Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Migration has remained a defining feature of human existence, shaping civilizations, economies, and cultures across the globe. In Africa, migration patterns are deeply influenced by historical, economic, and socio-political factors that have contributed to both voluntary and forced movements of people within and beyond the continent. The persistence of migration challenges in Africa has led to critical debates on how best to manage the movement of people, particularly in the face of increasing brain drain, irregular migration, and forced displacement[1]. The history of migration in Africa reveals deeply entrenched patterns of mobility shaped by economic, political, and social factors. In pre-colonial Africa, migration was largely influenced by trade, agriculture, and seasonal labour needs, as communities moved in search of fertile land, trade opportunities, and security. The trans-Saharan trade routes played a crucial role in facilitating migration, enabling the movement of goods, people, and cultures across North, West, and Central Africa. However, with the advent of colonial rule, migration patterns in Africa were significantly disrupted. European colonial administrations imposed artificial borders, disrupted indigenous trade and labour systems, and introduced exploitative economic structures that altered traditional migration flows[2].

Many Africans were forcibly displaced to serve as labourers on plantations and in mines, creating a legacy of economic migration that persists to this day. In the post-independence era, African migration became increasingly linked to political instability and economic hardship. Many newly independent states struggled with governance issues, economic mismanagement, and military coups, leading to waves of political refugees and economic migrants. Globalization and economic disparities further intensified migration flows in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, resulting in a significant brain drain, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, engineering, and academia. Today, African migration is characterized by both intra-continental and intercontinental movements. According to the International Organization for Migration, millions of Africans live outside their countries of birth, with significant migration towards Europe, North America, and the Middle East. The Mediterranean migration crisis has become one of the most visible aspects of African migration, as thousands of migrants undertake perilous journeys across the sea each year in search of better opportunities. The risks associated with these crossings are substantial, with reports indicating that thousands of migrants perish annually due to harsh conditions, human trafficking, and inadequate rescue efforts. Forced displacement due to conflict, terrorism, and political repression has further exacerbated the migration crisis. Many African nations, particularly those in the Sahel and Horn of Africa regions, have experienced mass displacements due to insurgencies, ethnic conflicts, and governance failures[3].

Nigeria and South Africa, as two of the continent's largest economies, have been at the center of migration dynamics in Africa, albeit in different capacities. While Nigeria is primarily a source country for skilled migrants seeking opportunities abroad, South Africa serves as a destination country for many African migrants, particularly from its neighboring states. These contrasting yet interrelated migration trends present unique challenges that require effective policy interventions, particularly in the areas of repatriation and regular migration frameworks[4]. The migration crisis in Africa has been worsened by economic instability, political conflicts, security challenges, and inadequate employment opportunities. For many skilled professionals, the lack of favorable working conditions, weak institutional frameworks, and socio-political uncertainties in their home countries serve as major push factors that drive them toward more developed economies, often outside Africa[5]. This phenomenon, widely known as brain drain, has significantly affected Nigeria, where a large proportion of highly skilled professionals in fields such as medicine, engineering, and academia migrate to countries in Europe, North America, and the Middle East in search of better prospects. According to recent reports, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of skilled labour migration in Africa, with thousands of doctors, nurses, IT professionals, and university lecturers leaving the country annually. The consequences of this mass exodus are far-reaching, as it has weakened local institutions, worsened human capital deficits, and slowed economic and technological advancement[6].

Conversely, South Africa experiences migration challenges from a different perspective. As one of the most industrialized nations on the continent, South Africa attracts a significant number of migrants from neighboring Southern African countries, as well as from West and East Africa. Many of these migrants, however, enter the country through irregular migration routes, leading to concerns over border security, labour competition, and social tensions[7]. Over the years, South Africa has witnessed recurrent episodes of xenophobic violence, largely fueled by perceptions that foreign migrants, particularly from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, are responsible for job displacement and increased crime rates. These migration challenges have raised questions about the effectiveness of South Africa's migration policies, particularly regarding regularization of migrants, integration programs, and labour market absorption[8]. Despite these differing migration challenges, Nigeria and South Africa share a common burden: the difficulty of retaining skilled professionals while ensuring the effective management of migration flows[9]. Both countries have made efforts to repatriate skilled migrants and integrate returning diaspora members into their national economies, yet the success of these efforts has been uneven. Nigeria has attempted to address brain drain through diaspora engagement policies, offering incentives for skilled professionals to return and contribute to national development. However, many returnees struggle with bureaucratic bottlenecks, poor infrastructure, and institutional inefficiencies, making reintegration difficult. Similarly, South Africa has initiated migration regularization programs, but these have often been met with policy inconsistencies, social resistance, and weak enforcement mechanisms[10]. The lack of a harmonized Pan-African approach to migration governance has further complicated these challenges, as migration policies in Africa are often fragmented and driven by nationalistic concerns rather than regional cooperation[11].

Recognizing the growing impact of migration on the socio-economic development of African states, regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have made significant efforts to create frameworks that promote safe, orderly, and regular migration[12]. The AU's Migration Policy Framework for Africa emphasizes the importance of brain circulation rather than brain drain, advocating for policies that encourage African professionals abroad to contribute to their home countries, either through physical return, investment, or knowledge transfer[13]. Similarly, ECOWAS has implemented free movement protocols, aiming to facilitate labour mobility and economic integration within the West African sub-region[14]. However, these regional policies often face implementation challenges at the national level, as governments struggle to balance domestic labour market needs with regional migration commitments. The examination of repatriation and regular migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa provides an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of existing migration governance frameworks and identify policy gaps that hinder sustainable migration management. While repatriation strategies are often seen as a solution to brain drain and irregular migration, their success depends on the ability of states to create enabling environments that attract and retain skilled returnees[15]. Similarly, regular migration policies are essential for ensuring that migration remains a driver of economic growth rather than a source of social conflict[16]. The experiences of Nigeria and South Africa offer valuable insights into how African states can develop comprehensive, Pan-African migration strategies that align with regional and global best practices.

By focusing on Nigeria and South Africa as case studies, this research contributes to ongoing policy discussions on migration governance in Africa, particularly in the context of brain drain mitigation, diaspora engagement, and the promotion of legal migration channels. Understanding the successes, challenges, and policy limitations of these two key African states will provide a foundation for recommendations on how Pan-African migration policies can be strengthened to address the continent's growing migration crisis. Ultimately, this study underscores the need for a coordinated and sustainable approach to migration management that balances national interests with regional integration goals, ensuring that migration serves as a catalyst for development rather than a persistent socio-political challenge.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Migration remains a complex challenge for many African states, and Nigeria and South Africa present two contrasting but connected situations. Nigeria continues to lose skilled professionals to foreign labour markets, especially in the health, education, and technology sectors. This persistent brain drain is driven by unattractive working conditions and unstable socio-political environments. Although the government has introduced diaspora engagement and repatriation initiatives, these efforts remain largely ineffective due to weak institutional frameworks, bureaucratic delays, and poor reintegration mechanisms for returnees.

South Africa, in contrast, experiences high levels of undocumented migration, labour competition, and recurrent xenophobic tensions. Despite existing visa, permit, and asylum systems, implementation remains inconsistent, and policy reversals have undermined public trust. Border management strategies are mostly reactive and fail to address the deeper structural drivers of irregular migration.

A major challenge shared by both countries is the lack of strong, coordinated regional and continental migration governance. Although frameworks exist under the African Union, ECOWAS, and SADC, national interests frequently override regional commitments, resulting in fragmented and ineffective migration outcomes.

These gaps contribute to continuous human-capital loss, economic inefficiencies, and social instability in both countries. Therefore, there is an urgent need to examine how Nigeria and South Africa's migration and repatriation policies can be strengthened and better aligned within a broader Pan-African migration framework.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research was to critically analyse and compare migration governance in Nigeria and South Africa between 2014 and 2024, with particular emphasis on Pan-African approaches to migration challenges. The study examined how migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa have been designed, implemented, and aligned with regional and continental migration frameworks to promote sustainable migration governance. The specific objectives were to:

i. identify the trends in migration crisis in Nigeria and South Africa.
ii. examine the migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa.
iii. identify the strategies for improving migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the key trends characterizing migration crisis in Nigeria and South Africa?
2. How do migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa compare in terms of structure, implementation and outcomes?
3. What strategies can be adopted to improve the effectiveness of migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Migration remains one of the most pressing challenges confronting African states, with Nigeria and South Africa serving as pivotal case studies due to their distinct yet interconnected migration dynamics. This study is significant as it contributes to both academic discourse and policy formulation by providing a comprehensive, Pan-African perspective on migration governance, and the effectiveness of regular migration policies. In a global context where migration is increasingly politicized, the study offers empirical and theoretical insights that highlight the importance of regional cooperation in addressing migration-related challenges in Africa.

From an academic standpoint, this study expands existing scholarship on migration governance by critically assessing how Pan-African migration policies can be leveraged to manage both high-skilled emigration (brain drain) and irregular migration. While previous studies have examined migration challenges in Africa, few have provided a comparative analysis of Nigeria and South Africa within the broader context of Pan-African policy frameworks. This research contributes to migration studies, international law, and diplomatic studies by bridging the gap between national migration policies and regional integration mechanisms, thereby advancing discussions on sustainable migration governance within Africa.

For policymakers, this study provides a data-driven evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of existing migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa. By identifying gaps in the implementation of repatriation strategies and regular migration frameworks, the study offers practical policy recommendations that can enhance the effectiveness of migration governance in both countries. The findings will be particularly useful for government agencies, lawmakers, and diplomatic institutions seeking to develop evidence-based strategies for managing migration, fostering economic development, and mitigating the negative effects of brain drain and irregular migration. The research also holds significant relevance for regional organisations such as the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). By analyzing how these organisations influence national migration policies, the study highlights the need for a harmonized and coordinated regional approach to migration governance. It offers insights into how regional institutions can strengthen their role in facilitating legal migration, promoting economic mobility, and enhancing cross-border cooperation.

At a practical level, this study benefits migrants, returnees, and skilled professionals by examining how policies affect their ability to migrate legally, reintegrate into their home countries, or access labour markets in destination countries. The findings can inform advocacy efforts for better migration policies, stronger legal protections, and improved reintegration mechanisms. By proposing policy solutions that prioritize human capital retention and structured migration pathways, the study aims to contribute to a more equitable and sustainable migration system that balances national interests with the rights and aspirations of migrants. Ultimately, this research is significant in shaping a Pan-African migration governance model that aligns with the broader objectives of continental integration, economic development, and diplomatic cooperation. As African nations continue to navigate the complexities of migration, this study provides a timely and policy-relevant analysis that can inform the development of inclusive, effective, and sustainable migration strategies for Nigeria, South Africa, and beyond.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on approaches to migration challenges and brain drain, with a particular emphasis on repatriation and regular migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa between 2014 and 2024. The choice of this decade allows for a contemporary assessment of policy shifts within the context of evolving migration patterns, global mobility trends, and regional integration efforts in Africa. Geographically, the research is confined to Nigeria and South Africa because they represent two distinct yet interconnected migration realities on the continent. Nigeria, as the largest economy in West Africa, is a major source of emigration, particularly of highly skilled professionals, thus contributing significantly to the phenomenon of brain drain. South Africa, on the other hand, is one of Africa's largest migrant-receiving countries, with complex dynamics involving both legal and irregular migrants. By examining these two countries, the study provides a comparative analysis of how different migration governance models operate within the broader Pan-African framework.

Thematically, the study covers three key areas: (i) the challenges of migration in Africa, (ii) the effectiveness of Nigeria's migration policies, and (iii) the role of South Africa's regular migration policies. It also assesses the extent to which national policies align with regional and continental frameworks, particularly those set by the African Union (AU), the Economic

Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The study further examines the socio-economic, diplomatic, and integration implications of migration governance in both countries. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach and relies entirely on secondary data sources. These include legal instruments, government reports, policy documents, academic literature, and case studies. No primary data was collected through surveys or interviews. The research is comparative in design, using Nigeria and South Africa as case studies while occasionally drawing insights from other African countries for benchmarking and highlighting best practices in migration governance.

The scope does not extend to a comprehensive analysis of all migration policies across the continent. Instead, it strategically narrows its focus to the two case study countries to illustrate broader migration challenges and potential solutions. By clearly outlining its geographical, thematic, temporal, and methodological boundaries, this study ensures that its analysis remains focused, relevant, and rigorous. The findings are expected to contribute to deeper scholarly and policy-oriented understanding of migration governance in Africa while offering practical recommendations for strengthening regional cooperation, policy implementation, and sustainable migration management.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Despite the significance of this study, several limitations inevitably shaped its scope, depth, and interpretative boundaries. These constraints do not diminish the value of the research but are acknowledged to situate its conclusions within proper methodological and contextual parameters. A primary limitation is the exclusive reliance on secondary data sources, such as academic literature, legal instruments, government documents, institutional reports, and policy analysis.

While appropriate for a qualitative, desk-based study of migration governance, this approach limits the incorporation of firsthand empirical insights. The absence of primary data, such as interviews with policymakers, migrants, or stakeholders directly involved in migration governance in Nigeria and South Africa, restricts the study's ability to capture lived experiences, informal policy dynamics, and implementation challenges that may not be documented in existing literature.

1.8 Operational Definitions of Key Terms

In order to ensure conceptual clarity, this study provides operational definitions of key terms that will be frequently used throughout the research. These definitions are tailored to the context of migration governance in Africa.

Migration: This refers to the movement of people from one place to another, either within a country (internal migration) or across international borders (international migration). In this study, migration is examined in the context of Nigeria and South Africa, focusing on both voluntary migration (for economic or educational opportunities) and forced migration (due to conflict, persecution, or environmental factors).

Brain Drain: This describes the large-scale emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals from their home country to foreign nations in search of better opportunities. In Africa, brain drain is particularly significant in sectors such as medicine, engineering, and academia, where professionals leave due to poor working conditions, low wages, or political instability. This study explores how brain drain affects Nigeria and South Africa and examines policies aimed at mitigating its impact.

Repatriation: This refers to the process of returning individuals whether voluntarily or forcibly to their country of origin. This study examines repatriation policies within the context of African migration governance, assessing how Nigeria and South Africa facilitate the return and reintegration of migrants, refugees, and deported individuals within their national and regional frameworks.

Regular Migration: This is defined as the movement of people through legal and officially recognized channels, often involving proper documentation such as visas, work permits, and residency status. This research evaluates how Nigeria and South Africa regulate regular migration through domestic laws and regional agreements, such as the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol and the SADC Migration Governance Framework.

Irregular Migration: This involves the movement of people outside established legal frameworks, either by crossing borders without authorization or overstaying legal permits. This phenomenon is often linked to human trafficking, labour exploitation, and border security challenges. This study examines how irregular migration impacts Nigeria and South Africa, as well as the role of regional migration policies in addressing it.

Xenophobia: This refers to the fear, dislike, or hostility toward foreigners or individuals perceived as outsiders. It manifests through negative attitudes, discrimination, and sometimes violence against migrants or non-nationals. It is viewed as both a social and institutional problem that limits integration and cooperation. It often reflects deep-seated inequalities and frustration within host communities. In South Africa, for example, xenophobia has become a recurring response to unemployment and poverty. It undermines social cohesion, regional unity, and human rights across Africa.

Pan-Africanism: This is the ideology advocating for unity, solidarity, and cooperation among African states to achieve political, economic, and social progress. Within the context of this research, Pan-Africanism is explored as a guiding principle for developing collaborative migration policies, particularly under the leadership of the African Union (AU).

Migration Governance: This refers to the legal, policy, and institutional frameworks that regulate migration at the national, regional, and international levels. This study analyses migration governance in Nigeria and South Africa, assessing how national policies align with broader African Union and regional frameworks.

Regional Integration: This involves cooperation among neighboring countries to facilitate economic, social, and political collaboration. Within the context of migration, regional integration is essential for enhancing free movement, trade, and labour mobility. This study evaluates how ECOWAS and SADC frameworks promote regional migration governance.

African Union Migration Policy Framework (AUMPF): This is a continental strategy designed to guide African nations in managing migration effectively. This research assesses how Nigeria and South Africa incorporate the AUMPF principles into their national migration policies.

Thus, by defining these key terms within the context of Pan-African migration policies, this section provides a conceptual foundation for understanding the study's analysis of repatriation, regular migration, and brain drain in Nigeria and South Africa.

Endnotes

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Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Migration

Migration, as a fundamental aspect of human history, refers to the movement of individuals or groups from one location to another, either within a country or across international borders. Scholars and institutions have provided various definitions and frameworks to understand migration, often distinguishing between voluntary and forced migration, regular and irregular migration, and internal and international migration. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as "the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a state"[1]. This definition highlights migration as a broad concept encompassing multiple forms, including economic migration, labour mobility, refugee movements, and displacement due to environmental or political factors. In the African context, migration is shaped by historical, economic, and political dynamics. Colonial-era disruptions, coupled with post-independence economic disparities and political instability, have contributed to significant migratory flows within and outside the continent. Migration within Africa, particularly between Nigeria and South Africa, has been extensively analysed in academic discourse, with scholars providing diverse perspectives on its causes, implications, and possible policy interventions.

African migration patterns are primarily intra-regional, with economic disparities being the main driving force behind movement. Countries like South Africa, with relatively better economic conditions, serve as attractive destinations for migrants from nations like Nigeria, where economic hardship and instability push people to seek opportunities elsewhere[2]. However, some scholars present a contrasting view, asserting that beyond economic factors, historical and colonial legacies have significantly shaped migration flows within the continent, particularly through the creation of artificial borders that do not align with ethnic and economic realities[3]. International migration from Africa is also closely linked to the issue of brain drain, as skilled professionals move to Europe, North America, and the Middle East in search of better wages and working conditions. It has been emphasized that brain drain disproportionately affects the health and education sectors, where African countries invest in training professionals who later seek employment in high-income nations[4]. In contrast, other perspectives present a more nuanced perspective, arguing that migration should not always be viewed negatively, as remittances from migrants significantly contribute to African economies[5].

Similarly, some studies highlight the role of social networks in facilitating migration, noting that established migrant communities in host countries create a chain effect where new migrants rely on the experiences and resources of those who migrated earlier. This view aligns with research emphasizing the importance of diaspora communities in supporting new arrivals providing them with financial and social capital necessary for integration. Conversely, other scholars argue that while these networks may ease the migration process, they also contribute to tension between locals and migrants, particularly in countries like South Africa, where xenophobic sentiments have been fueled by economic competition and political rhetoric. Within the framework of Pan-African migration governance, the African Union Migration Policy Framework (AUMPF) provides a structured approach to managing migration while promoting regional integration. The ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol and the Southern African Development Community (SADC)

Migration Governance Framework are key regional instruments facilitating migration in West and Southern Africa, respectively. These policies aim to enhance labour mobility, trade, and economic cooperation, although their implementation faces challenges such as xenophobia, border security concerns, and inconsistencies in national migration policies[6].

While the economic motivations behind migration are widely discussed, environmental factors have also gained attention in recent scholarship. Climate change and environmental degradation have increasingly become push factors for migration, with desertification in Northern Nigeria and flooding in the Niger Delta displacing communities and forcing people to seek better living conditions elsewhere. Similarly, scholars highlight that South Africa, despite being a migrant destination, faces its own climate-induced migration challenges, particularly due to droughts affecting rural livelihoods. These environmental dimensions complicate the traditional push-pull migration models, who asserts that migration should not be viewed solely as a result of economic or political instability but as a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by intersecting factors.

Policy responses to migration in Africa have been met with mixed results. Regional migration policies under the African Union's framework have been largely ineffective due to inconsistent implementation by member states. It is argued that while agreements such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aim to facilitate labour mobility, national interests often override regional commitments. On the other hand, studies suggest that bilateral agreements between Nigeria and South Africa could provide a more pragmatic approach to migration governance, particularly in addressing irregular migration and brain drain. However, this optimism is critiqued, noting that South Africa's restrictive migration policies often contradict diplomatic rhetoric, leading to frequent diplomatic tensions between the two countries.

Despite these policy efforts, irregular migration remains a pressing issue. He argues that many African migrants' resort to irregular routes due to restrictive visa policies, lack of legal pathways, and economic hardships[7]. This has led to increased vulnerabilities, including human trafficking, exploitation, and dangerous migration routes through the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean. South Africa, in particular, has witnessed tensions over migration, with periodic outbreaks of xenophobic violence against foreign nationals, largely driven by economic grievances and competition for jobs[8]. The discourse on migration in Africa must, therefore, balance the need for effective governance with the protection of migrants' rights and economic integration goals. A sustainable migration policy in Africa should focus on enhancing legal pathways for migration, strengthening regional cooperation, and addressing the root causes of forced migration, including political instability and underdevelopment[9].

2.1.2 Migration Crisis

Across Africa, instability, unemployment, and underdevelopment have pushed many individuals to seek better opportunities abroad, often under challenging or irregular conditions. The concept of migration crises captures not only the volume of movement but also the human, institutional, and policy challenges that arise from managing migration flows in an unequal global landscape.

Thus, the African migration crisis can be understood through multiple lenses: humanitarian, economic, and political. Humanitarian crises often arise when migration is prompted by factors such as armed conflicts, human rights violations, and environmental degradation. These crises place immense pressure on both the countries of origin, where displaced populations are often left in destitute conditions, and the destination countries, which may lack the capacity or willingness to manage large-scale arrivals. For instance, the migration from war-torn countries like South Sudan, Somalia, and Libya has caused massive displacement, with millions seeking refuge in neighboring African countries or crossing into Europe. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 3 million refugees were recorded in Africa by the end of 2022, with countries such as Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya hosting the majority of these displaced populations. The high levels of forced migration are often coupled with a lack of infrastructure and social services to support the migrant population, leading to overcrowded camps, limited access to healthcare, and severe food shortages[10].

