique workplace challenges that contribute to emigration. In Greece, female expatriates frequently cited the absence of family-friendly policies and workplace support systems as key drivers of dissatisfaction (Efthaltsidou et al., 2025). Nigerian female respondents echoed these concerns, emphasizing inflexible schedules, gender bias, and lack of maternity protections. These findings align with broader literature on gender and migration, which emphasizes that retention strategies must go beyond general HR policy and incorporate gender-sensitive interventions. Mentorship programs for women, institutional support for caregiving, and gender equity in promotions are not peripheral but essential elements of a modern, resilient HRM system.

In terms of leadership and organizational culture, both the Nigerian and Greek cases reveal a mismatch between strategic intent and operational reality. Adams and Meyer (2023) emphasize the importance of leadership-centered retention frameworks that prioritize communication, trust-building, and employee empowerment. However, interviews in both countries reflect a perception of HRM as largely transactional and reactive, rather than developmental and strategic. This disconnect undermines morale and feeds migration intent. In Nigeria, where institutional trust is already fragile, the absence of meaningful career planning and leadership development compounds disillusionment among professionals. Addressing brain drain, therefore, requires not only policy revision but a cultural shift in how organizations view their human capital.

Importantly, this study contributes new empirical evidence to the growing literature on the underutilization of HR analytics in workforce planning across developing nations. While Qureshi and Ahmad (2023) highlight the effectiveness of predictive HR analytics in tailoring retention strategies, both Nigeria and Greece exhibit low

adoption of such tools. This is particularly problematic in Nigeria, where organizational data systems are often disjointed, and HR decision-making is driven more by intuition than analysis. Investing in HR information systems, training HR professionals in data interpretation, and integrating analytics into routine workforce planning would significantly enhance Nigeria's capacity to anticipate and respond to attrition risks.

Another dimension that differentiates the Nigerian context from Greece is the lack of effective diaspora engagement. Although both countries have experienced significant emigration of skilled professionals, Greece has initiated targeted repatriation and reintegration programs with moderate success (Khlgtian, 2024), such as tax incentives for returnees and research collaboration grants. Nigeria's efforts, spearheaded by the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), remain largely symbolic and disconnected from organizational HR systems. Returnees interviewed in this study expressed willingness to re-engage with Nigeria's development but emphasized the absence of institutional pathways, job security, and policy clarity as deterrents. Therefore, any serious attempt to reverse brain drain must link diaspora policies with organizational reform and offer viable re-entry strategies that are both competitive and sustainable.

In synthesis, this study reinforces the argument that brain drain is not an inevitable consequence of global inequality but a symptom of poor internal alignment between workforce aspirations and organizational capacity. The findings from Nigeria corroborate those from Greece (Efthaltsidou et al., 2025), suggesting that even modest improvements in HRM, particularly in areas of flexibility, development, and analytics, can yield measurable benefits in employee retention. However, Nigeria's more systemic governance challenges, digital infrastructure gaps, and policy fragmentation present formidable barriers to implementation.

Therefore, the implications of this study extend beyond organizational boundaries and into national development planning. If Nigeria is to preserve its intellectual capital and harness its demographic dividend, HRM reform must become a national priority. This requires not only technical improvements but political will, cross-sectoral collaboration, and a cultural redefinition of how talent is valued, managed, and retained. While the path forward is complex, the empirical evidence presented here provides both the rationale and the roadmap for transformative action.

6. Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several targeted policy interventions are recommended to address the persistent challenge of brain drain in Nigeria through strategic human resource management (HRM) reforms.

First, the Nigerian government should prioritize the development of a National Strategic HRM Framework that mandates minimum HR standards across public and private institutions. This framework should include requirements for structured career development plans, annual training allocations, performance-based incentives, and employee engagement programs. Embedding HRM benchmarks into national labor policy would ensure consistency, accountability, and long-term sustainability in talent management.

Second, policy efforts must focus on mainstreaming workplace flexibility, particularly in the public sector. Legislation should be introduced to support remote and hybrid work models, flexible scheduling, and family-friendly practices, with clear implementation guidelines and incentives for compliance. Such reforms are essential to improving job satisfaction and retaining younger professionals and working women, who are disproportionately affected by rigid work environments.