Additionally, economic migration has been a major driver of Africa's migration crisis, with millions of individuals seeking better economic opportunities abroad. These migrants, often from economically underdeveloped countries, view migration as a pathway to improve their livelihoods, send remittances home, or secure better futures for their children. However, this desire for improved economic conditions often drives migrants to embark on perilous journeys in search of jobs in countries that have strict immigration policies. The migration routes through the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea are notorious for their risks, with many migrants losing their lives or becoming victims of trafficking. The Mediterranean remains the deadliest route for African migrants, with reports indicating that over 20,000 migrants have drowned since 2014 while attempting to cross the sea to Europe. These routes, despite their dangers, continue to be used due to the scarcity of legal and safe pathways for migration. Africa's growing youth population, which makes up a significant portion of the continent's migrants, is often trapped between the promise of economic opportunities abroad and the harsh realities of migration policies in destination countries.

Moreover, political instability and weak governance contribute to migration crises in Africa. In many countries, poor governance and lack of state capacity have fostered insecurity, corruption, and social unrest, which force individuals to flee their countries in search of safety and stability. Armed conflicts, such as the civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR), and Sudan, have caused widespread displacement, creating crises not only within the borders of these countries but also across the continent. The political upheavals in North Africa, particularly the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the conflict in Libya, have left entire regions unstable, further exacerbating the migration crisis. In the face of these conflicts, many African migrants are forced to cross borders, seeking refuge or employment in neighboring countries or beyond. One of the more complex aspects of the migration crisis in Africa is irregular migration, where people attempt to migrate without proper documentation or in contravention of immigration laws. Irregular migration is often associated with dangerous migration routes, which include crossing through conflict zones, deserts, and international waters without protection. The lack of legal migration pathways, combined with stringent visa and immigration policies in many receiving countries, compels migrants to use illicit means of transport and routes. This leads to not only an increase in the number of people who are trafficked but also exacerbates the risks of human rights violations. Migrants in these situations are often subjected to exploitation, violence, and discrimination both within their home countries and at the borders of destination countries. Many fall victims to human traffickers, who take advantage of their desperation, subjecting them to forced labour, sexual exploitation, and even slavery.

In addition to human trafficking, irregular migration also leads to the criminalization of migrants. This further compound the crisis, as migrants are often detained or deported under harsh conditions when they are caught in transit. Countries of destination frequently prioritize border control and national security over the protection of migrants' rights. In the European Union, for example, the criminalization of irregular migration has led to the establishment of stringent border control measures, such as the Frontex patrols, which seek to prevent migrants from entering European borders. This has resulted in the creation of increasingly militarized borders in the Mediterranean, the Sahara, and along the borders of the Sahel. These policies, however, have proven to be largely ineffective in deterring migration, and instead, they force migrants into more hazardous and exploitative conditions. The economic costs of migration crises are not limited to the countries experiencing the outflow of migrants. Destination countries also face significant economic pressures, particularly when large numbers of migrants arrive without being adequately integrated into labour markets or social systems. For instance, Europe has experienced both an influx of African migrants and public backlash against immigration policies. The financial strain caused by providing social services, healthcare, and housing for migrants, in addition to the political and social challenges of integration, has led some countries to push for restrictive immigration measures.

Pan-African efforts to address migration crises have been relatively slow and fragmented, often hindered by political disagreements among member states. While the African Union (AU) has sought to develop frameworks for regional migration management, including the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, many African countries have yet to fully implement policies that would allow for unrestricted movement across the continent. National governments are often reluctant to open borders or create systems that would allow for the free movement of labour, fearing it might exacerbate their domestic economic challenges. The African Union's Migration Policy Framework for Africa and its agenda for 2063 aim to facilitate better governance of migration through cooperative regional efforts, but the lack of infrastructure, the persistence of conflict, and the dominance of state-centric immigration policies have impeded progress. This deep-seated migration crisis necessitates a comprehensive, multi-dimensional response that balances security concerns, economic opportunities, and humanitarian needs. Africa's ability to address these challenges effectively will depend on coordinated efforts that prioritize the protection of migrants' rights, the development of legal migration pathways, and the establishment of more robust governance mechanisms at both national and regional levels.

2.1.3 Brain Drain

Brain drain, often referred to as human capital flight, describes the large-scale emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals from their home countries to more developed nations in search of better economic opportunities, working conditions, and quality of life. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in Africa, where professionals in fields such as medicine, engineering, and academia leave for destinations in Europe, North America, and the Middle East, significantly impacting the continent's development trajectory[11]. Scholars have long debated the implications of brain drain for African nations. Some argue that while the departure of skilled individuals weakens local economies by reducing the available talent pool, it can also have positive effects if returning migrants bring back enhanced expertise and investment capital. However, in many cases, African countries struggle to retain skilled workers due to low wages, political instability, inadequate infrastructure, and poor research funding. Countries like Nigeria and South Africa, both regional powerhouses have suffered significant losses in human capital, particularly in the healthcare and academic sectors.

In the case of Nigeria, medical professionals frequently migrate to countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Saudi Arabia, where salaries and working conditions are far superior. Scholars estimate that nearly 50% of doctors trained in Nigeria seek employment abroad within five years of graduation. This exodus has worsened the country's healthcare crisis, leading to severe shortages of medical personnel in rural and underserved areas[27]. South Africa faces similar challenges, particularly in its engineering and scientific research sectors. Highly trained professionals from South Africa increasingly move to Australia, Canada, and the UK, attracted by better economic opportunities and stable governance structures. The push and pull factors driving brain drain in Africa are complex. Push factors include political instability, economic mismanagement, corruption, poor research funding, and limited career advancement opportunities. Pull factors, on the other hand, include competitive salaries, access to cutting-edge research facilities, quality healthcare systems, and stronger institutional governance in destination countries. The widening economic gap between Africa and the Global North ensures a continuous flow of skilled migration, despite policy efforts to curb the trend.

Pan-African institutions have attempted to address brain drain through various initiatives. The African Union's Agenda 2063 promotes policies aimed at retaining talent, fostering intra-African mobility, and creating a knowledge-based economy. Similarly, regional organisations such as ECOWAS and SADC have introduced policies to facilitate skilled migration within Africa, though these efforts remain inconsistently implemented. The Nigeria-South Africa Bilateral Commission, established to enhance cooperation between both nations, has included migration governance in its discussions, yet practical solutions remain limited. Critics argue that African governments must improve domestic conditions to retain talent rather than relying solely on policy interventions. Emphasis is made on the need for increased investment in higher education, improved research funding, and better working conditions to make African countries more attractive for professionals[12]. Additionally, programs such as diaspora engagement initiatives, which encourage emigrants to invest in or return to their home countries, have been explored, with Ethiopia and Rwanda implementing some of the most successful models in Africa. Ultimately, brain drain remains a significant migration challenge for Africa, requiring a multi-pronged approach that includes policy reforms, economic restructuring, and regional cooperation. A sustainable solution to brain drain must integrate both retention strategies and incentives for skilled Africans abroad to contribute to their home countries[13].

The impact of brain drain on economic development cannot be overstated. Skilled professionals play a critical role in driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic productivity. The loss of such talent hampers economic growth, as it reduces the capacity for technological advancement, productivity improvement, and industrial development. For instance, in the field of information technology, many African countries have seen a steady outflow of skilled IT professionals who move to countries where the tech industry offers more competitive salaries and greater opportunities for career advancement. This loss of talent limits the ability of African countries to capitalize on the global digital economy, which is increasingly seen as a key driver of growth and development[14].

However, it is important to recognize that brain drain is not entirely negative. While it presents significant challenges, there are potential benefits for both the individuals who migrate and the countries they leave behind. The migration of skilled professionals can lead to the transfer of knowledge, skills, and capital back to the home country, particularly through remittances and diaspora networks. Remittances from migrants have become a significant source of income for many African countries, and the skills and knowledge acquired by African professionals abroad can be used to foster development when they return or collaborate remotely with organisations in their home countries[15]. Many African countries are increasingly looking to diaspora engagement as a strategy to mitigate the effects of brain drain. Initiatives to encourage the return of highly skilled professionals, such as financial incentives, professional development programs, and improved career prospects, are being explored. Countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa have established diaspora engagement programs to promote "brain circulation," where skilled professionals contribute to their home countries through knowledge-sharing, investment, and development projects[16].

Despite these potential benefits, the long-term solution to brain drain lies in addressing the root causes of migration. Improving the domestic conditions in African countries, such as enhancing economic opportunities, improving political stability, strengthening education systems, and developing healthcare infrastructure, would reduce the need for many professionals to seek opportunities abroad. Moreover, African countries need to create more favorable environments for their skilled professionals, offering competitive salaries, career growth opportunities, and better working conditions. Only by creating a sustainable and attractive environment for skilled professionals can Africa hope to retain its talent and reduce the negative impacts of brain drain.

2.1.4 Repatriation

Repatriation refers to the process of returning a person to their country of origin, often after they have migrated, fled conflict, or been displaced for various reasons. While repatriation is commonly associated with refugees and displaced persons, it also applies to the return of skilled professionals who have emigrated to seek better opportunities abroad. The concept of repatriation in the context of Africa is multifaceted, encompassing both the return of individuals who have left their countries due to economic hardships and those who have migrated for personal development, particularly in the form of skilled labour migration[17]. In the context of migration and brain drain, repatriation is seen as a potential solution to the challenges posed by the outflow of skilled labour from Africa. For many African countries, repatriating skilled professionals who have emigrated to more developed economies represent a critical opportunity to reverse the negative effects of brain drain[18]. However, repatriation is not a simple process; it involves several layers of policy, logistical challenges, and considerations that must be addressed for it to be successful. The push and pull factors that influence repatriation are closely linked to the same forces driving emigration. On the one hand, many African migrants are eager to return to their home countries, particularly when their host countries no longer offer the same economic opportunities or when the political climate shifts. For example, African professionals may choose to repatriate if they find that their skills are more valued in their home countries, or if they seek to contribute to the development of their nations by sharing the knowledge and expertise they have acquired abroad. Conversely, economic instability, political insecurity, or lack of professional opportunities can deter individuals from returning to their home countries[19].

Repatriation also has significant economic implications, both for the individuals involved and for the broader national economy. The remittances sent home by migrants, which are a major source of income for many African countries, can play an essential role in fostering development. Yet, repatriation has the potential to be more impactful if countries can harness the expertise and financial resources of their returning nationals. Professionals who return home after years of living and working abroad often bring with them new skills, networks, and financial resources that can be leveraged for economic development. This process is often referred to as brain circulation, where the returning professionals contribute to innovation, entrepreneurship, and development in their home countries[20]. The importance of repatriation policies cannot be overstated in this context. Many African governments have begun to implement policies to encourage repatriation, including financial incentives, tax exemptions, and the establishment of business incubators to support returning entrepreneurs. In countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, policies have been put in place to encourage diaspora engagement and attract highly skilled professionals who have acquired experience abroad. Some African governments have also established diaspora return programs, which are designed to facilitate the smooth reintegration of returnees by providing financial incentives, career support, and housing assistance. However, despite these efforts, repatriation rates in many African countries remain relatively low, due to persistent challenges such as political instability, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of competitive job opportunities[21].

One of the major hurdles to repatriation is the lack of effective reintegration mechanisms. Returning migrants often face difficulties in adjusting back to their home countries, especially if they have been away for an extended period. The job market may not be receptive to their foreign qualifications, or they may find that the work environment is less conducive to the type of professional advancement they had become accustomed to abroad. Moreover, some returnees may struggle to find housing, establish businesses, or navigate the complex social and political environment in their home countries. For example, many returning professionals find themselves competing for limited opportunities in an environment that may be politically unstable or economically underdeveloped[22]. To enhance the effectiveness of repatriation efforts, African countries need to focus on improving their domestic conditions. This includes investing in infrastructure, fostering political stability, creating economic opportunities, and implementing policies that make returning more attractive for skilled professionals. Public-private partnerships can also play an important role in facilitating the reintegration process by creating incentives for private companies to hire returning migrants and by providing access to start-up capital for entrepreneurs. Furthermore, African countries should prioritize the development of education systems, healthcare, and technology, which will not only support returning professionals but also create an environment where these individuals can thrive and contribute meaningfully to national development[23].

The diaspora's role in facilitating repatriation is another critical component. Many African countries have developed diaspora networks that help maintain ties with nationals living abroad. These networks can provide support to returning migrants by helping them navigate the challenges of reintegration and offering opportunities for networking and collaboration. The diaspora engagement strategies employed by African governments are crucial for strengthening the connection between those living abroad and their home countries. There is emphasis that strong diaspora network can facilitate knowledge transfer, investment, and the establishment of business ventures that benefit both the migrants and their home countries[24]. Repatriation and brain drain are often seen as two sides of the same coin. While brain drain results in the loss of skilled professionals from Africa, repatriation represents the potential for the reversal of this trend and the return of skilled labour to the continent. Countries like Ethiopia, Rwanda, and South Africa have implemented policies that emphasize repatriation as part of their overall strategy for economic and social development. By focusing on improving the conditions for returnees, these countries have been able to encourage a certain degree of brain circulation, where individuals return with enhanced skills and the potential to contribute to their home country's development[25].

Moreover, repatriation is increasingly being seen as a critical component of Pan-African solutions to migration crises. The African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) have both called for comprehensive policies that address the challenges of migration, including the need for sustainable solutions that focus on the return of

African migrants. Repatriation programs, when executed effectively, can serve as a means to mitigate the negative effects of brain drain and promote greater economic integration within the African continent. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement also plays a role in facilitating the free movement of skilled labour and encouraging repatriation by creating a more unified and attractive economic environment for returnees[26]. Thus, repatriation, if properly managed and integrated into broader development strategies, can offer a means to address brain drain, improve domestic human capital, and promote sustainable development. African countries must invest in creating inclusive policies that foster the return of skilled professionals and offer effective reintegration programs. International cooperation, along with diaspora engagement, will also be critical to making repatriation a viable and successful strategy for addressing the migration crisis in Africa.

2.1.5 Xenophobia

Xenophobia, broadly defined as the fear, dislike or hostility toward foreigners, remains one of the most troubling challenges in South Africa's migration landscape. Although the country emerged from apartheid with promises of unity, inclusion, and equality, the social divisions created by decades of racial segregation still shape public attitudes toward non-nationals. The new democratic state inherited deep inequalities, and as people from across Africa began migrating into South Africa in search of better opportunities, tensions grew around jobs, housing, and public services. These tensions gradually evolved into resentment toward migrants, who were often blamed for problems rooted in poverty, unemployment, and weak governance. Xenophobic tendencies are grounded in some kind of cultural superiority. The xenophobe considers the stranger as coming from a culturally inferior background, xenophobes are therefore individuals who are, with a passion, unwelcoming of strange, unknown and unfamiliar tradition or culture. For the xenophobic, a stranger is almost as good as an intruder or a trespasser; or an unwanted guest who has come to have an undue share of his social economic and ecological space.[37]

Historically, xenophobia in South Africa can be traced to the colonial and apartheid labour systems, when migrant workers from neighbouring countries were brought in as cheap labour but denied permanent residence or rights[38]. Even after 1994, many South Africans continued to see foreign workers as outsiders, useful for labour but not as part of the national community. The expectations of freedom and economic improvement that came with democracy were not fully met, and frustration over persistent inequality created fertile ground for anti-immigrant sentiment. The most violent expression of this resentment occurred in May 2008, when widespread attacks against African migrants erupted in Johannesburg, Durban, and other major cities[39]. Over sixty people were killed and thousands displaced, while businesses owned by foreign nationals were looted and destroyed. Since then, xenophobic incidents have recurred, with major outbreaks in 2015, 2017, and 2019[40]. These attacks have become a recurring feature of township life, reflecting deeper social fractures and the failure of authorities to address the root causes.

Politically, xenophobia is often fuelled by rhetoric that portrays migrants as criminals or competitors for scarce jobs. Movements such as Operation Dudula have capitalised on these fears, organising protests and raids against foreigners under the guise of protecting local workers[41]. This narrative ignores the fact that migrants frequently contribute to the South African economy through small-scale trade, entrepreneurship, and informal labour that sustains township economies[42]. Yet, public perception remains shaped by the idea that migrants “take” rather than “create” opportunities, a belief that continues to justify exclusion and violence in the minds of many. Government responses have been inconsistent. While South Africa has launched frameworks like the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, implementation has been weak[43]. Many victims of xenophobic violence have received little protection or justice, and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted. Bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption further limit access to asylum, work permits, and documentation, trapping migrants in a cycle of vulnerability and fear. These failures make xenophobia not only a social problem but also an institutional one. Despite this, moments of kindness and shared humanity do exist some South Africans and migrants live, trade, and worship side by side, showing that coexistence is possible when compassion replaces suspicion.

The effects of xenophobia extend beyond South Africa's borders, particularly straining its relationship with countries such as Nigeria. Nigerians have frequently been among the victims of xenophobic violence, and these incidents have, at times, triggered diplomatic tensions between both nations. Such hostility undermines broader continental initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's (AU) Free Movement Protocol, both of which seek to promote regional integration and mobility. When African citizens fear for their safety in another African country, it challenges the very foundation of Pan-African unity and cooperation.

The roots of xenophobia are not merely emotional, social or cultural, they are also economic. South Africa's high unemployment rate, persistent inequality, and slow economic transformation have created widespread frustration, especially among the youth. In this climate, migrants become convenient scapegoats for systemic challenges such as unemployment, corruption, and weak. Instead of addressing structural inequality and ineffective redistribution policies, some political actors exploit anti-immigrant sentiment to deflect blame and gain populist support. The result is a dangerous cycle where fear and frustration are redirected toward vulnerable migrant communities.

Viewed through the lens of the World Systems Theory, xenophobia in South Africa can be seen as a symptom of deeper global and regional inequalities. As a semi-peripheral economy, South Africa occupies a middle position between developed (core) and underdeveloped (peripheral) nations. It attracts migrants from poorer African states seeking better opportunities, yet it still faces its own dependency on global capital and trade structures. This dynamic creates economic and social tension, as locals perceive migrants as competitors rather than partners in development. Similarly, the Push-Pull Theory helps explain why economic "push" factors such as unemployment and insecurity in Nigeria intersect with "pull" factors like perceived economic stability and opportunity in South Africa only to result in social rejection when expectations collide with local realities.

Addressing xenophobia therefore requires a multidimensional approach. Beyond condemnation, South Africa needs sustained investment in public education, intercultural dialogue, and inclusive economic programs. Civic education campaigns should emphasize shared African identity and the contributions of migrants to national development. Schools and community organisations can promote cross-cultural understanding, while local governments should create mechanisms for early conflict detection and response in vulnerable areas. At the policy level, stronger implementation of the National Action Plan and closer coordination with regional bodies such as the AU and SADC are essential. Joint migration management frameworks could help prevent violence, protect migrants' rights, and promote safe, regular migration channels.

In the end, xenophobia in South Africa is not merely a product of hatred; it reflects long-standing inequality, disillusionment, and the struggle over national identity in a society still healing from its divided past. Reducing it requires more than condemnation it calls for education, fair economic opportunities, stronger legal protection, and honest leadership that promotes inclusion rather than fear. Only by addressing these roots can South Africa move closer to the ideals of dignity and unity envisioned at the end of apartheid.

2.1.6 Regular Migration Policies

Regular migration refers to the legal and systematic movement of individuals across borders for various reasons, including employment, education, family reunification, or humanitarian purposes. In the context of African countries, regular migration policies are critical for managing the flow of migrants in a manner that maximizes the benefits while minimizing the potential negative impacts on both the migrants and the host countries. These policies are designed to facilitate the movement of individuals in a manner that respects both national sovereignty and international obligations[27].

For African countries, regular migration has significant implications for both the economic and social development of the continent. Given the increasing trend of migration from African countries to more developed regions, especially in search of better economic opportunities, regular migration policies can play a pivotal role in harnessing the potential of the African diaspora, improving labour markets, and addressing the challenges posed by irregular migration, which often involves unsafe and exploitative practices. A well-structured and inclusive regular migration policy framework can help ensure that the movement of people is safe, legal, and beneficial to both sending and receiving countries[28].

Regular migration is fundamentally connected to migration governance, which involves the development and enforcement of laws, regulations, and agreements that manage the movement of individuals across borders. These regulations ensure that migrants are provided with the necessary protections, including legal rights, social benefits, and secure employment opportunities. In many African countries, the lack of robust migration policies has led to a situation where migration is often unregulated, resulting in issues such as human trafficking, exploitation, and irregular migration. Addressing these challenges requires the establishment of comprehensive and coordinated policies that align with both national interests and international norms[29].

At the regional level, the African Union (AU) has played a significant role in advocating for the development of regular migration policies that harmonize migration processes across the continent. One such initiative is the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence, and Right of Establishment under the African Union's Migration Policy Framework, which seeks to facilitate the free movement of people within the continent, thereby promoting regional integration and cooperation. This protocol aims to reduce barriers to migration by eliminating restrictions on the movement of individuals, such as visa requirements, and by ensuring that African citizens can travel, reside, and establish businesses across borders without facing unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles[30]. A major aspect of regular migration policies is the establishment of bilateral and multilateral agreements between African countries and the host nations that receive migrants from Africa. These agreements often govern the terms of employment, social benefits, and the legal status of migrants in the host countries. For example, African countries may negotiate labour migration agreements with countries in the Middle East, Europe, or North America to ensure that migrants have legal work opportunities and are protected from exploitation. These agreements also provide a framework for regularizing the migration process, thereby enhancing the ability of migrants to contribute to the economies of both the sending and receiving countries[31].

Moreover, remittances are one of the key benefits of regular migration, particularly for African economies. Migrants often send substantial financial resources back to their families, contributing to poverty alleviation and the economic development of their home countries. In 2019, the World Bank reported that African countries received over $80 billion in remittances, which represent a vital source of income for many households across the continent. Regular migration policies can help to maximize these benefits by creating formal channels for remittance transfers, reducing transaction costs, and ensuring that migrants' earnings are invested in productive activities back home. Another important aspect of regular migration policy is the protection of migrants' rights. Migrants are often vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and discrimination, especially if they are undocumented or in countries with inadequate protections for foreign workers. Well-designed migration policies ensure that migrants are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their legal status. This includes providing them with access to healthcare, education, and legal support, as well as safeguarding their rights to work and live without the fear of deportation or exploitation. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have both stressed the importance of human rights protections in migration policies, emphasizing the need for labour standards, social protections, and equal treatment for migrants[32].

Regional migration governance plays a critical role in fostering cooperation between African countries and improving the management of migration. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community (EAC) have established frameworks to facilitate the free movement of people, ensure equal treatment of nationals, and support the integration of migrants into regional labour markets. These frameworks are intended to foster cohesion among member states and reduce the disparities that often drive irregular migration. Furthermore, the Africa-Middle East Corridor and Africa-Europe cooperation agreements aim to manage migration flows more effectively by focusing on the root causes of migration, such as unemployment, lack of education, and political instability. Regular migration policies also contribute to the overall development of sending countries by fostering the movement of skilled labour. In many African countries, highly educated professionals, such as doctors, engineers, and educators, migrate to developed countries in search of better opportunities[33]. While this can worsen the brain drain phenomenon, regular migration policies can help counter this by implementing mechanisms for the return of skilled professionals. These policies can include initiatives like diaspora engagement programs, skills transfer programs, and incentives for returnees, encouraging African migrants to return home after gaining experience abroad[34].

Sustainable migration management requires addressing the root causes of migration, which include poverty, lack of opportunities, and environmental degradation[35]. Regular migration policies must therefore be integrated with broader development strategies, including improving education systems, infrastructure, and employment opportunities[36]. By tackling the factors that drive irregular migration, African governments can create an environment where people are less likely to seek opportunities abroad and more inclined to contribute to their countries' development. Therefore, regular migration policies are an essential aspect of managing migration in Africa. By facilitating legal migration, protecting migrants' rights, and promoting regional integration, these policies offer a way to maximize the benefits of migration while addressing its challenges. Through the development of coordinated, inclusive, and sustainable migration strategies, African countries can harness the potential of their diaspora, reduce the negative impacts of irregular migration, and contribute to their own development and that of the continent as a whole.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Push-Pull Theory of Migration

The Push-Pull Theory of Migration, initially formulated by Everett Lee in the 1960s, is one of the most influential and widely used frameworks for understanding migration patterns. The theory posits that migration is influenced by two fundamental forces: push factors and pull factors. Push factors refer to the negative conditions that compel individuals to leave their home countries, while pull factors are the attractive conditions in other countries that draw migrants. These forces are interconnected, and the interplay between them is central to understanding migration, especially in the context of brain drain and repatriation[44]. Push factors are typically associated with adverse or unfavorable conditions in the home country. These could include economic challenges such as high unemployment rates, low wages, or lack of job opportunities, as well as political instability, social unrest, and corruption. For many skilled professionals, particularly in developing countries, push factors play a significant role in the decision to migrate. Economic instability, inadequate infrastructure, and the inability to advance in their respective careers often force individuals to seek better opportunities abroad. In many African countries, for example, there is a significant outflow of skilled workers such as doctors, engineers, and educators who leave in search of more promising environments. In this context, the push factors are both economic and political in nature. The brain drain phenomenon is a direct result of these push forces, with skilled professionals leaving their home countries in search of improved conditions and better prospects for themselves and their families[45].

On the other hand, pull factors represent the attractive elements in destination countries that entice individuals to migrate. These factors include higher wages, better job opportunities, political stability, access to advanced healthcare and education, and overall improved living conditions. Developed countries, particularly in the Global North, such as the United States, Canada, and European nations, offer a multitude of advantages that appeal to migrants. Higher salaries, better career advancement opportunities, a more stable political environment, and advanced healthcare systems serve as strong pull factors for professionals from developing countries. A doctor or an engineer from an African nation, for example, might choose to migrate to a country like the United Kingdom or the United States, where wages are higher and working conditions are more conducive to professional growth. The pull factors are often the primary motivators that draw people to specific destinations, helping to explain the consistent flow of migrants from the Global South to the Global North[46].

The brain drain phenomenon, which occurs when skilled individuals migrate from developing countries to developed countries, is a direct result of the interplay between push and pull factors. For instance, a highly trained professional may feel the pressures of poor infrastructure, inadequate professional resources, and limited career progression in their home country, pushing them to seek better opportunities abroad. This migration often results in a significant loss of human capital in the countries of origin, exacerbating developmental challenges. In many African nations, the outflow of skilled labour, particularly in sectors like healthcare, education, and engineering, weakens the country's ability to develop in these critical areas. This depletion of talent contributes to a vicious cycle where countries continue to lose their educated and skilled professionals, impeding their ability to improve conditions at home and ultimately leading to sustained developmental stagnation[47]. While push and pull factors are often cited as the primary explanations for migration, it is important to recognize that migration is a complex process that goes beyond simple cause-and-effect relationships. Migration is also influenced by social, cultural, and psychological factors that are not always immediately obvious. For example, networks of migrants in destination countries can act as a significant pull factor, as they provide newcomers with social support, guidance, and assistance in adjusting to life in a new country. These migrant networks reduce the risks and uncertainties associated with migration, making it easier for individuals to make the decision to move[48]. Thus, while the push-pull framework is useful for understanding migration, it may not fully account for the broader social dynamics that also shape migration decisions.

The concept of repatriation is an important aspect of the push-pull theory that has gained increasing attention in recent years. Repatriation, or return migration, refers to the process by which migrants return to their home countries after living abroad. This can be a result of both push and pull factors. Returnees may be attracted by improving conditions in their home countries, the desire to reconnect with family and communities, or even the opportunity to contribute to national development. In the case of brain drain, repatriation offers a potential solution to mitigate the loss of human capital. Countries that are experiencing significant brain drain have begun implementing repatriation programs aimed at enticing skilled workers to return home by offering incentives such as tax breaks, access to better job opportunities, and funding for professional development. These policies aim to reverse the trend of skilled labour migration and facilitate the reintegration of returnees into the local workforce, which can, in turn, contribute to economic development and the improvement of public services. However, the success of repatriation efforts depends on the extent to which the push factors in the home country are addressed, as well as the ability of destination countries to offer sufficient pull factors that encourage migrants to return[49].

Despite its widespread application and utility, the push-pull theory has limitations. One significant limitation is that it simplifies migration into a binary relationship between push and pull factors. Migration decisions are often more complicated, and the theory does not always account for the influence of other variables, such as the role of migrant networks, individual motivations, and institutional frameworks[50]. For instance, while the theory focuses on individual push-pull motivations, it does not sufficiently address how migration policies in destination countries can influence migration flows or how global economic trends may affect migration patterns[51]. Moreover, the theory assumes that migration is primarily driven by individual choices and fails to account for the structural and institutional factors that may constrain or enable migration[52]. As such, while the push-pull theory remains a useful framework for understanding migration dynamics, it must be supplemented by other theories and models that consider the broader context of migration, including policies, social networks, and geopolitical factors[53].

Thus, the Push-Pull Theory of Migration offers valuable insights into the forces that drive migration, particularly in relation to brain drain and repatriation. By examining the push and pull factors that influence migration decisions, the theory highlights the complex interplay between unfavorable conditions in the home country and the attractive opportunities available in destination countries. However, migration is not solely the result of these forces; social, cultural, and institutional factors also play a crucial role in shaping migration patterns. Understanding the push-pull dynamics is critical for developing effective policies to address the challenges posed by migration, particularly in terms of retaining skilled professionals and encouraging repatriation to help reverse the negative impacts of brain drain.

2.2.2 World Systems Theory of Migration

The World Systems Theory, developed by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, provides a broader, macro-level explanation of migration by linking it to the historical and structural development of the global economic system[54]. This theory argues that migration is a consequence of the global capitalist system, where economic and political inequalities between nations create imbalances that drive population movements. The theory divides the world into three categories: the core, semi-periphery, and periphery[55]. The core nations, consisting of highly industrialized, economically dominant countries, exploit peripheral nations, which are less developed and serve as sources of cheap labour and raw materials. The semi-periphery lies between these two, acting as a buffer zone with mixed characteristics of both core and peripheral economies.

From this perspective, migration is not merely an individual economic decision but a structural consequence of historical colonialism, economic dependency, and global market forces. Former colonies, particularly in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, often experience high rates of migration because their economies remain dependent on and integrated into the economies of their former colonial rulers[56]. This economic dependency is reinforced by multinational corporations, trade agreements, and financial institutions that continue to shape labour markets and capital flows in a way that favors core economies at the expense of periphery nations. As a result, migration flows tend to follow the historical economic and political ties established during colonial rule for example, migration from Francophone Africa to France, South Asia to the United Kingdom, and West Africa to the United States[57].

In the African context, the World Systems Theory helps explain the brain drain phenomenon by illustrating how global inequalities create conditions where skilled professionals from peripheral nations are drawn to core economies in search of better opportunities. This is not simply due to wage differentials but also because global economic structures concentrate technological innovation, education, and industrial growth in core nations, leaving periphery nations dependent on external capital and expertise. Multinational corporations and international financial institutions play a crucial role in this dynamic, often extracting wealth from developing nations through foreign direct investment, resource exploitation, and capital flight, further weakening local economies and pushing skilled labour to migrate[58]. In recent times, globalization and the rise of digital work have added a new twist to this problem. Many young Africans now work remotely for foreign companies that pay low wages compared to global standards. This new "digital brain drain" means that local talent benefits global economies more than their own countries. Also, trade policies still favor rich nations. African countries like Nigeria and South Africa often export raw materials and import expensive finished goods. This unbalanced system keeps their economies dependent and encourages people to migrate in search of better opportunities.

This theory also provides insights into repatriation and regular migration policies. Since migration under this framework is seen as a result of structural inequalities rather than individual decisions, successful repatriation policies must address the underlying economic dependencies that drive migration in the first place[59]. Simply offering financial incentives for returnees may not be enough if the home country remains economically marginalized in the global system. Instead, Pan-African solutions should focus on economic restructuring, regional integration, and the development of self-sustaining industries that reduce reliance on foreign economies[60].

Institutions like the African Union (AU) have emphasized the need for intra-African migration policies that promote labour mobility within the continent rather than directing skilled migration towards core economies[61]. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the AU's Free Movement Protocol are practical manifestations of this theoretical insight. By encouraging intra-African trade, investment, and labour mobility, these frameworks aim to shift migration flows within the continent, allowing African nations to retain and circulate talent domestically rather than losing it to global labour markets.

Another implication of World Systems Theory is the role of irregular migration and how border policies in core nations contribute to undocumented migration. Core countries benefit from the cheap labour of undocumented migrants while simultaneously implementing restrictive immigration policies that maintain economic hierarchies[62]. This paradox is evident in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and domestic labour, where migrants often fill essential but low-wage jobs that locals in core economies are unwilling to take. Similarly, European countries have pushed migration control onto African transit states, turning them into border guards for Europe. This keeps African countries under pressure while protecting European interests almost like a modern version of colonial control. Thus, migration restrictions do not stop labour movements; instead, they create informal economies where migrants are exploited without legal protections[63]. By shifting the focus from individual migration choices to global economic structures, the World Systems Theory provides a powerful critique of conventional migration policies. It suggests that unless the economic and political structures that sustain global inequality are addressed, migration will continue to follow patterns dictated by historical and economic dependencies, reinforcing the dominance of core economies and perpetuating the economic struggles of peripheral nations.

2.2.3 New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) Theory

The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theory eemphasizes that migration is not simply an individual decision based on wage differentials but rather a household strategy aimed at minimizing economic risks and maximizing income diversification[64]. Developed in response to the limitations of earlier economic migration theories, NELM argues that migration occurs within a broader social and economic context, where families or communities play a central role in deciding who migrates, where they go, and how their earnings are utilized. This perspective is particularly relevant in developing regions, including Africa, where migration is often seen as a survival strategy rather than just an individual pursuit of higher wages[65]. This theory suggests that households send migrants abroad to reduce exposure to economic uncertainties, such as fluctuations in local labour markets, political instability, or lack of access to financial resources[66]. By having a family member working in a foreign country, households can secure a more stable income through remittances, which serve as a form of economic insurance. These remittances help families cover education expenses, healthcare, business investments, and even social obligations, thereby improving household welfare and reducing economic vulnerabilities. In this way, migration becomes a collective decision-making process rather than an isolated individual choice[67].

One of the most significant contributions of NELM is its focus on remittances and their impact on development. In many African countries, remittances from the diaspora exceed foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development aid (ODA), making them a crucial source of economic stability. Countries such as Nigeria, Egypt, and Ghana receive billions of dollars annually from their migrant populations abroad, which are used to support families, start businesses, and fund infrastructure projects[68]. Beyond basic consumption, remittances are increasingly being channeled into small businesses and entrepreneurship. Families are using funds to start or expand local enterprises, demonstrating that migration can contribute to job creation and community development when resources are well-managed. However, this outcome depends largely on the country's economic structure and the availability of supportive institutions. Where business environments are weak, remittances may remain focused on consumption rather than long-term investment, they do not necessarily translate into national development. Another key development is the changing gender dimension of migration. More women are now part of migration decisions, either as migrants themselves or as managers of remittance income at home.

In the context of migration, NELM provides insights into why skilled professionals may choose to return to their home countries after migrating to a foreign country. If economic and political conditions improve, families may encourage return migration to reintegrate professionals into the local economy. However, if home countries remain economically unstable or fail to provide attractive reintegration programs, migrants may continue to reside abroad while supporting their families through remittances. This dynamic underscore the need for Pan-African policies that facilitate both regular migration and sustainable return migration by creating incentives such as tax breaks, housing schemes, and professional reintegration programs for skilled returnees[69]. A practical example of how NELM applies to African migration patterns can be observed in rural-urban and international migration trends. In many West African countries, families pool resources to send one or more members abroad, expecting that the migrant will send back money to support those who remain. This strategy is evident in the migration patterns of Nigerians, Senegalese, and Ethiopians, where communities rely heavily on diaspora remittances for local development[70]. Moreover, in times of economic crisis or political instability, families may encourage additional migration to ensure a diversified income stream[71].

One of the major critiques of NELM is that while it provides a household-level explanation of migration, it does not fully address the structural causes of labour migration, such as global economic inequalities, labour market segmentation, and restrictive immigration policies. Additionally, while remittances offer financial relief to families, they can also create a dependency that discourages local economic productivity[72]. Furthermore, the theory assumes that migration always leads to positive financial outcomes, overlooking cases where migrants face exploitation, unemployment, or deportation in host countries[73].

After evaluating the major theories of migration, the Push-Pull Theory stands out as the most suitable framework for this study. It provides a broad and balanced explanation of why people migrate and why efforts to manage or reverse migration, such as repatriation and regular migration programs, often face challenges. The theory explains that migration occurs when negative conditions in a country "push" people away, while more favourable conditions elsewhere "pull" them toward new destinations. In the case of Nigeria and South Africa, push factors include persistent economic hardship, unemployment, low wages, insecurity, and political uncertainty. These conditions create frustration and encourage both skilled and unskilled individuals to seek better opportunities abroad. On the other hand, pull factors such as higher wages, better living standards, political stability, and improved working environments in destination countries act as strong attractions. Together, these contrasting realities drive the ongoing migration of professionals and workers from both nations.

While other theories, such as the World-Systems Theory, focus primarily on global economic inequalities or historical dependencies, they do not fully capture the complex human and social motivations behind migration. The Push-Pull Theory, by contrast, integrates both economic and non-economic factors including safety, quality of life, and social aspirations offering a more complete understanding of migration behaviour. This makes it the most comprehensive and practical theoretical framework for examining the migration patterns, policy challenges, and repatriation efforts discussed in this study.

2.3 Review of Empirical Studies

2.3.1 General Studies

Scholarly investigations into migration and brain drain in Africa have consistently underscored the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon, with economic, political, social, and historical factors all playing pivotal roles in shaping migration patterns across the continent[74]. General studies on migration within Africa tend to highlight the dual forces of voluntary and involuntary migration, where skilled and unskilled labour movements are often intertwined with historical legacies of colonial rule, structural economic dependencies, and contemporary globalization trends[75]. Migration in Africa has long been driven by economic disparities between regions, political instability, and the demand for labour in more developed economies, both within and outside the continent.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) have extensively studied the trends of migration within Africa, finding that a significant percentage of African migration remains intra-continental, contrary to the popular belief that most African migrants seek destinations in Europe and North America[76]. Empirical studies indicate that over 70% of African migrants relocate within Africa, driven by economic opportunities in emerging economies such as South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria, which serve as migration hubs within their respective subregions. This suggests that migration is not merely a product of African underdevelopment but also an intrinsic part of regional economic integration and labour market fluidity. However, these movements are often informal, with migrants facing legal uncertainties, exploitative labour conditions, and the absence of clear policy frameworks that support regular migration and integration[77].

A critical dimension of the African migration discourse is the brain drain phenomenon, which has been extensively studied by organisations such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), the World Bank, and regional policy think tanks. Studies show that Africa loses a substantial percentage of its skilled professionals to high-income countries, with sectors such as medicine, engineering, and information technology (IT) suffering the most severe losses. The World Bank reports that nearly 30% of highly educated Africans live and work outside the continent, leading to significant human capital deficits in essential industries. Nigeria, for example, has witnessed a large-scale migration of healthcare professionals, with over 15,000 Nigerian doctors currently practicing in the United Kingdom and the United States. This has left the country with an alarming doctor-to-patient ratio far below the World Health Organization's recommended standard. Similar trends have been observed in Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, where skilled migration is driven by factors such as poor working conditions, low wages, lack of career progression, and political instability[78].

Beyond economic incentives, political and security concerns also play a major role in African migration patterns. Empirical studies conducted by the International Crisis Group (ICG) and the African Union Commission (AUC) highlight how political instability, civil conflicts, and weak governance structures have fueled large-scale forced migration across the continent. The Libyan crisis, the ongoing conflicts in the Sahel region, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, and instability in the Horn of Africa have all contributed to mass displacement, with millions seeking asylum in neighboring countries or attempting dangerous crossings into Europe. Refugee data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicate that African nations such as Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo account for some of the highest numbers of internally displaced persons and asylum seekers worldwide. This mass displacement complicates regional migration governance, placing immense pressure on host countries that often lack the institutional and economic capacity to manage large refugee inflows effectively[79].

In contrast, empirical studies on repatriation in Africa present a mixed picture, with some programs yielding positive reintegration outcomes while others fail due to structural challenges. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and African Union's Migration Policy Framework for Africa have both emphasized that successful repatriation programs require more than financial incentives; they must be complemented by job creation, infrastructure development, and social reintegration mechanisms. Countries such as Rwanda and Ethiopia have implemented structured return migration policies that provide financial support, business grants, and professional reintegration programs for returnees. Rwanda's One-Cow-Per-Poor-Family program has been highlighted as a model for economic reintegration, as it provides returning migrants with tangible economic support to rebuild their livelihoods. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring that repatriated professionals do not emigrate due to continued economic and political instability[80].

Regular migration policies within Africa remain an area of both opportunity and challenge. Empirical studies on regional migration frameworks, particularly within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), indicate that while policy frameworks for free movement exist, their implementation remains inconsistent[81]. The ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol, for instance, theoretically allows citizens of member states to move freely, reside, and establish businesses across the region. However, studies have shown that in practice, border restrictions, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and security concerns hinder full implementation, often forcing migrants into irregular migration channels[82]. Similarly, while the AfCFTA presents opportunities for economic mobility and job creation, its success in addressing migration challenges will depend on member states' commitment to labour mobility policies and cross-border employment facilitation[83].

Overall, empirical studies demonstrate that migration in Africa is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, shaped by both push and pull factors that range from economic motivations to political instability and institutional weaknesses. While existing research provides valuable insights into the scope of migration challenges, significant gaps remain, particularly in the long-term impacts of brain drain on African economies, the effectiveness of repatriation programs, and the role of intra-African migration in regional development. Future research and policy interventions must focus on structural solutions, including investment in human capital, strengthening of regional migration policies, and economic incentives for skilled professionals to remain or return. The need for Pan-African solutions, rooted in strong institutional frameworks and collective policy action, remains critical in addressing the migration crisis and mitigating the adverse effects of brain drain on the continent.

2.3.2 Nigeria

Nigeria represents one of the most significant cases of migration crisis in Africa, with a long history of skilled emigration driven by economic hardship, political instability, and inadequate professional opportunities[84]. The country has consistently ranked among the top sources of highly skilled migrants, particularly in fields such as medicine, engineering, and information technology. Empirical studies on Nigerian migration patterns reveal a combination of economic push factors and external pull factors, creating a continuous cycle of skilled labour loss to more developed economies[85]. The trend is largely facilitated by migration policies of destination countries, particularly the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and the European Union, which have structured pathways for attracting skilled professionals from Nigeria.

The Nigerian healthcare sector has been one of the most affected by brain drain. Data from the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) indicates that over 15,000 Nigerian-trained doctors currently practice in the UK, while thousands more have relocated to the US, Canada, and the Middle East. A 2022 study by the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) found that over 75% of Nigerian doctors were considering migration due to low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of career progression[86]. This large-scale emigration has left Nigeria with an alarmingly low doctor-to-patient ratio, currently estimated at one doctor per 5,000 patients, far below the World Health Organization's recommended ratio of one doctor per 600 patients. The exodus of medical professionals has significantly weakened Nigeria's healthcare system, leading to increased mortality rates, medical tourism, and dependence on foreign-trained personnel[87].