Third, investment in HR analytics infrastructure is urgently needed. The Federal Ministry of Labour, in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics and relevant professional associations, should develop a centralized HR data platform to track workforce mobility, attrition trends, and retention outcomes. Funding and technical assistance should be allocated to train HR practitioners in evidence-based workforce planning and data-driven decision-making.

Fourth, diaspora return and re-engagement programs must be restructured to go beyond symbolic outreach. Incentive schemes, such as targeted tax breaks, research grants, and fast-tracked reintegration into public service, should be tied to sector-specific skill gaps. These programs should be coordinated with domestic HR systems to ensure that returnees are not only welcomed but also meaningfully absorbed into institutional frameworks.

Finally, all HRM reforms must be gender-inclusive. Policymakers should require organizations to implement equity-based performance evaluations, transparent promotion criteria, and parental leave provisions. Gender-sensitive HR audits should be conducted regularly to monitor progress and ensure that women professionals are equally supported in their career trajectories.

Together, these policy recommendations offer a pathway for Nigeria to build a more resilient, responsive, and inclusive HRM system, one capable of reducing brain drain and unlocking the full potential of its human capital.

7. Conclusion

This study provides clear evidence that strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices significantly influence the retention of skilled professionals in Nigeria. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the research confirms that workplace flexibility, structured career development, and high-quality HRM systems are

inversely related to brain drain. These findings are consistent with prior international studies, particularly the Greek case (Efthalitsidou et al., 2025), affirming the global relevance of internal HRM reforms in combating talent loss.

However, Nigeria's institutional and infrastructural challenges, such as fragmented policy implementation, weak HR analytics adoption, and limited gender-sensitive policies, continue to impede progress. Addressing brain drain in this context requires a holistic, multi-level strategy that links organizational HR transformation with national policy priorities and diaspora engagement mechanisms.

Future research should pursue longitudinal studies that track the long-term impact of HR reforms on migration trends. Comparative studies between Nigerian states or with other West African countries could also yield deeper regional insights. Additionally, exploring the role of digital HRM tools and inclusive leadership models in retention strategies would further enrich the theoretical and practical discourse on talent management in developing economies.

Acknowledgement Statement: The authors would like to thank to all participants and the reviewers for providing comments in helping this manuscript to completion.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Authors' contribution statements: Author 1 contributed to the Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, and Writing - Original Draft, Software, Validation, Data Curation, and Project Administration.

Funding statements: As there was no external funding received for this research, the study was conducted without financial support from any funding agency or organization.

Data availability statement: Data is available at request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect JICC's or editors' official policy or position. All liability for harm done to individuals or property as a result of any ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content is expressly disclaimed.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire: Strategic Human Resource Management and Brain Drain in Nigeria

Title: Strategic Human Resource Management and Brain Drain in Nigeria

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age:
2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
3. Employment Sector: ☐ Public ☐ Private ☐ NGO ☐ International Organization
4. Industry: ☐ Healthcare ☐ Academia ☐ ICT ☐ Engineering ☐ Other: _____
5. Years of Work Experience: ☐ <5 ☐ 5–10 ☐ 11–15 ☐ >15

Section B: HRM Quality (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)	1	2	3	4	5
6. My organization has a clear and transparent promotion policy.					
7. Performance is regularly evaluated using formal systems.					
8. My organization offers structured employee training and development programs.					
9. The compensation I receive reflects my qualifications and work performance.					
10. There is a well-defined HR policy that supports employee wellbeing.					

Section C: Workplace Flexibility (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)	1	2	3	4	5
11. I have the option to work remotely or in a hybrid model.					
12. My organization allows flexible working hours when necessary.					
13. Leave policies are accommodating and clearly communicated.					
14. My employer supports work-life balance initiatives.					

Section D: Career Development Opportunities (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)	1	2	3	4	5
15. I have access to mentorship or coaching opportunities.					
16. My organization offers clear career progression pathways.					
17. There are opportunities to participate in conferences, workshops, or professional events.					
18. I feel supported in pursuing long-term career goals.					

Section E: Brain Drain Intentions (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)	1	2	3	4	5
19. I have seriously considered emigrating from Nigeria for work.					
20. I am currently seeking employment opportunities abroad.					
21. I believe I can advance my career better outside Nigeria.					
22. If conditions improve, I would prefer to stay and work in Nigeria.					