The technology and engineering sectors in Nigeria have also witnessed a high rate of skilled migration. The emergence of digital migration platforms and remote job opportunities has facilitated a wave of "tech brain drain," with thousands of Nigerian software developers, data scientists, and engineers taking up roles in foreign companies while physically relocating abroad. Canada's Global Talent Stream Program and the UK's Tech Nation Visa Scheme have provided structured migration pathways for Nigerian professionals in these fields. Empirical research from the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) highlights that while the country produces over 50,000 STEM graduates annually, a significant percentage either leave the country or work remotely for foreign firms, leading to capital flight and intellectual loss[88].

Beyond skilled migration, irregular migration remains a critical challenge for Nigeria. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has consistently ranked Nigeria among the top countries with high numbers of irregular migrants attempting to cross into Europe through the Central Mediterranean Route. The route, which primarily passes through Libya, has become a major humanitarian crisis, with thousands of Nigerian migrants falling victim to human trafficking, forced labour, and abuse by armed groups[89]. Reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicate that Nigerian migrants, particularly women, account for a large proportion of those trafficked for forced prostitution in Europe, especially in Italy and Spain. In response, the Nigerian government, in collaboration with IOM and the European Union, has implemented repatriation programs, bringing back thousands of stranded migrants from Libya and other transit countries. However, the success of these repatriation efforts remains limited due to lack of reintegration support, economic opportunities, and social stigma faced by returnees[90].

Regular migration policies in Nigeria have also faced challenges in implementation. The country is a signatory to the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol, which allows for visa-free travel, residence, and establishment of businesses within West Africa. However, Nigerian migrants in

Ghana, South Africa, and other African nations often face restrictive immigration policies and xenophobic tensions, limiting the effectiveness of regional migration agreements. South Africa, for instance, has periodically introduced strict visa and work permit restrictions targeting Nigerian migrants, while Ghana has implemented business regulations that disproportionately affect Nigerian traders. These barriers have hindered the full realization of intra-African migration as a tool for economic development[91].

In response to the ongoing migration crisis, the Nigerian government has introduced various policy measures aimed at retaining skilled professionals and promoting return migration[92]. The Nigerian Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) was established to engage with the Nigerian diaspora and encourage knowledge transfer and investment in the country. Programs such as the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC) have also sought to improve Nigeria's business climate to attract returning entrepreneurs. However, empirical studies indicate that these measures have had limited impact, as structural challenges such as poor infrastructure, security concerns, and economic instability continue to push professionals towards migration[93]. In all, the Nigerian case illustrates the complexities of migration in Africa, demonstrating the intersection of economic, political, and institutional factors that drive emigration.

2.3.3 South Africa

South Africa presents a unique case in the discourse on migration in Africa, as it is both a destination and source country for migrants. The country has historically attracted skilled and unskilled migrants from across the continent, particularly from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of Congo[94]. However, South Africa has also experienced its own form of brain drain, with highly skilled professionals emigrating to Europe, North America, and Australia due to economic challenges, crime, and racial tensions. Empirical studies reveal that migration trends in South Africa are shaped by a combination of economic pull factors, policy restrictions, and xenophobic sentiments, making it a complex case for understanding repatriation and regular migration policies[95].

One of the defining aspects of migration in South Africa is the influx of African migrants seeking better economic opportunities. The country's relatively advanced economy, industrial base, and employment prospects have made it a preferred destination for migrants fleeing economic and political instability in their home countries. According to the South African Department of Home Affairs (DHA), the country hosts over 4 million documented and undocumented migrants, with the highest numbers coming from Zimbabwe (over 15. million), Mozambique (about 1 million), and Nigeria (approximately 300,000). Many of these migrants work in low-skilled labour sectors such as mining, agriculture, and domestic services, contributing significantly to the South African economy[96]. However, despite their economic contributions, foreign migrants in South Africa often face harsh migration policies, discrimination, and periodic outbreaks of xenophobic violence.

Xenophobia has been a recurring challenge in South Africa's migration landscape. Since the early 2000s, the country has witnessed violent attacks on foreign nationals, particularly in urban centers like Johannesburg, Durban, and Pretoria. Anti-immigrant sentiments are fueled by high unemployment rates (currently over 32%), perceptions of job competition, and political rhetoric that scapegoats foreign workers[97]. A 2022 report by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) found that at least 60% of South Africans believe that immigrants take jobs meant for locals, leading to frequent calls for restrictive immigration policies. Government responses have often involved tougher visa regulations, stricter border controls, and deportation programs, rather than long-term integration policies[98].

South Africa's migration policies have fluctuated over the years, reflecting a tension between economic needs and nationalist sentiments. The 1998 Refugees Act and the Immigration Act of 2002 were designed to provide structured pathways for asylum seekers and skilled migrants. However, implementation has been inconsistent, with lengthy processing times, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and corruption within the Department of Home Affairs. The 2014 White Paper on International Migration sought to tighten migration controls by limiting work permits for low-skilled migrants while introducing more favorable conditions for high-skilled professionals. However, critics argue that these policies have contributed to a rise in irregular migration, as many migrants struggle to obtain legal documentation and work permits[99].

Despite its role as a migrant-receiving country, South Africa has also experienced a significant brain drain, particularly in the fields of medicine, engineering, and academia. A 2023 report by the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) found that over 900,000 skilled South Africans have emigrated since 1994, with key destinations being the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Many professionals cite economic instability, crime, and political uncertainty as primary reasons for leaving the country[100]. The healthcare sector has been one of the hardest hits, with thousands of South African doctors and nurses moving abroad for better salaries and working conditions. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) estimates that the country loses over 1,000 medical professionals annually to emigration, exacerbating existing shortages in rural and underdeveloped areas[101].

To address the challenges of migration, South Africa has experimented with various repatriation and retention policies. Programs such as the Zimbabwean Exemption Permit (ZEP) have sought to regularize the stay of thousands of Zimbabwean migrants, preventing mass deportations and allowing them to contribute legally to the economy. However, in recent years, the government has moved towards terminating special permits, forcing thousands of long-term migrants into irregular status[102]. For skilled professionals, initiatives like the Critical Skills List provide fast-tracked work visas for foreign experts in key sectors, but critics argue that there is no equivalent effort to retain South African talent within the country. The South African Diaspora Investment Initiative, launched in 2018, aims to encourage South Africans abroad to invest in local businesses and infrastructure, but empirical evidence suggests limited success due to continued economic instability and governance concerns[103].

The case of South Africa highlights the contradictions within African migration policies, where a country can be both a destination for migrants and a source of brain drain. While economic opportunities attract foreign workers, restrictive policies and social tensions make long-term integration difficult. At the same time, the outflow of skilled professionals weakens key sectors, particularly healthcare and academia. The South African experience underscores the need for comprehensive migration governance, balancing economic benefits with social cohesion and human rights protections. Without stronger regional cooperation and a more pragmatic migration policy, South Africa risks continuing cycles of xenophobic violence, irregular migration, and skilled labour loss, undermining its long-term development.

2.4 Conceptual Model

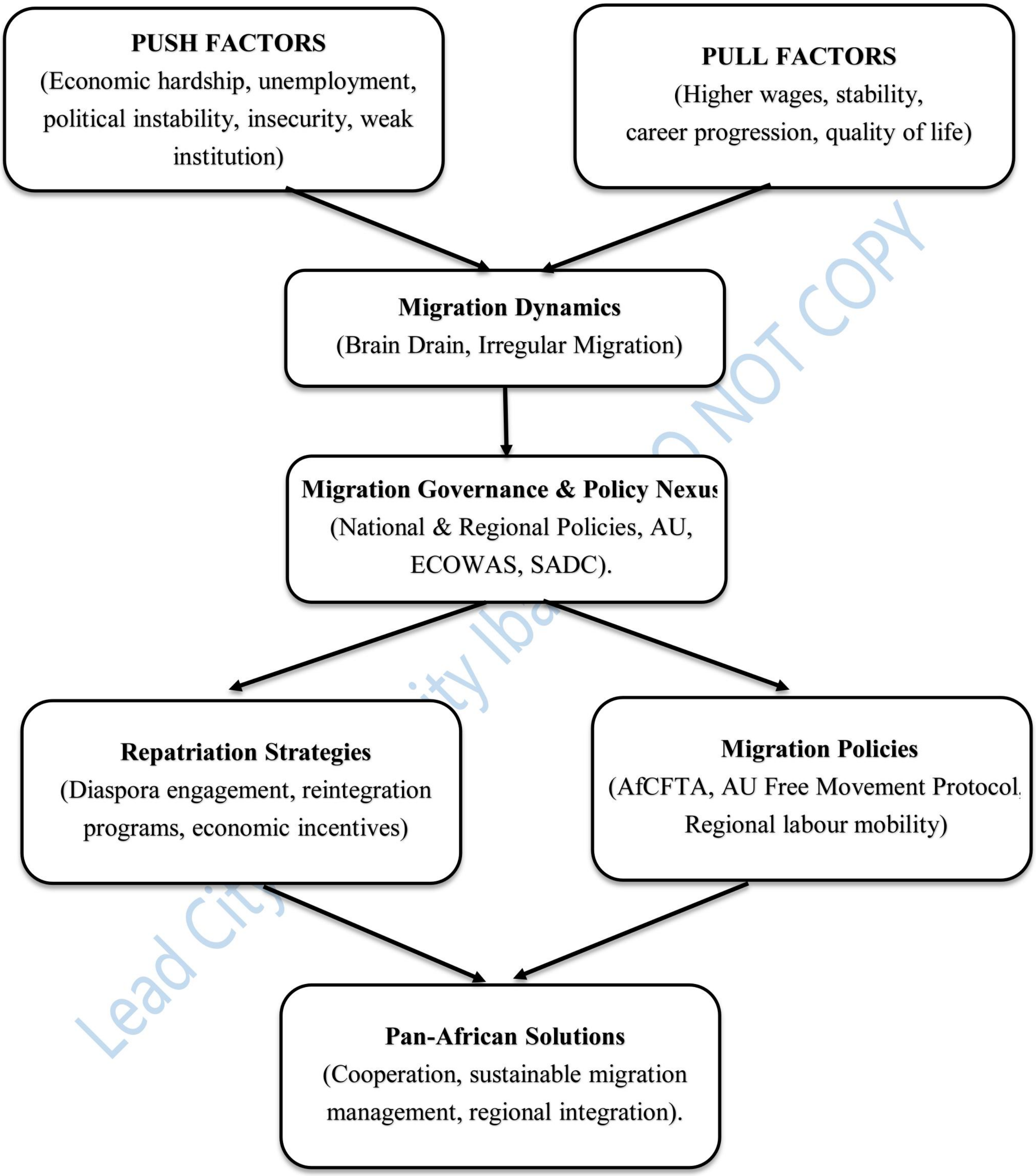

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework for Migration Governance in Africa

Source: Researcher's Construct

Migration in Africa is shaped by economic, political, social, and policy-driven factors, requiring a structured approach to understand how different elements contribute to both the migration crisis and brain drain[104]. A conceptual model for this study must capture the dynamics of migration governance, particularly in the context of Pan-Africanism, repatriation strategies, and regular migration policies. This model seeks to establish the relationships between push and pull factors of migration, the role of policies in regulating movement, and the potential for sustainable repatriation as a solution to brain drain. By integrating these components, the model provides a framework for analyzing migration challenges and formulating solutions within the African continent[105].

At the core of the model is the Push-Pull Framework, which explains migration patterns in terms of factors that either drive individuals away from their home countries (push factors) or attract them to destination countries (pull factors)[106]. Push factors include economic hardship, political instability, insecurity, unemployment, and lack of career advancement opportunities. Many African countries face governance failures, economic downturns, and weak institutional frameworks, leading skilled professionals and labourers alike to seek better opportunities abroad. In contrast, pull factors such as higher wages, political stability, improved living standards, and career progression opportunities in developed nations or stronger African economies encourage migration[110]. This model explains why African nations simultaneously experience both brain drain and large influxes of irregular migrants, as economic disparities within the continent shape internal and external migration trends[107].

A key element in this conceptual model is the Migration Governance and Policy Nexus, which underscores the role of state and regional policies in regulating migration flows. African governments and regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) have attempted to develop migration policies to control the movement of people. However, these policies often lack coherence, enforcement mechanisms, and coordination among member states. Countries with restrictive immigration laws push migrants into irregular migration channels, exacerbating border control challenges and increasing the vulnerability of migrants to exploitation and human rights abuses. Conversely, well-structured policies that facilitate legal migration pathways, work permits, and residency rights help reduce irregular migration and encourage skilled professionals to stay within the continent[108].

Repatriation, as another key component of this model, serves as a corrective mechanism for brain drain, aiming to reintegrate skilled professionals into their home countries. However, repatriation efforts must be sustainable and supported by economic incentives, such as favorable employment opportunities, research funding, business grants, and reintegration programs[109]. Many African governments have initiated diaspora engagement policies, targeting skilled professionals abroad to contribute through knowledge transfer, investment, and short-term consultancies. However, the success of repatriation policies depends on domestic conditions, including political stability, institutional efficiency, and economic viability. If returning migrants find conditions unchanged or worse than when they left, repatriation efforts fail, and cyclical migration resumes[110].

Regular migration policies serve as a stabilizing force in migration governance, ensuring that movement across African countries is regulated, beneficial, and rights-based. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and initiatives such as the AU's Free Movement Protocol aim to facilitate labour mobility within Africa, reducing the pressure on skilled professionals to migrate outside the continent[111]. However, the success of these policies hinges on political will, regional cooperation, and the ability of individual states to implement migration agreements effectively. Countries that successfully integrate regular migration frameworks experience economic benefits from controlled labour movement, while those that maintain restrictive migration policies continue to face irregular migration challenges and talent drain[112].

This conceptual model thus illustrates how push and pull factors, migration policies, repatriation strategies, and regular migration frameworks interact within the African migration landscape. It highlights the importance of coordinated policy action at national and regional levels to address migration crises while leveraging Pan-African solutions to brain drain. Without well-managed migration governance and sustainable repatriation programs, Africa risks a continued exodus of its skilled workforce, reinforcing economic stagnation and dependency on external expertise.

2.5 Summary of Gap in Literature Reviewed

The reviewed literature has provided a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complexities of migration crisis and brain drain in South Africa and Nigeria, emphasizing the role of repatriation and regular migration policies as key solutions. The discussion has covered the conceptual underpinnings of migration, the theoretical frameworks that explain migration patterns and policy responses, as well as empirical studies that offer real-world insights into migration governance on the continent. Through this extensive review, several key themes have emerged, shedding light on the interplay between economic, political, and social factors shaping migration trends in Nigeria and South, and on a larger vintage, Africa. It also revealed how policy implementation gaps, weak institutional capacity, and lack of regional synergy continue to hinder effective migration management in both countries.

First, the conceptual review highlighted the definitions and interpretations of migration crisis, brain drain, repatriation, and regular migration policies[113]. Migration in Africa has been historically driven by a combination of push and pull factors, including economic hardship, political instability, and security concerns, while brain drain remains a critical issue affecting national development, human capital retention, and economic progress[114]. The review underscored the importance of repatriation and diaspora engagement strategies in reversing brain drain and fostering development. It also drew attention to the growing importance of digital remittances, transnational entrepreneurship, and knowledge transfer as alternative means through which the diaspora contributes to national economies. Additionally, the conceptual exploration of regular migration policies demonstrated how structured migration frameworks can facilitate labour mobility, economic integration, and regional stability in Africa[115]. Yet, it also noted that without political will and effective monitoring, many of these policies risk remaining aspirational rather than transformative.

The theoretical framework section examined various perspectives that explain migration patterns and policy interventions. The Push-Pull Theory provided insights into why individuals migrate[116]. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) introduced the idea that migration is often a household strategy rather than an individual decision, particularly in African societies where remittances play a vital role in economic stability[117]. The World-Systems Theory looks at migration as a result of the unequal structure of the global economic systems. Together, these theories demonstrate that migration is not only an economic decision but also a response to broader systemic inequalities and survival strategies shaped by historical, social, and institutional realities.

The empirical review further supported these theoretical insights by providing case studies and data-driven analyses on migration in Africa. Research has shown that Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa are among the most affected countries in terms of brain drain, with skilled professionals emigrating in search of better opportunities abroad[118]. Studies on repatriation efforts revealed that countries such as Rwanda and Ethiopia have successfully implemented diaspora return programs that contribute to national development. However, the effectiveness of such programs depends on favorable political and economic conditions, incentives for returnees, and institutional support for reintegration[119]. Empirical findings also highlighted the significance of good governance, youth empowerment, and social protection systems in reducing the structural pressures that push skilled workers to migrate. The review also examined the African Union's migration policies, the impact of ECOWAS free movement protocols, and the role of international organisations like IOM, UNHCR, and the ILO in supporting migration governance in Africa[120]. Despite these interventions, coordination among states remains weak, and data collection mechanisms are often fragmented, limiting evidence-based policy development.

The conceptual model developed in this study integrates these key findings, illustrating the relationships between push and pull factors, migration policies, repatriation strategies, and regular migration frameworks. The model emphasizes that without a well-structured approach to migration governance, Africa will continue to experience skilled labour exodus and irregular migration challenges[121]. However, coordinated policy action at national and regional levels can provide sustainable solutions[122].

Thus, the literature reviewed has established that migration governance in Africa requires a holistic, multi-faceted approach that balances the need for labour mobility, economic growth, and the mitigation of brain drain. While challenges persist, the implementation of effective repatriation strategies, enhanced regular migration policies, and robust regional cooperation mechanisms remains the most viable path towards a sustainable migration system. Bridging the current gaps in policy coordination, data reliability, and reintegration support will therefore be essential to building migration systems that serve both human and developmental needs. The next chapters builds on this foundation by conducting further analysis of policy effectiveness and comparative studies with other regions to propose viable solutions tailored to Africa's unique migration dynamics. Therefore, this study fills this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of migration policies in both countries, examining how national and regional strategies can be harmonized to promote sustainable migration governance.

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Chapter Three

Methodology

3. 1 Research Design

The research design of this study is primarily qualitative, employing a doctrinal and analytical approach to investigate the legal and policy frameworks governing migration in Nigeria and South Africa. A qualitative research design is most suitable for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of legal principles, policy frameworks, and scholarly discourse on migration challenges. Unlike quantitative studies that rely on numerical data, a qualitative approach enables a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding repatriation and regular migration policies within both countries. Doctrinal research, which is often referred to as legal research, is particularly useful in analyzing statutes, treaties, case law, and policy documents to ascertain the legal obligations and policy commitments of Nigeria and South Africa concerning migration governance. This method involves a critical examination of legal texts and authoritative sources to identify consistencies, gaps, and potential reforms[1]. Furthermore, the analytical aspect of this research design involves interpreting these legal and policy instruments in the context of broader migration trends, historical developments, and contemporary challenges.

Comparative legal analysis is also integrated into the research design to facilitate an examination of the similarities and differences between Nigeria's and South Africa's approaches to migration and their policies. This comparative approach helps to highlight best practices, identify areas of convergence and divergence, and provide a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies[2]. By juxtaposing the legal and policy frameworks of these two African nations, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how Pan-African migration governance can be enhanced. Additionally, this study employs a descriptive approach, which allows for a thorough exposition of the key themes and issues surrounding migration governance. Descriptive analysis ensures that the study provides a clear and comprehensive picture of the regulatory landscape, policy challenges, and institutional frameworks that shape migration patterns in Nigeria and South Africa.

Overall, the chosen research design ensures a methodical and rigorous examination of the subject matter, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the legal, policy, and institutional dimensions of migration and brain drain. By relying on qualitative, doctrinal, analytical, and comparative methodologies, this study presents a well-rounded analysis that is both academically sound and policy-relevant.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises legal, policy, and institutional documents frameworks governing migration in Nigeria and South Africa. It relies exclusively on secondary data sources, including primary legal instruments such as statutes, treaties, judicial decisions, and policy documents, as well as secondary materials like academic literature, peer-reviewed journals, and institutional reports, government reports, publications from relevant international and regional organisations.

The population of study encompasses materials that reflect the evolution, implementation, and effectiveness of migration policies in both countries. These documents provide insights into how legal and policy instruments are applied within national contexts and how they align with regional and international migration governance standards. By analyzing these legal and documentary sources, the study captures a comprehensive picture of the frameworks guiding migration management, institutional coordination, and policy responses to human mobility in Nigeria and South Africa.

3.3 Sample Technique & Sample Size

The sample size is determined by the relevance and richness of the selected materials rather than numerical representation. This study employed a purposive sampling technique to select 125 secondary sources comprising 45 journal articles**,** 30 institutional and policy reports**,** 25 books and book chapters**,** and 25 textbooks and grey literature**.** This method enables the deliberate selection of legal and policy materials based on their authority, credibility, and direct relevance to the study's objectives.

The sampling process followed three key stages:

1. Identification: Legal and policy materials were sourced from reputable institutional databases and official websites of the IOM, African Union, UNHCR, ECOWAS, and relevant national agencies.
2. Selection: Primary and secondary sources published between 2014 and 2024 were included to ensure contemporary relevance and capture evolving migration policy trends.
3. Validation: All selected materials were cross-verified through peer-reviewed databases and recognized legal repositories such as SAFLII and Nigerian Law Pavilion.

3.4 Instrument for Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from existing literature based on common parameters used in examining migration crisis, policy frameworks, and governance. Accordingly, the researcher developed a checklist focusing on literature relating to migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa. This checklist guided the identification and selection of materials that discussed the nature, evolution, and implementation of migration policies in both countries, as well as their impacts on migration trends.

3.5 Validity of the Research Instrument

Since the study made use of secondary data, the process of validating a research instrument was not required. However, to ensure validity, the researcher selected journal articles, books, policy documents, and reports that were within the scope of the study and relevant to migration policy analysis. Each source was reviewed to confirm its alignment with the objectives of the study and the research questions.

3.6 Reliability of the Research Instrument

Reliability in this study was ensured by consistently using credible secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journals, institutional publications, and official government or international reports. The researcher maintained uniform criteria for selecting and analysing these materials, focusing on consistency in concepts, policy indicators, and comparative variables across both countries. This uniformity enhanced the reliability of the findings and ensured that the analysis accurately reflected the trends and policy dynamics in Nigeria and South Africa.

3.7 Administration of Research Instrument

This study relies solely on secondary data. The data were gathered from scholarly databases, journals, books, government documents, reports, and reputable online resources related to migration and policy studies. Each material was carefully evaluated to ensure relevance, authenticity, and contribution to the research objectives.

3.8 Method of Data Collection

This study relies on secondary data sources to explore the legal, policy, and institutional frameworks governing migration and brain drain in Nigeria and South Africa. Data are gathered from official government websites, international organisations, and credible legal databases to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Key documents include international treaties such as the United Nations Global Compact for Migration and the 1951 Refugee Convention, regional instruments like the African Union Migration Policy Framework and the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, and national legislations including Nigeria's Immigration Act 2015 and South Africa's Immigration Act 2002 (as amended).

In addition, academic literature, policy reports, and research studies are reviewed to provide theoretical and empirical perspectives on migration. This method of data collection was implemented by examining previous studies on the subject, as they remain relevant to understanding the evolution of migration governance. Data are sourced from reliable databases such as JSTOR, HeinOnline, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate, ensuring a comprehensive and evidence-based foundation for the study

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative method of data analysis, combining doctrinal and comparative, approaches to examine migration and repatriation policies in Nigeria and South Africa. The analysis focuses on interpreting international, regional, and national legal frameworks such as the Nigerian Immigration Act 2015, South Africa's Immigration Act 2002 (as amended), the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, and the African Union's Migration Policy Framework. This legal analysis helps identify inconsistencies, gaps, and areas for reform within the existing legal frameworks[3].

A comparative and thematic analysis is used to evaluate similarities, differences, and best practices between both countries' migration policies. Thematic analysis is employed to categorize findings under key areas such as legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and socio-economic impacts of policy migration[4]. Policy documents, official reports, and scholarly materials are systematically reviewed to assess how well these policies align with international standards. Through triangulation and contextual analysis, the study ensures validity and reliability, offering a balanced and evidence-based evaluation of migration governance and brain drain management.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This study upholds strict ethical standards to ensure integrity, fairness, and respect for human rights in analyzing secondary data on migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa. All sources were properly cited using the Kate Turabian referencing style to avoid plagiarism, and care was taken to ensure that the interpretation of documents remained faithful to their original context and intent. The study refrained from speculating about classified information, relying solely on declassified, publicly accessible, and ethically sourced materials. Although no human participants are involved, the research aligns with institutional ethics, ensuring transparency, objectivity, and social responsibility throughout the analysis.

Endnotes

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Chapter Four

Results and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Presentation of Findings

In Africa, migration continues to be one of the most important socioeconomic and political concerns, with South Africa and Nigeria acting as discussion centers. The findings of this research reveal that migration challenges in both countries are shaped by a complex interplay of economic disparity, governance issues, security concerns, and historical migration patterns. Nigeria, as a major sending country, continues to experience significant outward migration, particularly of skilled professionals, due to economic hardship, insecurity, and weak institutional frameworks. South Africa, as a primary destination country within the continent, grapples with increasing numbers of migrants, heightened xenophobic tensions, and shifting immigration policies that influence both regular and irregular migration trends[1].

4.1.1 Patterns and Trends of Migration Between Nigeria and South Africa

Migration between Nigeria and South Africa is shaped by a complex interplay of economic, political, and social factors. While both countries serve as significant migration destinations within Africa, their migration dynamics differ in terms of volume, motivation, and regulatory frameworks. Nigeria, as a key West African migration hub, experiences substantial outward and return migration, with South Africa being one of the preferred destinations for Nigerian migrants. Conversely, South Africa attracts migrants from across the continent, particularly from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Nigeria, but maintains a highly restrictive migration policy that disproportionately affects African migrants[2].

Historical Evolution of Migration Trends:

Historically, migration between Nigeria and South Africa has been influenced by colonialism, apartheid, and post-independence economic transformations. During the apartheid era (1948–1994), South Africa's migration policies were highly exclusionary, aimed at restricting the movement of non-white populations, including migrants from other African countries. During this period, Nigerian migration to South Africa was minimal due to political barriers and racial segregation policies[3]. However, following the end of apartheid in 1994 and the democratic transition, South Africa emerged as a major economic hub in Africa, leading to an increase in migration from Nigeria and other parts of the continent. The post-1994 period saw a significant influx of Nigerian professionals, traders, and students seeking better economic and educational opportunities in South Africa. Scholars note that South Africa's strong economic position, industrialization, and relative political stability made it an attractive destination for skilled and unskilled migrants alike[4].

Despite this shift, South Africa's migration policies remained restrictive, leading to high rates of irregular migration. Unlike Nigeria, which allows free movement within the ECOWAS framework, South Africa maintains strict visa and work permit requirements, limiting legal migration opportunities for many Nigerians and other African migrants.

Current Migration Flows and Motivations:

Recent data on Nigeria-South Africa migration patterns indicate a two-way flow of migration, with a higher volume of Nigerian migrants moving to South Africa than vice versa. The motivations for migration can be categorized into the following:

a. Economic Migration: South Africa's relatively stronger economy and higher wages attract Nigerian migrants, particularly in sectors like trade, business, information technology, and academia. Many Nigerian entrepreneurs establish businesses in major cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, contributing to South Africa's informal economy[5].

b. Educational Migration: South Africa's well-established universities, such as the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand, attract Nigerian students seeking higher education. The country's relatively affordable tuition fees and globally recognized degree programs make it a desirable destination for Nigerian students.

c. Irregular Migration and Informal Sector Employment: Due to South Africa's strict visa policies, many Nigerian migrants enter the country irregularly or overstay their visas, leading to precarious employment conditions. Nigerian migrants in the informal sector often engage in trading, artisanal work, and transportation services.

d. South African Migration to Nigeria: In contrast, South African migration to Nigeria is primarily driven by corporate investment and business expansion. South African multinational companies such as MTN, Shoprite, and Standard Bank have established significant operations in Nigeria, leading to an influx of South African expatriates in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. However, this flow is relatively small compared to Nigerian migration to South Africa.

Challenges and Controversies in Nigeria-South Africa Migration Patterns

Despite the economic and educational benefits of migration between Nigeria and South Africa, several challenges persist:

a. Xenophobia and Anti-Migrant Sentiment: One of the most pressing issues affecting Nigerian migrants in South Africa is the persistent xenophobic violence targeted at African migrants. Scholars argue that xenophobic attacks in South Africa are fueled by economic competition, unemployment, and political scapegoating of migrants. Nigerian-owned businesses in South Africa have been repeatedly looted and destroyed during waves of anti-immigrant violence[6].

b. Deportations and Migration Crackdowns: The South African government has intensified deportation efforts targeting irregular migrants, with Nigerians often among the most affected groups. The Department of Home Affairs frequently conducts immigration raids, leading to mass deportations and detentions. In contrast, Nigeria's approach to South African migrants remains largely open, with fewer cases of deportation or mistreatment of South African expatriates in Nigeria.
c. Diplomatic Tensions: Migration-related disputes have occasionally strained diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa. Issues such as visa denials, deportation policies, and attacks on Nigerian nationals in South Africa have led to diplomatic rifts, with Nigeria at times threatening retaliatory measures. However, both governments have engaged in high-level discussions to ease tensions and improve migration management[7].

Comparative Analysis of Migration Trends

When comparing migration patterns between Nigeria and South Africa, several key differences emerge:

a. Volume and Direction: While a significant number of Nigerians migrate to South Africa, South African migration to Nigeria is relatively minimal and largely business-driven.
b. Legal Framework and Restrictions: Nigeria's ECOWAS free movement policy allows for easier migration within West Africa, whereas South Africa's strict immigration policies create significant barriers for African migrants.

c. Xenophobia and Security: South Africa experiences higher levels of anti-migrant violence, whereas Nigeria has a more tolerant migration environment for South African expatriates and other foreign nationals.

d. Economic Contributions: Nigerian migrants in South Africa are highly entrepreneurial, contributing to the growth of small businesses and informal trade, while South African companies operating in Nigeria focus more on corporate investments and formal employment.

Therefore, the migration patterns between Nigeria and South Africa highlight the economic and social interdependence of both countries, despite their differing policy approaches. Nigeria's open and regional integration-based migration policies contrast sharply with South Africa's restrictive, securitized migration framework. While migration offers opportunities for economic growth, education, and investment, it also presents challenges such as xenophobia, irregular migration, and diplomatic tensions[8].

For a more balanced and sustainable migration relationship, both countries need to enhance bilateral cooperation, reduce xenophobic hostilities, and establish structured migration agreements that facilitate legal migration, economic partnerships, and skills exchange. Addressing migration-related tensions through diplomatic dialogue and policy reforms will be essential in promoting a mutually beneficial migration framework between Nigeria and South Africa.

Factors Influencing Migration Between Nigeria and South Africa:

Economic Factors:

Economic factors remain one of the primary determinants of migration between Nigeria and South Africa. The search for better economic opportunities, higher wages, and improved living standards has historically driven migration patterns. South Africa, being one of the largest economies in Africa, presents itself as a major destination for Nigerian migrants seeking employment and business prospects. Scholars argue that economic disparities between countries often serve as the principal motivation for migration, as individuals tend to move from regions with limited economic opportunities to those with higher wages and more stable economies. In the case of Nigeria and South Africa, this theory is evident in the migration trends observed over the years[9].

The South African economy, despite its own internal challenges, offers a relatively stronger job market compared to Nigeria, particularly in the formal sector. Studies highlight that many Nigerian migrants are drawn to South Africa due to perceived economic stability, access to financial services, and a more structured labour market. Furthermore, research suggests that Nigeria's economic struggles, including high unemployment rates, inflation, and inconsistent economic policies, have pushed many young Nigerians to seek better prospects in South Africa. These studies reinforce the view that economic migration is largely a response to disparities in job availability, income levels, and the overall economic environment[10]. The presence of a large informal economy in South Africa also plays a role in attracting Nigerian migrants. As documented many Nigerian traders, artisans, and entrepreneurs have found a niche in the informal sector, engaging in small-scale businesses, retail trade, and services. This economic dynamic aligns with the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theory, which posits that migration is often a household strategy to diversify income sources and mitigate economic risks. By working in South Africa, Nigerian migrants are able to send remittances back home, supporting their families and contributing to the Nigerian economy. Studies confirm that remittances from South Africa form a crucial part of household incomes in Nigeria, thus reinforcing the economic motivations behind migration.

However, despite the economic pull factors, South Africa's economy is not without challenges. Recent studies have noted that increasing unemployment and economic stagnation in South Africa have led to growing tensions between local workers and migrant communities, particularly in urban areas where competition for jobs is high. This economic competition has fueled anti-immigrant sentiments and periodic xenophobic attacks, as documented by scholars who argue that economic grievances often translate into social hostility against migrant populations. Despite these challenges, economic motivations continue to drive migration between Nigeria and South Africa, as many Nigerians perceive South Africa as a land of better economic prospects compared to the uncertainties in Nigeria.

Political Factor:

Political factors play a significant role in shaping migration patterns between Nigeria and South Africa. Governance structures, political stability, policy frameworks, and diplomatic relations influence the movement of people across borders. Nigeria and South Africa, as two of Africa's largest economies and political powerhouses, have experienced different political trajectories that have impacted migration flows between them. Political stability and effective governance often determine the attractiveness of a country as a migration destination. Where governance is weak and political instability persists, people are more likely to migrate in search of safety, stability, and better prospects[11].

Nigeria's political environment has historically been characterized by a mix of democratic governance and episodes of instability, corruption, and poor policy implementation. Scholars argue that factors such as electoral violence, human rights abuses, and weak institutional frameworks contribute to outward migration. Over the years, political instability has led to socioeconomic challenges, further exacerbating migration trends. The absence of policies that effectively address youth unemployment, social inequality, and security concerns has made emigration a viable option for many Nigerians. Studies highlight that Nigerian professionals, particularly in academia, medicine, and engineering, often seek migration opportunities in politically stable countries like South Africa, where institutional frameworks and governance structures are perceived to be stronger.

South Africa, on the other hand, has had a more stable democratic experience since the end of apartheid in 1994, but it faces its own political challenges that affect migration. South Africa's immigration policies have fluctuated between inclusion and exclusion, influenced by internal political dynamics and economic concerns. While post-apartheid South Africa initially welcomed skilled migrants from other African nations, including Nigeria, recent policies have become more restrictive due to rising unemployment, political pressures, and xenophobic sentiments. Research also suggests that political decisions in South Africa, particularly those related to labour laws, visa restrictions, and migration controls, have created barriers for Nigerian migrants seeking entry or permanent residency[12].

Diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa have also influenced migration trends. While both countries have historically maintained strong bilateral ties, tensions have occasionally arisen due to political disagreements, economic competition, and incidents involving Nigerian migrants in South Africa. Scholars have documented instances where diplomatic disputes, such as visa restrictions and deportation policies, have affected the ease of migration between the two nations. The impact of xenophobic attacks on Nigerian migrants has further strained relations, leading to retaliatory diplomatic measures. Political hostility and inconsistent foreign policies have contributed to a climate of uncertainty for migrants, with fluctuating policies affecting their legal status, business operations, and overall well-being.

Despite these political challenges, migration between Nigeria and South Africa continues, driven by economic necessity and the quest for better governance. However, the politicization of migration in South Africa has led to the tightening of immigration laws and increased surveillance of Nigerian migrants. This dynamic illustrates how political factors not only drive migration but also shape the lived experiences of migrants in their host countries.

Social and Cultural Factors:

Social and cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping migration trends between Nigeria and South Africa. The movement of people is not solely influenced by economic and political factors; rather, cultural similarities, social networks, language, historical ties, and perceptions of social inclusion or exclusion also determine migration patterns. Scholars emphasize that social structures, family connections, and cultural integration significantly influence both the decision to migrate and the ease of settlement in a host country[13]. One of the primary social drivers of migration is the presence of established Nigerian communities in South Africa. Research indicates that the existence of migrant networks makes South Africa an attractive destination for Nigerians, particularly those in search of economic opportunities. Social networks provide new migrants with accommodation, employment leads, and financial assistance, thereby reducing the risks associated with migration. Migration networks play a self-sustaining role in perpetuating migration flows, as individuals rely on the experiences and successes of earlier migrants when making their own migration decisions.

Language and cultural affinity also contribute to migration patterns between the two countries. While Nigeria and South Africa have distinct linguistic and ethnic diversities, the use of English as an official language in both countries facilitates communication, social integration, and access to opportunities. Studies highlight that linguistic compatibility reduces barriers to employment, education, and social interactions, making South Africa a more attractive destination for Nigerian migrants compared to non-English-speaking African countries. Additionally, the shared colonial histories of Nigeria and South Africa have created cultural similarities in governance, education, and business practices, further easing the process of adaptation for migrants[14].

Religion is another factor that influences migration dynamics. Nigeria is religiously diverse, with a significant Christian and Muslim population. South Africa, while predominantly Christian, also hosts various religious communities. Research suggests that religious affiliations and institutions provide migrants with a sense of belonging and support. Nigerian churches and mosques in South Africa serve as community hubs, offering social, economic, and psychological support to migrants. The role of religious organisations in facilitating integration is well documented in migration studies, with scholars noting that faith-based networks often serve as bridges between migrants and host communities.

However, social challenges such as xenophobia, discrimination, and cultural tensions have also shaped the migration experience of Nigerians in South Africa. The works of researchers that Nigerian migrants often face hostility from segments of the South African population, fueled by perceptions that they are taking away jobs, engaging in criminal activities, or dominating the informal economy. Xenophobic violence, particularly in urban centers like Johannesburg and Durban, has led to social exclusion and heightened tensions between Nigerian migrants and local South African communities. In South Africa, migration policy is undermined by societal hostility toward foreigners. Xenophobia functions as a persistent obstacle, creating a gap between policy intentions and actual outcomes. This contrasts with Nigeria, where outward migration pressures and weak reintegration policies are more central challenges than hostility toward migrants[15]. The South African Migration Programme (SAMP) has documented instances where anti-immigrant sentiments have resulted in violence, loss of property, and even loss of lives among Nigerian migrants. Furthermore, differences in social norms and cultural attitudes sometimes create friction between Nigerian migrants and their host communities. South Africans often perceive Nigerian migrants as being more aggressive in business and social interactions, leading to cultural misunderstandings. Additionally, gender roles and family structures differ significantly between the two countries, influencing how Nigerian migrants, particularly women, navigate social life in South Africa.

Despite these challenges, the resilience of Nigerian migrants and the strength of their social and cultural networks have allowed them to establish thriving communities in South Africa. Studies indicate that Nigerian migrants have significantly contributed to South Africa's cultural and economic landscape, particularly in sectors such as business, academia, and the entertainment industry. Nigerian entrepreneurs have established businesses that cater to both Nigerian and South African populations, and the popularity of Nollywood films and Afrobeats music in South Africa has further solidified cultural ties between the two nations. Therefore, social and cultural factors significantly influence migration trends between Nigeria and South Africa. While established migrant networks, linguistic similarities, and religious affiliations promote migration and integration, challenges such as xenophobia, cultural misunderstandings, and discrimination create obstacles for Nigerian migrants. However, the continued interactions between the two populations contribute to the evolving social and cultural dynamics of migration in the region.

4.1.2 Overview of Migration Policy Frameworks

Migration governance in Nigeria and South Africa is primarily shaped by their respective legal frameworks and institutional structures. While both countries have comprehensive migration policies, their approaches differ significantly due to historical, economic, and geopolitical factors. Nigeria's framework emphasizes regional integration, diaspora engagement, and voluntary repatriation, whereas South Africa adopts a more securitized and restrictive stance on immigration, particularly in relation to African migrants[16].

Nigeria's Legal and Institutional Framework on Migration:

Nigeria's migration governance is rooted in a combination of domestic legislation, regional agreements, and international conventions. The principal laws regulating migration in Nigeria include:

a. The Immigration Act of 2015 is the most important legislation guiding the regulation of migration in Nigeria, and it plays a major role in shaping the country's response to contemporary migration challenges. The Act was introduced to update older immigration laws and respond to new realities such as increasing irregular migration, human trafficking, insecurity around Nigeria's borders, and the expanding movement of skilled and unskilled migrants within and outside the country. Under the Act, the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) is given broad authority to manage migration. This includes the power to issue visas, supervise deportation processes, monitor border crossings, and regulate expatriate quotas for foreign workers. These functions are important because they determine how people enter the country, how long they stay, and under what legal conditions they work or reside. By strengthening the formal processes for migration, the Act seeks to encourage regular, documented movement, which aligns with international standards of safe and orderly migration. The Act also introduces stricter penalties for illegal entry, visa abuse, and other irregular migration activities. This is especially relevant to Nigeria's situation, where many migrants travel through irregular channels due to weak regulation and limited legal opportunities. By tightening penalties and improving monitoring mechanisms, the legislation aims to reduce undocumented migration, trafficking networks, and smuggling routes that expose migrants to danger.

Importantly, the law includes provisions for residence permits and asylum, which reflects Nigeria's responsibility under international agreements to protect refugees and displaced persons. These provisions demonstrate that the Act is not only about restricting migration but also about ensuring that genuine migrants and asylum seekers have legal protection. However, the Immigration Act faces challenges that limit its impact. Nigeria's borders remain difficult to police because of their size and terrain, and the NIS sometimes lacks the manpower, technology, and infrastructure needed for effective enforcement. These weaknesses create opportunities for irregular migration to continue and reduce the effectiveness of legal controls. In relation to the topic of this study, the Act is significant because it provides the legal foundation for Nigeria's efforts to manage migration more efficiently and responsibly. Although the law does not directly address brain drain or the large-scale emigration of professionals, it contributes indirectly by trying to strengthen the state's capacity to track and regulate movement. It also supports Nigeria's commitments to international and regional migration frameworks, including ECOWAS free movement protocols and African Union initiatives on safe and orderly mobility. Overall, the Immigration Act of 2015 represents a major step in modernizing migration governance in

Nigeria. However, unless improvements are made in institutional capacity, inter-agency coordination, and border management, its long-term impact on migration control, regularization, and repatriation outcomes will remain limited.

b. The National Migration Policy (NMP) of 2015: The National Migration Policy (NMP) of 2015 is Nigeria's first comprehensive attempt to approach migration as a strategic national development issue rather than just a border control concern. The policy provides a unified framework for managing all dimensions of migration, including labour mobility, diaspora engagement, border security, irregular migration, return and reintegration, and migration data management.

One of the reasons the NMP is significant is that it introduces a more organized and humane approach to migration governance. Before its adoption, migration activities in Nigeria were largely fragmented, with different ministries and agencies working in isolation. The NMP seeks to correct this by establishing a national coordination structure that brings agencies together and encourages joint planning, information sharing, and standardization of migration procedures. This structure is crucial in a country where migration issues cut across many institutions from foreign affairs to labour, security, population management, and human rights enforcement.

The policy was developed with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the European Union (EU), reflecting international best practices and aligning Nigeria with global principles on safe, orderly, and regular migration. This collaboration also shows a growing recognition that migration is not only a domestic issue but one that requires international cooperation, especially in the context of large-scale emigration and increasing cross-border mobility.

A major strength of the NMP is its attention to diaspora engagement, which is particularly relevant to Nigeria as a major migrant-sending country. The policy acknowledges the economic and intellectual value of Nigerians abroad and encourages the government to create mechanisms for harnessing diaspora skills, investments, and remittances for national development. This aligns with your study's emphasis on repatriation and human capital retention, as effective diaspora policies can help transform brain drain into "brain gain."

The NMP also focuses strongly on labour migration, recognizing that many Nigerians move abroad in search of better employment. By encouraging formal labour mobility channels, the policy aims to reduce irregular migration, protect migrant workers, and improve Nigeria's bargaining position in bilateral migration agreements.

However, despite its strong design, the National Migration Policy faces several limitations. Implementation has been slow due to inadequate funding, overlapping institutional mandates, weak coordination across government agencies, and limited technical capacity. The absence of reliable migration data systems also makes planning difficult, as policies are often based on incomplete or outdated information. These challenges reduce the effectiveness of the NMP and limit its influence on issues such as skilled emigration, reintegration of returnees, and the governance of regular migration pathways.

In summary, the National Migration Policy of 2015 represents an important shift toward structured and development-focused migration management in Nigeria. It establishes a foundation for regulating migration in a way that supports national growth, protects migrants' rights, and strengthens Nigeria's engagement with the global community. However, for the NMP to deliver its full potential, stronger coordination, adequate funding, and institutional capacity improvements are needed.

c. The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (2003): The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act of 2003 stands as Nigeria's primary legal mechanism for combating human trafficking and related transnational crimes. The Act was enacted in response to increasing regional and international pressure to address trafficking networks that were exploiting Nigerian citizens particularly women and children through forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and other forms of modern slavery. One of the most significant features of the Act is the establishment of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), which functions as the central institution responsible for enforcing the law. NAPTIP was given a broad mandate that includes investigation of trafficking networks, prosecution of offenders, rescue and rehabilitation of victims, public sensitization campaigns, and the development of national strategies against trafficking. In this sense, the Act not only criminalizes trafficking but also institutionalizes a coordinated national approach to combating it. The Act is also important because it aligns Nigeria with major international conventions, particularly the United Nations Palermo Protocol (2000), which calls on states to criminalize human trafficking, protect victims, and strengthen international cooperation. By domesticating this protocol, Nigeria demonstrated a commitment to global efforts against trafficking and positioned itself as a pioneer within West Africa, being one of the first countries in the region to develop a comprehensive anti-trafficking law. Since its implementation, the Act has enabled Nigeria to make measurable progress. NAPTIP has recorded numerous convictions, dismantled trafficking networks, and rescued thousands of victims through nationwide operations. The agency also conducts community campaigns to address the social and economic drivers of trafficking, such as poverty, unemployment, and irregular migration pressures. Despite these achievements, several challenges limit the effectiveness of the Act in practice. Weak inter-agency coordination, particularly between security agencies, immigration authorities, and social welfare institutions, often slows case management and victim support. Additionally, while victims are rescued, rehabilitation and reintegration services remain insufficient**,** with limited shelters, poor psychosocial support structures, and inadequate long-term reintegration programs. These weaknesses increase the risk of re-victimization and reduce the deterrence effect of the law. Furthermore, trafficking continues to be driven by deep structural issues such as unemployment, inequality, weak border control, and the demand for cheap labour in destination countries. As a result, enforcement alone is not enough; broader economic and migration governance reforms are also needed to reduce the vulnerability of potential victims. In summary, the 2003 Trafficking in Persons Act represents a major milestone in Nigeria's fight against human trafficking and aligns the country with global anti-trafficking standards. It has strengthened legal prosecution and victim protection through the work of NAPTIP.

d. The National Diaspora Policy of 2017 is Nigeria's first comprehensive framework designed to formally recognize the country's diaspora population as a critical engine for national development. The policy emerged in response to the increasing number of Nigerians living and working abroad, many of whom are highly skilled professionals in fields such as medicine, academics, finance, engineering, and technology. Rather than viewing outward migration solely as a loss of talent, the policy adopts a developmental approach that seeks to transform the Nigerian diaspora into a strategic asset. A key objective of the policy is to strengthen institutional mechanisms for diaspora engagement, enabling Nigerians abroad to contribute more effectively through financial remittances, foreign investment, knowledge transfer, philanthropic initiatives, and capacity-building partnerships. The policy highlights several priority areas, including diaspora mapping, dual citizenship recognition, investment facilitation, protection of diaspora rights, and the promotion of return and reintegration programs.

One of the most significant outcomes of the policy was the establishment of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) in 2019, a dedicated federal institution responsible for coordinating government–diaspora relations. NIDCOM provides a formal platform for structured engagement through diaspora conferences, investment forums, professional exchange programs, and direct channels of communication with Nigerian communities abroad. Through these efforts, Nigeria has been able to identify diaspora expertise, encourage participation in national development projects, and foster stronger emotional and economic ties between the state and its citizens living outside its borders.

The policy also aligns with broader global and continental trends that promote the role of diaspora in national development, reflecting the models advocated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the African Union's Migration Policy Framework for Africa. It embraces modern ideas such as "brain circulation," where migration is seen not merely as a loss but as a process that can generate reciprocal benefits to human capital return, transfer of knowledge, and transnational partnerships capable of enhancing national competitiveness. Despite its achievements, the implementation of the policy faces several challenges. Returnees often struggle with reintegration, partly due to limited support systems, weak coordination between institutions, and the absence of a comprehensive reintegration framework. In many cases, diaspora investments suffer from bureaucratic delays, policy inconsistency, inadequate infrastructure, and limited protection of investor interests, which can discourage sustained participation. Additionally, communication links between diaspora groups and government institutions remain uneven and often fragmented, affecting long-term planning.

In summary, the National Diaspora Policy of 2017 marks an important shift in Nigeria's migration governance from managing migration as a problem to leveraging it as a development opportunity. By institutionalizing diaspora engagement through NIDCOM, Nigeria has created a structured platform for mobilizing diaspora skills, capital, and networks. However, to fully realize its potential, the country must strengthen reintegration systems, streamline investment processes, and ensure consistent policy coherence across federal and state institutions.

e. National Labour Migration Policy (2014): The National Labour Migration Policy (NLMP), adopted in 2014, represents Nigeria's first dedicated national framework designed to manage labour migration in a structured, rights-based, and development-oriented manner. The policy was developed in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), reflecting global best practices and aligning Nigeria with international labour standards. At its core, the NLMP seeks to ensure that Nigerian workers migrating abroad do so under conditions that protect their dignity, welfare, and socio-economic rights. It acknowledges that migration can be a significant driver of development when properly harnessed, benefiting migrants, their families, and the Nigerian state. As such, the policy focuses on three major pillars:

Protection of Migrant Workers Abroad:

The policy promotes ethical recruitment practices, fair contractual agreements, portable social security rights, and mechanisms for grievance reporting. It mandates better regulation and monitoring of employment agencies to prevent exploitation, forced labour, and deceptive job placements. The NLMP also encourages Nigerian missions abroad to play a more active role in supporting distressed workers and providing consular assistance.

Governance and Regulation of Labour Migration:

The policy provides guidelines for licensing and supervising private employment agencies to prevent unregulated and informal recruitment that often leads to human rights violations. It also supports the establishment of bilateral and multilateral labour agreements with destination countries, ensuring migrant workers benefit from formalized protections. Additionally, the NLMP promotes institutional cooperation among the Ministry of Labour, immigration authorities, and other stakeholders through a national coordination structure.

Maximizing Developmental Benefits:

Recognizing migration as a driver of foreign earnings and skills transfer, the policy encourages Nigeria to leverage labour migration for national development. This includes gathering reliable data on employment trends, supporting diaspora contributions, and ensuring that returning migrants can reintegrate into the local workforce.

Despite these strengths, several implementation challenges have limited the policy's full impact. In practice, weak enforcement mechanisms, limited funding, poor inter-agency coordination, and insufficient data on Nigerian migrant workers have constrained monitoring efforts. Many agencies still operate outside regulatory oversight, and migrant workers often remain unaware of their rights prior to departure. Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive labour migration database makes it difficult to monitor flows, outcomes, and policy effectiveness. Nevertheless, the NLMP remains a significant milestone in Nigeria's migration governance landscape. It sets a clear foundation for institutional responsibility, rights-based recruitment, and integration of migration into national development planning. The policy also establishes a basis for Nigeria's continued engagement with international labour markets, while seeking to reduce the vulnerabilities and risks faced by Nigerian workers abroad.

Nigeria's approach to migration governance is largely shaped by its position as both a source and transit country for migration. Institutions such as the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), and the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) play critical roles in policy implementation. The Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM), established in 2019, is particularly instrumental in engaging the Nigerian diaspora, facilitating investments, and supporting voluntary return programs for stranded Nigerians abroad[17]. Despite these legal and institutional frameworks, Nigeria's migration governance faces challenges. Scholars argue that inconsistencies in policy implementation, coupled with weak border control mechanisms, undermine Nigeria's ability to effectively manage migration. Furthermore, the lack of a robust reintegration framework for returning migrants exacerbates issues of irregular re-migration.

South Africa's Legal and Institutional Framework on Migration:

South Africa's migration governance is regulated by a more restrictive and enforcement-driven legal framework. Key legislation includes:

a. The Immigration Act of 2002 (as amended): The Immigration Act of 2002 forms the backbone of South Africa's migration management system. It replaced earlier apartheid-era legislation that severely restricted the entry of non-whites and introduced a more inclusive legal order aligned with the South African Constitution after 1994. The Act regulates the admission, residence, employment, and rights of foreign nationals within South Africa, making it the principal reference point for all migration-related administrative processes. The Act provides detailed procedures for issuing different categories of visas and permits, such as work visas, study permits, visitor and transit visas, permanent residence permits, and intra-company transfer authorizations. It also prescribes the legal grounds for deportation, overstaying penalties, and cancellation of immigration privileges. In theory, the Act is designed to serve economic development by allowing the country to attract highly skilled foreign professionals needed in critical sectors such as engineering, sciences, medicine, and academia. This reflects South Africa's broader economic development agenda, where the immigration system should ideally complement labour market needs and close national skills gaps.

However, this developmental ambition has increasingly collided with growing public fears and political narratives linking migration to unemployment, insecurity, border weakness, and pressure on public services. As unemployment rates rose and xenophobic tensions escalated, the Immigration Act was amended repeatedly to tighten administrative controls. Application processes became more stringent, documentation requirements multiplied, eligibility criteria were raised, and appeals procedures became more restrictive. These amendments were driven largely by political pressure to show tougher border control, especially as migrants became targets of political rhetoric during elections. Despite this, the Act has faced significant implementation challenges. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) is under-resourced, resulting in long waiting times, lost files, changing regulations, difficulty in renewing permits, and a growing administrative backlog. Many employers report challenges navigating the system, especially when applying for foreign work authorizations. For highly skilled migrants, the system is frustrating and unpredictable; for low-skilled migrants from neighboring countries, legal pathways are extremely narrow or nonexistent. The result is a policy paradox: South Africa has a legal system that is sophisticated on paper, but challenging to access in practice. This disconnect drives many foreign nationals into irregular status, increasing vulnerability to exploitation, police harassment, and deportation. Thus, the Immigration Act provides the main structure for migration governance, but its operational weaknesses continue to undermine its intended policy goals.

b. The Refugees Act of 1998: The Refugees Act of 1998 was a groundbreaking piece of legislation in post-apartheid South Africa, marking the country's transition to a rights-based asylum system consistent with the UN 1951 Refugee Convention and the OAU 1969 Convention**.** The Act recognizes the rights of refugees and asylum seekers to seek protection, receive temporary documentation, and enjoy freedom of movement, access to education, healthcare, and employment. It defines who qualifies as a refugee and outlines the procedures for recognition, appeals, and termination of refugee status. Following the end of apartheid, South Africa became one of the top asylum destinations in Africa, largely because it offered the rare combination of legal work rights and freedom of movement. By the late 2000s, South Africa was receiving tens of thousands of applications annually from Zimbabwe, Somalia, Burundi, Ethiopia, the DRC, and other conflict-affected states. Refugee Reception Offices (RROs) were opened to manage the caseload, supported by the Standing Committee for Refugee Affairs and the Refugee Appeal Board.

However, the system quickly became overwhelmed. Backlogs mounted as capacity failed to keep pace with increasing flows. DHA struggled with inadequate staffing, limited budget, poor information systems, and administrative inconsistency. Some offices were temporarily closed, leading to fewer service points and further congestion. Many asylum seekers waited years for decisions, living in a state of extended legal uncertainty. Regular renewals and lost files added to the burden, while corruption, extortion, and document fraud further eroded public trust. At the same time, growing public resentment and xenophobic sentiments led to shifts in political attitudes. Government rhetoric increasingly framed asylum seekers as economic migrants abusing the protection system to bypass strict visa rules. This contributed to policy changes that narrowed eligibility, tightened renewal rules, and increased police and border enforcement. As a result, while the Refugees Act remains one of the most liberal and progressive refugee laws on paper, the real-world asylum environment has become restrictive, adversarial, and marked by widespread administrative failure.

Nevertheless, the Act remains the cornerstone of refugee protection in South Africa and plays a crucial role in providing legal sanctuary to vulnerable individuals fleeing systematic persecution, war, and political crisis across Africa. The challenge is not the absence of legal instruments, but the gap between legislative promise and administrative reality.

c. Border Management Authority (BMA) Act of 2020: The Border Management Authority Act of 2020 represents one of South Africa's most significant institutional reforms in migration control. For decades, border management responsibilities were fragmented across multiple agencies, including the army, immigration services, customs, health inspectors, and police. Coordination problems created inefficiencies that allowed irregular migration, informal cross-border trade, trafficking, and smuggling to flourish.

The BMA Act centralized border operations into a single agency tasked with regulating and securing all of South Africa's air, land, and sea ports of entry. The Authority works under the Department of Home Affairs but collaborates with defense, police, intelligence services, and the justice system. Its mandate includes:

- managing official ports of entry,
- conducting visa and immigration inspections,
- preventing unlawful entry,
- detecting and intercepting trafficking and smuggling,
- regulating the movement of goods,
- improving inter-agency information flow and technology use,
- training specialized border enforcement personnel.

The BMA reflects South Africa's shift toward a security-centric migration paradigm, shaped by intense domestic political pressure to show tougher control of borders in response to public perceptions that "foreigners enter easily" and burdens public resources. The rise of organized transnational crime networks, including syndicates smuggling narcotics, counterfeit goods, firearms, and undocumented migrants, also contributed to the need for coordinated border governance.

However, the BMA faces formidable structural challenges. South Africa has vast and permeable land borders shared with Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, and Lesotho, many of which are difficult to patrol comprehensively. Smuggling routes are deeply entrenched, supported by well-organized networks and sometimes facilitated by corrupt officials. The BMA also faces budget shortfalls, staff shortages, limited technology deployment, and the practical difficulty of transforming multiple existing agencies into a single unified system. Despite these challenges, the BMA is a major institutional milestone that signals South Africa's determination to modernize border governance and project stronger state authority over migration flows.

d. Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons (PACOTIP) Act of 2013: The PACOTIP Act of 2013 is South Africa's most comprehensive legislation addressing human trafficking. Adopted in line with the UN Palermo Protocol, the Act criminalizes the recruitment, transportation, harboring, or receipt of persons for exploitation, including forced labour, prostitution, organ removal, slavery, debt bondage, or child exploitation. It introduced strict penalties for traffickers, provisions for seizing assets, and legal protection mechanisms for victims.

The Act provides trafficking victims with a range of rights and services, including:

- temporary residency permits,
- access to shelters and psychosocial counseling,
- medical treatment,
- legal assistance,
- witness protection,
- reintegration and rehabilitation programs.

The Act has strengthened the ability of law enforcement agencies, social welfare institutions, and border authorities to detect and respond to trafficking cases. Multi-agency task forces have been formed, involving police, migration services, child protection authorities, and civil society partners. Nonetheless, the operational capacity to fully implement PACOTIP remains uneven. Many border officials, police officers, and community-level authorities have limited training to identify trafficking indicators effectively. Shelters and victim rehabilitation facilities are insufficient and concentrated mainly in urban centers like Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban. Prosecution rates remain low because of challenges such as lack of evidence, victim withdrawal due to fear or intimidation, or poor investigative follow-through. Corruption and smuggling networks also remain significant obstacles, especially given South Africa's position as both:

- a destination country, attracting migrants seeking work and opportunity, and
- a transit corridor, where victims are moved toward other markets.

Despite these challenges, the PACOTIP Act remains a crucial legal instrument that places South Africa among the stronger anti-trafficking jurisdictions in Africa.

e. Southern African Development Community (SADC) Migration Policy Framework: At the regional level, South Africa's migration system is guided by commitments made under the SADC Migration Policy Framework, which seeks to promote regulated, safe, and development-oriented mobility across Southern Africa. SADC envisions a regional environment where labour can move relatively freely to support economic integration, industrial expansion, and shared development. The framework encourages:

- harmonization of visa and permit requirements,
- protection of migrant workers' rights,
- creation of legal labour-mobility channels,
- cross-border social security portability,

- coordinated border management,
- data sharing among governments,
- reduction of administrative barriers to trade and movement.

Many SADC economies rely heavily on outward migration to South Africa, whose economy is the largest in the region and offers more employment opportunities than its neighbors. Historically, cross-border labour flows played a major role in the mining industry, agriculture, trade, and service sectors.

However, despite South Africa's formal commitment to SADC integration, national migration policy increasingly reflects domestic political pressures rather than regional ambitions. As unemployment, inequality, and xenophobic tensions intensified, South Africa tightened immigration regulations affecting low-skilled migrants from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Eswatini. Temporary permits that once allowed migrants to work legally have been discontinued or revised unpredictably. Enforcement operations increased, and political rhetoric increasingly portrayed migrants as competitors for jobs and public services.

This creates a persistent contradiction: while SADC promotes freer movement and regional solidarity, South African domestic policy often prioritizes border fortification, tighter controls, security concerns, and the protection of national labour markets. As a result, the regional framework remains aspirational, and the gap between regional commitments and local implementation illustrates the difficulty of balancing sovereignty, political legitimacy, and regional cooperation.

Unlike Nigeria, South Africa's institutional framework prioritizes migration control over regional integration. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) is responsible for managing migration policies, issuing permits, and overseeing deportation operations. Additionally, the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) play active roles in border security and immigration enforcement[18]. South Africa's migration governance has been widely criticized for its exclusionary nature. Scholars argue that the government's restrictive policies and deportation-driven approach have fostered xenophobia and social tensions, particularly against African migrants. Unlike Nigeria, which engages with its diaspora as a strategic economic asset, South Africa has no formal diaspora engagement policy.

Comparative Analysis of Nigeria and South Africa's Migration Legal Frameworks

A comparison of Nigeria and South Africa's migration legal frameworks reveals stark contrasts in their approaches. It provides a crucial perspective on how these two African nations approach migration governance, repatriation, and brain drain mitigation. Both countries serve as regional powerhouses and major migration hubs within the continent, yet their policies and institutional responses to migration challenges differ significantly due to historical, political, economic, and social factors. By examining these policies side by side, we can gain deeper insights into their effectiveness, limitations, and potential areas for improvement within the Pan-African migration governance framework.

Nigeria adopts a more open, integrationist framework, particularly within the ECOWAS regional structure. Its laws prioritize diaspora engagement, labour migration, and voluntary return programs. However, weak implementation mechanisms and porous borders remain key challenges. South Africa, on the other hand, prioritizes security, enforcement, and border control. Its restrictive visa policies and frequent amendments to migration laws indicate a shift toward anti-immigration sentiment, particularly against African migrants. The lack of a regional free movement framework like ECOWAS further isolates South Africa's migration policies within the Southern African Development Community (SADC)[19].

One major difference is how both countries approach migration-related institutions. Nigeria's NIDCOM actively engages its diaspora, promoting economic investments and skills transfer. South Africa, however, lacks a structured diaspora engagement policy, which limits the potential contributions of South Africans abroad to national development. Scholars argue that South Africa's securitized approach to migration governance fails to recognize the economic contributions of migrants, particularly in sectors like mining, agriculture, and informal trade. In contrast, Nigeria's regional integration strategy, while flawed, promotes a more inclusive and developmental approach to migration.

Thus, the legal and institutional frameworks governing migration in Nigeria and South Africa reflect their broader policy orientations. Nigeria's approach is regionally integrated, diaspora-focused, and voluntary in its repatriation efforts, whereas South Africa's approach is security-driven, exclusionary, and often coercive in deportation measures. Both countries, however, face governance challenges Nigeria struggles with enforcement and border control, while South Africa grapples with bureaucratic inefficiencies and xenophobic tensions[20]. For a more balanced and effective migration policy, Nigeria needs to strengthen its implementation mechanisms, enhance reintegration programs, and address irregular migration through job creation strategies. South Africa, in turn, must adopt a less restrictive migration policy, integrate regional cooperation within SADC, and develop structured diaspora engagement programs to harness the economic potential of migration.

Repatriation Policies in Nigeria and South Africa:

The research findings indicate that repatriation policies in both Nigeria and South Africa are primarily reactive rather than strategic. Nigeria has engaged in various repatriation exercises, particularly in response to crises involving stranded citizens abroad. A notable example is the government's intervention in the repatriation of Nigerian migrants from Libya, a process largely facilitated through collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Reports from the IOM reveal that over 17,000 Nigerians were repatriated from Libya between 2017 and 2022, following revelations of severe human rights abuses, including forced labour and slavery in detention camps. However, while these repatriation efforts provide temporary relief, they fail to address the structural causes of irregular migration, such as economic instability, unemployment, and insecurity. It is argued that repatriation without a comprehensive reintegration strategy merely recycles the migration problem rather than solving it[21].

In contrast, South Africa's repatriation framework largely revolves around deportation and border enforcement. According to data from South African Home Affairs, between 2018 and 2023, the government deported over 300,000 irregular migrants, primarily from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Nigeria. Scholars contend that South Africa's deportation-heavy approach does not effectively deter irregular migration but instead exacerbates tensions between migrants and local communities. Moreover, reports from Human Rights Watch indicate that repatriation processes in South Africa are often characterized by human rights violations, including arbitrary detentions and the mistreatment of migrants in deportation facilities.

Repatriation Policies: Reactive vs. Strategic Approaches

A key observation from the findings is that repatriation policies in Nigeria and South Africa are largely reactive rather than proactive. In Nigeria, repatriation efforts primarily arise in response to crises, as seen in the government's intervention in returning stranded Nigerian migrants from

Libya. This aligns with Push-Pull Theory, which suggests that economic hardship, insecurity, and political instability in Nigeria serve as primary push factors driving emigration. The response of repatriating citizens, however, fails to address these push factors, leading to recurrent cycles of irregular migration.

In contrast, South Africa's repatriation approach is largely deportation-driven, with mass removals of undocumented migrants. The comparative analysis reveals that this method does not effectively curb irregular migration, as deported individuals often return due to economic disparities between South Africa and neighboring countries, particularly Zimbabwe and Mozambique. World Systems Theory helps explain this trend by emphasizing how South Africa's more developed economy acts as a magnet for migrants from less-developed African states. Scholars argue that deportation strategies do not tackle the structural inequalities that fuel migration flows. Instead, they reinforce cycles of migration, often through more dangerous and informal channels.

Regular Migration Policies in Nigeria and South Africa:

Another key finding of the study is that regular migration policies in both Nigeria and South Africa remain constrained by bureaucratic inefficiencies, political considerations, and weak regional coordination. Nigeria has implemented various initiatives to promote legal migration channels, including the establishment of the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI) and bilateral labour migration agreements with countries in Europe and the Middle East. Despite these efforts, however, scholars argue that Nigeria's regular migration framework is hampered by corruption, slow administrative processes, and limited awareness among potential migrants[22].

In South Africa, the research findings indicate that regular migration policies are highly politicized, with shifting legislative frameworks that often prioritize border security over human rights considerations. The country's immigration system has undergone multiple reforms, including the tightening of visa requirements for skilled workers and asylum seekers. Scholars emphasize that South Africa's migration policies are inconsistent, driven more by domestic political pressures than by long-term migration management strategies. Additionally, findings from the Scalabrini Institute for Human Mobility in Africa (SIHMA) suggest that the country's visa system remains exclusionary, making it difficult for many migrants to transition from irregular to regular migration status.

Regular Migration Policies: Bureaucratic Inefficiencies and Political Considerations

Regular migration remains a challenge in both Nigeria and South Africa due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, inconsistent policies, and political considerations. Nigeria has sought to create legal pathways for migration, particularly through bilateral labour migration agreements with Europe and the Middle East. However, empirical data suggest that these agreements remain underutilized due to limited public awareness, administrative bottlenecks, and corruption. When regular migration pathways are inaccessible due to systemic inefficiencies, migrants are more likely to pursue irregular routes, despite associated risks[23]. From the perspective of Push-Pull Theory, these systematic inefficiencies act as push factors that discourage migrants from engaging with migration channels. At the same time, the promise of better employment opportunities and stability abroad serves as strong pull factors, motivating migrants to seek alternatives, often through irregular routes.

South Africa, on the other hand, maintains a restrictive approach to legal migration, particularly through its visa policies and tightened border controls. The country has repeatedly revised its immigration laws, often in response to domestic political pressures rather than long-term migration planning. The findings suggest that South Africa's policies favor skilled labour migration while imposing strict regulations on low-skilled migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) Theory is relevant here, as it emphasizes how migration decisions are often household strategies rather than individual choices. Many migrants seek to diversify household income sources by accessing better labour markets, yet restrictive policies in South Africa create structural barriers that limit these opportunities.

Impact of Repatriation and Regular Migration Policies

The impact of repatriation and regular migration policies between Nigeria and South Africa is a subject of increasing academic and policy interest. These policies influence migration patterns, socio-economic conditions, diplomatic relations, and human rights issues affecting migrants. Scholars have extensively analysed how migration policies shape the experiences of migrants and their home and host countries. While repatriation policies often emphasize the return of undocumented migrants, regular migration policies aim to create structured pathways for legal migration. The effectiveness of these policies depends on their implementation, alignment with international human rights standards, and responsiveness to socio-economic realities[24].

One of the most significant impacts of repatriation policies is the forced return of Nigerian migrants from South Africa. Studies indicate that South Africa's tightening immigration policies, combined with periodic crackdowns on irregular migrants, have led to large-scale deportations of Nigerians. The South African Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has consistently implemented stringent repatriation measures, citing concerns over illegal migration, crime, and overstaying of visas. Reports from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) confirm that thousands of Nigerians have been repatriated from South

Africa in recent years, often under conditions that raise concerns about human rights violations. Forced repatriation disrupts lives, separates families, and creates socio-economic hardships for returnees who may have spent years building livelihoods abroad.

Regular migration policies, on the other hand, aim to facilitate legal migration through visas, work permits, and residency programs. South Africa has historically had a complex and often restrictive migration policy, with frequent changes in visa regulations affecting Nigerian migrants. The introduction of stricter work permit requirements, business visa limitations, and extended processing times has made it increasingly difficult for skilled and semi-skilled Nigerian migrants to regularize their stay in South Africa. However, scholars argue that regular migration policies, when effectively implemented, can enhance bilateral economic relations by allowing skilled professionals and entrepreneurs to contribute to both economies. Nigerian migrants, particularly in sectors such as information technology, academia, and entertainment, have significantly contributed to South Africa's economic landscape despite facing regulatory hurdles[25].

The impact of these policies is also evident in the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa. Tensions have occasionally arisen due to perceived unfair treatment of Nigerian migrants. For instance, the mass deportation of Nigerians in 2012 over alleged invalid yellow fever vaccination certificates led to a diplomatic standoff between the two countries. Similarly, South Africa's xenophobic attacks, often accompanied by calls for stricter migration controls, have strained relations. Scholars argue that while migration policies are necessary for state security and economic stability, their implementation must be guided by principles of fairness, non-discrimination, and respect for human rights to avoid diplomatic tensions.

Repatriation cannot be separated from human rights, since the decision to return people to their countries of origin inevitably tests how far states are willing to uphold principles of safety, fairness, and respect for human life. International standards emphasize that repatriation must be voluntary, safe, and dignified, yet in practice, states often fall short. While Nigeria struggles with the challenge of reintegrating its citizens who return from migration, South Africa faces an even deeper ethical crisis: xenophobia.

Xenophobia in South Africa has become a structural barrier to the fair treatment of migrants and foreigners[15]. It manifests not only in sporadic violence but also in policies and practices that implicitly tolerate hostility toward non-citizens. This creates a gap between the legal frameworks that exist on paper and the lived realities of migrants. The consequence is that repatriation, which should uphold human rights standards, is often undermined by discriminatory attitudes and institutional failures.

By contrast, Nigeria's migration policies are less defined by xenophobia but more by economic and institutional limitations. The challenge lies in designing effective reintegration programs for returning migrants, many of whom face unemployment, stigmatization, or the prospect of re-migration. Unlike South Africa, Nigeria's human rights concerns in repatriation are not about hostility from the host community but about the state's capacity to protect returnees and guarantee their welfare.

An ethical approach provides a valuable lens for comparison. He emphasizes that the treatment of migrants must be grounded in respect for human dignity and justice, values that should underpin all migration policies[15]. Applied comparatively, this means that South Africa must confront xenophobia as a violation of migrants' basic rights, while Nigeria must reorient its repatriation policies to ensure that returnees are not marginalized upon reintegration. Both cases highlight the tension between state sovereignty in managing migration and the universal human rights obligations that demand fairness, non-discrimination, and dignity for all individuals.

From a human rights perspective, repatriation policies often raise ethical and legal concerns International law, particularly under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, emphasizes the need for humane treatment of migrants. Studies by Okeke and Mutanda indicate that some repatriation processes have involved arbitrary detentions, lack of due process, and even physical abuse. Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have documented cases where Nigerian migrants in South Africa faced inhumane detention conditions before deportation. These reports highlight the need for migration policies that uphold international legal standards while addressing domestic concerns.

Despite the challenges, regular migration policies also offer opportunities for enhanced cooperation between Nigeria and South Africa. Scholars advocate for bilateral migration agreements that facilitate skills exchange, business investments, and cultural cooperation. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) presents an opportunity for both countries to revise their migration policies in a way that promotes economic integration while ensuring orderly migration. Furthermore, diaspora remittances from Nigerian migrants in South Africa contribute significantly to Nigeria's economy, emphasizing the economic benefits of well-structured migration policies[26].

Thus, repatriation and regular migration policies have profound impacts on migrants, diplomatic relations, and economic opportunities. While repatriation policies often lead to forced returns with significant socio-economic and human rights implications, regular migration policies, when effectively managed, can enhance economic development and bilateral cooperation. The challenge remains in striking a balance between national security interests and the protection of migrant rights. Effective policy reforms, grounded in international best practices, are necessary to ensure that migration between Nigeria and South Africa is both sustainable and mutually beneficial.

Challenges and Opportunities in Policy Implementation

The implementation of repatriation and regular migration policies between Nigeria and South Africa presents a complex landscape characterized by both significant challenges and opportunities. While migration policies are intended to regulate movement, enhance security, and promote economic stability, their execution is often fraught with administrative, legal, political, and socio-economic difficulties. Scholars have highlighted the barriers to effective policy implementation, including weak institutional capacity, inconsistent enforcement, human rights concerns, and diplomatic tensions. However, opportunities exist for both countries to develop more structured, humane, and economically beneficial migration frameworks through regional cooperation and policy reforms[27].

One of the foremost challenges in migration policy implementation is weak institutional capacity and administrative inefficiencies. Studies indicate that South Africa's Department of Home Affairs (DHA) faces chronic backlogs in processing visa and asylum applications, leading to delays, frustration, and an increase in undocumented migrants. Nigerian migrants seeking work permits, business visas, or asylum status often encounter bureaucratic obstacles that hinder legal migration channels. Similarly, Nigeria's immigration enforcement agencies, including the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), struggle with inadequate resources, corruption, and inconsistent application of repatriation agreements. This institutional weakness creates a scenario where migration policies, despite their legal frameworks, are not effectively enforced, resulting in irregular migration and tensions between migrants and authorities[29].

Another significant challenge is inconsistent and politically driven policy enforcement. Research shows that South Africa's migration policies have been subject to frequent changes based on shifting political climates. During periods of economic downturn or heightened xenophobic sentiments, the South African government has tightened migration laws and intensified repatriation efforts. The periodic nature of these crackdowns has led to uncertainty for Nigerian migrants, who often find themselves caught between changing legal requirements and enforcement strategies. Similarly, Nigeria's approach to dealing with repatriated citizens has been inconsistent, with returnees often facing economic hardships, inadequate reintegration programs, and limited government support.

Human rights concern and xenophobia further complicate migration policy implementation. Scholars have extensively documented the rise of xenophobic violence in South Africa, which disproportionately affects Nigerian migrants. Xenophobic attacks have led to looting, displacement, and loss of life, exacerbating diplomatic tensions between the two countries. The South African government's response to these attacks has been widely criticized for being inadequate, with law enforcement agencies often failing to hold perpetrators accountable. Repatriation processes have also been flagged for violating international human rights norms, with reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch documenting cases of arbitrary detention, poor detention conditions, and lack of due process for Nigerian migrants. The challenge, therefore, is to ensure that migration policies align with human rights standards and do not fuel discrimination or violence.

Another major hurdle is the economic impact of restrictive migration policies. Scholars argue that while restrictive migration policies aim to control labour markets and national security, they often have unintended economic consequences. Nigerian migrants, particularly in the business, technology, and entertainment sectors, contribute significantly to South Africa's economy. Policies that make it difficult for Nigerian entrepreneurs and skilled workers to regularize their status ultimately hinder economic cooperation between the two countries. Similarly, repatriation policies that result in mass deportations without reintegration strategies burden Nigeria's economy, as returnees struggle to find employment or rebuild their lives[29].

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for improving migration policy implementation. One key opportunity lies in regional cooperation and policy harmonization. Scholars emphasize the role of the African Union (AU) and regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in facilitating structured migration frameworks. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) also presents an opportunity for Nigeria and South Africa to establish bilateral migration agreements that promote labour mobility, trade, and skills exchange while ensuring legal protections for migrants[30]. Another opportunity is the adoption of technology in migration governance. Digital migration management systems, biometric identification, and e-visa platforms can streamline migration processes, reduce administrative delays, and enhance transparency in visa and work permit applications. South Africa and Nigeria can invest in such technologies to improve efficiency and curb corruption within their immigration systems.

Public awareness campaigns and community engagement also offer a pathway to improving migration policy implementation. Scholars argue that migration policies should be accompanied by public education initiatives that address xenophobia, promote social cohesion, and highlight the economic contributions of migrants. Both Nigeria and South Africa can benefit from policies that foster positive narratives around migration rather than framing it as a security threat[31]. Lastly, the establishment of reintegration programs for returnees can mitigate the negative impacts of repatriation policies. Nigeria, in particular, can develop structured reintegration programs that provide financial assistance, vocational training, and employment opportunities for repatriated migrants. This would not only ease the socio-economic burden on returnees but also contribute to national development by reintegrating skilled individuals into the workforce[32].

While the implementation of repatriation and regular migration policies between Nigeria and South Africa faces significant challenges, including weak institutional capacity, inconsistent enforcement, human rights concerns, and economic implications, there are notable opportunities for improvement. Regional cooperation, technological advancements, public awareness initiatives, and reintegration programs can enhance migration governance, ensuring that policies are both effective and humane. Strengthening bilateral and regional frameworks will be crucial in balancing migration control with economic and human rights considerations, ultimately fostering a more structured and mutually beneficial migration relationship between Nigeria and South Africa.

To provide a clearer understanding of the similarities and differences in how Nigeria and South Africa address migration, the table below presents a comparative summary of their major migration policies, objectives, and institutional frameworks. It highlights key areas such as legal structures, policy priorities, implementation strategies, and alignment with continental and international migration frameworks. This comparison helps to illustrate how each country's approach reflects its national realities while also revealing areas of convergence and divergence in policy direction.

Table 4.1 Comparative Analysis of Migration Policies in Nigeria and South Africa

Category			
Key Legal Frameworks	Nigeria	South Africa	Comparative Observation
Main Institutions	Immigration Act 2015; National Migration Policy 2019	Immigration Act 2002 (amended); Refugees Act 1998	Both have modern laws, but South Africa's is more enforcement-focused, Nigeria's more developmental.
Policy Focus	NIDCOM, Ministry of Interior, Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS)	Department of Home Affairs (DHA), Refugee Appeals Authority	South Africa's institutions are better structured but face xenophobia-driven constraints; Nigeria's institutions lack coordination.
Implementation Challenges	Managing emigration, returnee reintegration, diaspora engagement	Border control, asylum regulation, and labour migration	Nigeria focuses on repatriation; South Africa emphasizes restriction and security.

Socio-Economic Impacts	Weak coordination, limited funding, brain drain	Xenophobia, administrative bottlenecks, political pressure	Both suffer from governance gaps and inconsistent policy enforcement.
Regional Alignment	Loss of skilled labour, remittances sustain households	Labour shortages in some sectors, social tension	Migration impacts both economies differently brain drain in Nigeria, xenophobia in South Africa.
Human Rights Concerns	Active in ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol	Active in SADC Migration Policy Framework	Both participate in regional protocols but struggle with implementation.
Policy Opportunities	Weak reintegration support for returnees	Detention and deportation practices questioned	Rights-based governance is weak in both contexts but more visible in South Africa's legal discourse.
	Diaspora investment schemes, skills transfer programs	Labour migration reforms, anti-xenophobia campaigns	Both can benefit from harmonizing regional migration standards and promoting intra-African mobility.

***Source:* Compiled by the researcher from secondary data based on AU (2018), ECOWAS (2020), SADC (2013), IOM (2022), NIDCOM (2021), and DHA (2023).**

The comparison shows that both Nigeria and South Africa have made progress in developing migration policies, but their focus and effectiveness vary. Nigeria's policies emphasize emigration management and diaspora engagement, while South Africa's concentrate more on immigration control, documentation, and integration. These differences reflect their distinct migration dynamics, Nigeria as a migrant-sending country and South Africa as a major migrant-receiving country. Overall, the analysis highlights the importance of harmonizing national efforts with continental migration goals to ensure more coordinated, inclusive, and sustainable migration governance across Africa.

4.1.3 Pan-African Approaches to Migration Governance

The findings underscore the necessity for a Pan-African approach to migration governance, as neither repatriation nor restrictive regular migration policies alone have proven effective in addressing the continent's migration crisis. Nigeria and South Africa, as regional leaders, must adopt strategies aligned with the African Union's Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA). However, the study finds that implementation of AU migration frameworks remains inconsistent due to lack of political will, inadequate financial resources, and weak intergovernmental collaboration[33].

For instance, Nigeria has signed onto various continental migration agreements, yet its engagement remains fragmented, with significant discrepancies between policy formulation and practical implementation. Similarly, while South Africa plays an active role in regional migration discussions, particularly through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) framework, domestic migration policies remain restrictive. Scholars argue that unless African countries embrace collective migration governance mechanisms, unilateral policy approaches will continue to be ineffective.

Pan-African Migration Governance: Implementation Gaps

Despite both Nigeria and South Africa being signatories to African Union migration frameworks, implementation remains inconsistent. Nigeria has been committed to multiple AU migration initiatives; however domestic execution remains fragmented. Similarly, South Africa actively participates in SADC migration discussions but prioritizes domestic migration laws over regional commitments. This finding supports the argument made by scholars who assert that regional migration governance in Africa is hampered by national self-interest, weak institutional capacity, and inadequate funding for continental migration frameworks[34].

Comparatively, Nigeria's engagement in AU migration policies appears more diplomatic and passive, focusing on formal agreements with international organisations. South Africa, however, has a more aggressive stance, shaping its migration policies based on national security concerns and economic interests. While Nigeria's challenge lies in implementation and follow-through, South Africa's challenge stems from balancing regional integration with domestic political realities.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal critical insights into the dynamics of migration governance in Nigeria and South Africa, exposing key weaknesses in repatriation policies, legal migration pathways, regional cooperation, and the socio-economic drivers of migration. This section provides an extensive analysis of these findings, critically engaging with existing scholarly debates, theoretical perspectives, and practical policy implications.

4.2.1 The Shortcomings of Repatriation Policies: A Reactive, Ineffective Approach

Repatriation policies in both Nigeria and South Africa have historically been reactive, poorly coordinated, and ineffective in addressing the root causes of migration. While Nigeria focuses on voluntary return programs, South Africa relies heavily on forced deportations. Neither approach has successfully reduced irregular migration, as both fail to integrate reintegration strategies or address the underlying socio-economic drivers that compel individuals to migrate.

Nigeria's voluntary repatriation approach is largely humanitarian, emphasizing the return of its nationals stranded abroad, often in collaboration with international organisations such as the International Organization for Migration, the European Union, and the Nigerian National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons. Over the years, thousands of Nigerians have been repatriated from Libya, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, most of whom had embarked on irregular migration through unauthorized routes. Nigeria's repatriation efforts increased significantly following international outcry over the mistreatment of Nigerian migrants in Libya, where reports surfaced of extreme abuse and modern-day slavery. However, these efforts have been largely symbolic, as they do not address the factors that initially pushed these individuals to migrate. The major weaknesses of Nigeria's repatriation policies include a lack of sustainable reintegration programs, weak inter-governmental coordination, and an over-reliance on international funding. There are arguments that the absence of structured reintegration support renders these repatriation programs ineffective, as returnees often struggle with unemployment and financial instability, leading many to reattempt migration. Additionally, the poor coordination among government agencies results in logistical failures, lack of proper tracking of returnees, and inadequate post-return support.

The fact that these repatriation efforts are largely funded by external organisations, particularly the European Union and the International Organization for Migration, raises concerns about their sustainability[35].

In contrast, South Africa's repatriation strategy is largely coercive, with a primary focus on forced deportations of undocumented migrants. The government justifies these deportations on grounds of national security and economic protectionism, claiming that irregular migrants burden social services and contribute to crime. However, empirical studies demonstrate that forced deportations have failed to deter migration into South Africa and have, in some cases, worsened diplomatic relations with neighboring countries. Over the years, South Africa has deported hundreds of thousands of migrants, primarily from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Nigeria, with the Department of Home Affairs conducting frequent immigration raids that lead to the mass detention and removal of undocumented migrants. Scholars argue that deportation has not significantly reduced migration flows, as migrants often return through alternative routes, demonstrating the ineffectiveness of this approach. They emphasize that the country's deportation policies are often politically motivated, as anti-migrant rhetoric is frequently used by politicians to gain public support, especially during economic downturns. Reports from Human Rights Watch reveal that migrants held in South African detention centres often endure prolonged periods of detention without due process, and in some cases, face human rights abuses and xenophobic violence at the hands of law enforcement officials.

Despite their differences, the repatriation policies of both Nigeria and South Africa share fundamental weaknesses. In both countries, repatriation fails to address the root causes of migration, as economic hardship, insecurity, and lack of viable opportunities continue to push individuals to seek better prospects abroad. Repatriation remains an emergency response rather than a component of a comprehensive migration policy, and without structured post-return support, it merely perpetuates a cycle of irregular migration. Additionally, migration governance in both countries is heavily influenced by political considerations rather than empirical evidence, with Nigeria's voluntary return framed as a diplomatic success and South Africa's deportation policies used to appease nationalist sentiments. These findings indicate that repatriation, whether voluntary or forced, cannot serve as a sustainable migration management strategy unless accompanied by policies that support reintegration, provide legal migration alternatives, and address the economic drivers of migration. While Nigeria's approach appears more humane compared to South Africa's, both ultimately fail to offer a durable solution to irregular migration[36].

4.2.2 Bureaucratic and Political Barriers to Regular Migration Pathways

The bureaucratic and political barriers to regular migration pathways in Nigeria and South Africa present significant obstacles to legal migration, worsening irregular migration patterns. Both countries have migration policies that are ostensibly designed to facilitate orderly movement, but in practice, excessive bureaucracy, inconsistent enforcement, and politically motivated restrictions limit access to regular migration channels. These barriers not only frustrate prospective migrants but also contribute to the proliferation of irregular migration routes and the exploitation of migrants by traffickers and corrupt officials[37].

In Nigeria, obtaining legal migration documentation is often a protracted and costly process, marked by inefficiencies, corruption, and arbitrary delays. The issuance of passports, visas, and work permits is fraught with systemic corruption, with many applicants forced to pay bribes to expedite processing. The bureaucratic inefficiencies within the Nigerian Immigration Service make it difficult for many citizens to obtain legal travel documents, leading some to seek alternative, often illegal, routes to migrate. The situation is further complicated by stringent visa requirements imposed by foreign countries, particularly Western nations, which make it nearly impossible for many Nigerians to migrate through regular channels. European and North American visa policies toward Nigerians are restrictive, often requiring extensive financial proof and sponsorship that the average applicant cannot meet. This has contributed to an increase in irregular migration, as individuals resort to unauthorized means to bypass these bureaucratic hurdles.

Additionally, political instability and diplomatic tensions have influenced Nigeria's migration governance. Certain foreign countries have imposed stringent travel restrictions on Nigerian nationals due to concerns about irregular migration, fraud, and security threats. For example, in 2020, the United States placed Nigeria on a travel ban list, citing concerns over security vetting procedures. Although the ban was later lifted, its impact on migration policies remains significant, as it reinforced existing stereotypes about Nigerian migrants and influenced other countries to adopt similarly restrictive measures. Such policies, rather than curbing irregular migration, often push migrants toward more dangerous routes, including human smuggling networks and forged travel documents[38].

In South Africa, migration bureaucracy is equally complex, particularly for African migrants seeking legal residency or work permits. The country has a long history of imposing restrictive immigration policies, often justified on economic and security grounds. The Department of Home Affairs, responsible for processing migration applications, is notorious for its inefficiencies, lengthy processing times, and frequent policy shifts. South Africa's visa and work permit system is highly exclusionary, with preference given to highly skilled migrants while low-skilled workers from neighboring countries face significant obstacles. Many African migrants, particularly those from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Nigeria, report experiencing xenophobic discrimination in the migration process, with officials deliberately stalling their applications or rejecting them without justification[39].

Furthermore, South Africa's migration policies have become increasingly politicized, with migration often used as a scapegoat for economic challenges. During periods of economic downturn, the government has implemented restrictive policies, such as terminating special permit programs for Zimbabwean migrants and tightening visa requirements for asylum seekers. Such policies have forced many migrants into irregularity, as they are unable to renew their legal status due to shifting bureaucratic requirements. The inefficiencies in the asylum-seeking process further exacerbate this issue, with many refugees waiting years for their applications to be processed. According to Human Rights Watch, South Africa's asylum system is one of the most backlogged in the world, with thousands of applications pending due to administrative failures and deliberate obstruction. This situation has led to increased vulnerability among migrants, who, unable to access legal migration pathways, become susceptible to exploitation by employers, traffickers, and corrupt officials[40].

Despite the differences in their migration contexts, both Nigeria and South Africa share common bureaucratic and political barriers that obstruct regular migration. In both countries, inefficient migration governance, corruption, and politically motivated restrictions push migrants toward irregular routes, undermining the objectives of structured migration policies. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive reform, including digitization of migration processes, reduction of bureaucratic red tape, and depoliticization of migration policy. Additionally, stronger bilateral and multilateral agreements between African states could facilitate regular migration pathways, reducing dependence on irregular means of mobility. Without such reforms, the existing bureaucratic and political barriers will continue to undermine legal migration and exacerbate irregular migration flows.

4.2.3 Labour Market Dynamics and Employment Opportunities for Migrants

Labour market dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the migration landscape, as employment opportunities, or the lack thereof, serve as key determinants of migrant movement and integration. In Nigeria and South Africa, labour market conditions significantly influence the success or failure of repatriation and regular migration policies. South African labour market is characterised by high unemployment rates, which worsened xenophobic sentiments and create barriers to migrant employment. Similarly, Nigeria's labour market struggles with underemployment and an overwhelming informal sector, making it difficult for returnees and migrants to secure stable and decent jobs[41].

Economic migration is often driven by the perceived availability of employment opportunities abroad, and when repatriation policies do not align with realistic labour market conditions, reintegration becomes challenging. The structural challenges in the African labour market, including skill mismatches and informal employment, hinder the effectiveness of regular migration policies. Migrants who return to their home countries frequently struggle to find jobs due to a lack of support systems that facilitate reintegration into the workforce. This issue is particularly evident in Nigeria, where returning migrants often lack access to vocational training or entrepreneurship support.

Furthermore, the demand for migrant labour varies across industries, with some sectors relying heavily on foreign workers while others remain resistant to their inclusion. In South Africa, the agricultural and domestic work sectors depend significantly on migrant labour, whereas formal employment sectors often impose strict work permit regulations that exclude migrants. Nigeria presents a similar scenario, where industries such as construction and transportation informally integrate migrant workers without legal protections, making them vulnerable to exploitation, as noted by IOM reports[42]. To improve the impact of regular migration policies, scholars suggest that labour market policies must be aligned with migration frameworks. Governments must establish mechanisms that facilitate the legal employment of migrants and returnees, ensuring that repatriation does not lead to economic disenfranchisement. In both Nigeria and South Africa, skill accreditation programs, vocational training, and economic incentives for businesses to hire returnees can play a vital role in enhancing the sustainability of regular migration pathways.

4.2.4 Regional Cooperation and Multilateral Approaches to Migration Governance

The role of remittances in migration dynamics is a critical factor in understanding the economic implications of repatriation and regular migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa. Remittances, which refer to financial transfers made by migrants to their home countries, play a significant role in sustaining households, funding education, and stimulating local economies. Remittances constitute a major source of foreign exchange for many African nations, often surpassing foreign direct investments and official development assistance. In Nigeria, remittance inflows are among the highest in Africa, with the World Bank reporting an inflow of approximately $20 billion in 2022, accounting for a significant portion of the country's GDP. Similarly, South Africa, as a major destination for migrants from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, also experiences substantial remittance outflows, with migrants sending earnings back to their home countries, particularly Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Lesotho[43].

The economic significance of remittances extends beyond household consumption, as scholars argue that these financial flows contribute to poverty reduction and increased access to healthcare and education. However, the impact of remittances on national economies is not entirely positive, as excessive dependence on them may discourage productive economic activities. In Nigeria, while remittances help cushion economic hardships, they do not necessarily translate into long-term investments in industries that create employment opportunities. This presents a paradox where migration provides immediate economic relief through remittances but does not necessarily contribute to sustainable development.

In the context of repatriation and regular migration policies, remittance patterns influence the willingness of migrants to return to their home countries. Return migrants often rely on remittances to establish businesses or reintegrate into society. However, restrictive migration policies that limit the ability to work legally in host countries can disrupt remittance flows and hinder the financial stability of migrant households. In South Africa, the introduction of stricter immigration controls has made it more difficult for undocumented migrants to access formal employment, thereby reducing their capacity to send remittances. Similarly, Nigeria's lack of structured reintegration programs for returnees means that repatriated individuals often struggle to generate income, leading to a cycle of re-migration in search of better opportunities[44].

To maximize the benefits of remittances in regular migration policies, scholars such as Clemens and McKenzie advocate for financial inclusion measures that enable migrants and returnees to channel their earnings into productive investments. Policies such as tax incentives for diaspora investments, improved banking access for migrants, and financial literacy programs for returnees could enhance the developmental impact of remittances. Furthermore, fostering partnerships between governments and the private sector to create job opportunities for returnees could reduce the reliance on remittances as a sole economic lifeline.

4.2.5 Diaspora Engagement and Its Role in Migration Policies and National Development

The role of diaspora engagement in shaping migration policies and national development has gained prominence in academic and policy discussions, particularly in relation to Nigeria and South Africa. Diaspora communities are often regarded as strategic assets for their home countries, contributing not only through remittances but also via investments, knowledge transfer, and advocacy for policy changes. Diaspora engagement policies are increasingly being institutionalized as governments recognize the potential of their nationals abroad in driving development. In Nigeria, for example, the establishment of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) is a testament to the government's efforts to harness diaspora resources for national development. South Africa, despite its significant migrant population, has a less formalized diaspora engagement strategy, although various initiatives have been launched to integrate its expatriate population into economic and social development efforts[45].

Scholars argue that successful diaspora engagement requires a structured approach, including policies that encourage investment, participation in governance, and skills transfer. Nigeria's diaspora investment initiatives, such as the Diaspora Bond launched by the government in 2017, demonstrate an effort to mobilize external financial contributions. However, critics point out that systemic challenges, including corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak institutional frameworks, have hindered the effectiveness of these programs. Similarly, South Africa has struggled with harnessing its diaspora potential due to political tensions and concerns about xenophobia, which often affect the willingness of expatriates to engage with homeland policies[46].

Beyond financial contributions, diaspora communities play a crucial role in shaping migration policies through advocacy and lobbying efforts. Studies indicate that politically active diasporas can influence host and home country policies, particularly in areas related to human rights, migration governance, and development aid. Nigerian and South African diasporas in the United States, United Kingdom, and other Western nations have been instrumental in advocating for policies that favor regular migration pathways and improved treatment of migrants. For instance, Nigerian diaspora organisations have consistently pushed for better consular services and legal protections for their compatriots abroad.

One of the key challenges of diaspora engagement is the divergence in interests between governments and expatriate communities. While governments may prioritize financial remittances and investments, diasporas often seek political inclusion, dual citizenship rights, and greater participation in decision-making processes. Nigeria has made some strides in this regard, with discussions on diaspora voting rights gaining momentum in recent years. South Africa, however, remains restrictive in granting voting rights to its citizens abroad, limiting their political engagement with homeland affairs.

To maximize the benefits of diaspora engagement in migration governance, scholars recommend policies that go beyond remittance-driven approaches. This includes creating formal diaspora institutions with clear mandates, fostering public-private partnerships for diaspora-led development projects, and addressing structural barriers such as excessive bureaucracy and political instability that deter expatriates from investing in their home countries. Strengthening diplomatic ties and providing better consular services to support migrants abroad can also enhance the role of diaspora communities in shaping migration policies and national development.

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Chapter Five

Conclusions

5.1 Summary of Finding

The comparative study of Migration Policies in Nigeria and South Africa, has provided significant insights into the complexities of migration governance, the socio-economic implications of repatriation, and the role of regional frameworks in addressing migration challenges. Through a comparative analysis of the migration policies of both countries, as well as an exploration of relevant theoretical perspectives and empirical data, several key findings have emerged.

First, the study has demonstrated that migration between Nigeria and South Africa is driven by a combination of economic, political, and socio-cultural factors. Drawing from the Push-Pull Theory of Migration and the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) Theory, the study found that migration patterns between Nigeria and South Africa are largely influenced by a mix of economic, social, and policy factors. In Nigeria, persistent unemployment, insecurity, and limited livelihood opportunities continue to push citizens to seek better living conditions abroad. South Africa, despite facing its own economic and political challenges, remains a major destination because of its relatively stable labour market, industrial capacity, and perceived opportunities for upward mobility.

The findings also align with the NELM perspective, which emphasizes that migration is often a collective household strategy rather than a purely individual decision. Many Nigerian families view migration as a means to diversify income, secure remittances, and improve their socio-economic standing. This dynamic highlight migration as both a coping mechanism and a development strategy at the microeconomic level.

However, the study also revealed that South Africa's increasingly restrictive immigration policies including tightened visa regimes and selective labour admissions have created significant barriers for migrants. These restrictions, coupled with rising incidents of xenophobia and socio-political tensions, have led to forced repatriations and strained relations between citizens and foreign nationals. Overall, the findings underscore the complex interplay between economic necessity, social networks, and policy frameworks shaping migration flows within Africa.

Second, the findings underscore the fact that repatriation policies in both Nigeria and South Africa are often reactive and politically driven rather than structured and development-oriented. South Africa's deportation policies have been marked by periodic crackdowns on undocumented migrants, driven by political pressures, economic downturns, and rising xenophobic sentiments. Studies reveal that repatriation is frequently executed without due process, leading to human rights violations, detention without trial, and forced removals that fail to consider the economic and social contributions of migrants. Similarly, Nigeria's approach to repatriated citizens remains inadequate, with limited reintegration programs that address the economic and psychological effects of forced return. Another significant finding relates to the legal and institutional weaknesses in migration governance. While both Nigeria and South Africa have legal frameworks that govern migration, enforcement remains inconsistent due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and lack of inter-agency coordination. The study found that despite South Africa's relatively advanced immigration system, the implementation of policies often suffers from delays, arbitrary decisions, and discriminatory practices that disproportionately affect African migrants, particularly Nigerians. In Nigeria, migration governance is further weakened by a lack of coherent policies to engage with returnees, resulting in social and economic difficulties for deported individuals.

The study also highlights the economic implications of migration policies on both countries. South Africa's restrictive migration laws, while intended to protect local employment, have had unintended consequences, including labour shortages in certain sectors, disruptions in the informal economy, and reduced foreign investment from migrant entrepreneurs. Nigerian migrants, particularly those involved in business and skilled professions, contribute significantly to South Africa's economy, and their forced removal often leads to economic losses. Conversely, Nigeria faces a major challenge with brain drain, as highly skilled professionals in sectors such as medicine, engineering, and technology seek better opportunities abroad, leading to a loss of human capital and slowed national development.

Moreover, the study finds that xenophobia remains a critical barrier to successful migration governance and regional integration. South Africa has witnessed repeated outbreaks of xenophobic violence, targeting Nigerian and other African migrants under the perception that they are taking local jobs and engaging in criminal activities. Research demonstrates that these xenophobic attitudes are not only fueled by economic insecurities but are also reinforced by political rhetoric and weak law enforcement. The failure to address xenophobia systematically has exacerbated diplomatic tensions between Nigeria and South Africa, undermining efforts at regional cooperation. Despite these challenges, the study identifies several opportunities for improving migration governance. One of the key opportunities lies in regional cooperation through frameworks such as the African Union's Migration Policy Framework for Africa, ECOWAS, and SADC agreements. These regional bodies provide platforms for policy harmonization, labour mobility agreements, and diplomatic engagement to resolve migration disputes. Additionally, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) presents an avenue for structured migration policies that promote economic integration and skill-sharing between African nations.

Another opportunity for improving migration management is the adoption of technology in migration governance. Digital visa systems, biometric identification, and automated migration monitoring tools can enhance transparency, reduce corruption, and streamline migration processes. Nigeria and South Africa can also benefit from public awareness campaigns that educate citizens on the economic benefits of migration, counter xenophobic narratives, and promote social cohesion.

Lastly, the study finds that sustainable repatriation and reintegration programs are essential for managing migration effectively. Nigeria must develop structured reintegration policies that provide returnees with vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and mental health services to facilitate their reintegration into society. South Africa, on the other hand, must adopt more humane repatriation policies that respect international human rights standards and provide legal pathways for skilled migration.

The findings of this study emphasize that while migration challenges between Nigeria and South Africa are deeply rooted in economic, political, and historical factors, there are viable solutions that can be explored through regional cooperation, policy harmonization, and sustainable migration governance. Addressing institutional weaknesses, reducing xenophobia, and leveraging migration for economic development will be crucial in ensuring that both countries can benefit from structured migration policies that align with Pan-African development goals.

5.2 Conclusion

The comparative study of migration policies in Nigeria and South Africa between 2014 and 2024 reveals the complex, multi-layered nature of migration governance in Africa. Both countries, though operating under distinct socio-economic and political contexts, reflect the tensions that exist between national interests, regional commitments, and continental aspirations for a more integrated Pan-African migration system. In Nigeria, the persistent challenge of brain drain highlights the structural weaknesses of domestic labour markets, governance systems, and institutional capacity. Despite numerous diaspora engagement initiatives and policy attempts to harness remittances, Nigeria's repatriation frameworks remain largely underdeveloped and unsustainable. Skilled professionals often find little incentive to return permanently due to unstable political environments, insufficient infrastructure, and limited economic opportunities. While remittances provide short-term economic relief, they cannot substitute for the long-term developmental benefits of retaining and reintegrating skilled labour. This indicates that without strong repatriation mechanisms supported by economic incentives and governance reforms, Nigeria will continue to struggle with the exodus of human capital.

South Africa, conversely, represents a different reality: as a migrant-receiving hub, it attracts labour migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from across Africa. However, restrictive immigration laws, coupled with poor policy coherence and weak institutional enforcement, have contributed to widespread irregular migration. This has in turn fueled social tensions, xenophobic violence, and perceptions of migrants as competitors for scarce jobs and services. While South Africa has attempted to regulate migration through critical skills lists and policy frameworks, its inability to balance security concerns with rights-based approaches has undermined both social cohesion and economic integration.

At the regional and continental levels, both Nigeria and South Africa exemplify the gap between Pan-African aspirations and national realities. Continental frameworks such as the AU Migration Policy Framework (2018–2030), the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, and the SADC Regional Migration Policy Framework provide normative guidance, but their implementation has been inconsistent and uneven. Nigeria's commitment to ECOWAS free movement stands in contrast to South Africa's reluctance to fully embrace liberalized migration regimes under SADC, reflecting divergent political economies and national security priorities. These divergences undermine the continental push for harmonized migration policies under initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The study therefore concludes that sustainable migration governance in Africa cannot be addressed solely at the national level. Both Nigeria and South Africa demonstrate that unilateral approaches are inadequate in the face of transnational migration flows, regional labour mobility, and shared socio-economic challenges. Instead, effective governance requires a combination of national reforms, regional cooperation, and continental harmonization, underpinned by strong political will and accountability. Finally, the comparative perspective underscores that migration is both a challenge and an opportunity. When poorly managed, it exacerbates brain drain, irregular flows, and social conflict. When effectively governed, however, it can drive economic growth, knowledge transfer, and regional integration. The path forward lies in transforming migration from a source of crisis into a catalyst for Africa's sustainable development.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Understanding and Responding to Migration Trends in Nigeria and South Africa: To effectively respond to the complex trends shaping migration in Nigeria and South Africa, both countries should strengthen their capacity to collect, analyse, and use reliable migration data. Migration statistics are often inconsistent and outdated, making it difficult to understand emerging migration patterns, drivers, and impacts. Establishing a National Migration Data Observatory in each country linked to regional databases such as those of the African Union (AU) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) would enable evidence-based policymaking.

   Furthermore, both governments should partner with universities, research centers, and civil society organisations to conduct continuous studies on migration flows, remittances, brain drain, and return migration. Such collaboration would help identify socioeconomic push and pull factors influencing mobility between the two countries, in line with the Push-Pull and New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theories highlighted in this study.

   Public awareness and education campaigns should also be launched to address misinformation and reduce xenophobic sentiments, especially in South Africa. By showcasing the positive contributions of migrants to economic growth, innovation, and cultural diversity, both nations can foster greater understanding, reduce hostility, and promote regional solidarity.

2. Strengthening and Harmonizing Migration Policies in Nigeria and South Africa: Nigeria and South Africa both have migration frameworks that require improvement in terms of implementation, coordination, and inclusivity.

   For Nigeria, reforms should focus on enhancing the repatriation and reintegration of returnees. The Nigerian government, through agencies such as NIDCOM and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, should create structured programs that provide financial support, entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and reintegration grants. These initiatives would enable returnees to become productive contributors to national development rather than dependents. Policies should also be reviewed to encourage brain gain, offering incentives to skilled Nigerians abroad to return and invest in national projects through diaspora bonds and exchange schemes.

   For South Africa, a rights-based approach is essential to balance national security and human rights. The migration policy framework should be simplified to ensure fair visa and work permit procedures, reduce corruption, and prevent the exploitation of foreign workers. National campaigns promoting social cohesion can help curb xenophobic violence and improve relations between South Africans and other African migrants.

   Both countries should also enhance institutional coordination by establishing an inter-ministerial committee that links immigration services, labour departments, and foreign affairs ministries. This would improve communication, reduce overlapping mandates, and ensure a coherent and consistent approach to migration governance.

3. Developing Sustainable Strategies for Improving Migration Management: To strengthen migration management, Nigeria and South Africa should prioritize regional and continental cooperation within frameworks such as ECOWAS, SADC, and the African Union's Free Movement Protocol. Enhanced cooperation would facilitate safer and more structured migration pathways, reducing irregular migration, human trafficking, and migrant exploitation. Both countries should also engage actively in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)'s labour mobility framework, which promotes the free movement of skilled workers and supports economic integration. This would not only improve employment opportunities but also strengthen intra-African relations and reduce dependency on migration to non-African destinations.

   Additionally, governments should develop bilateral agreements on labour exchange, education, and health cooperation to ensure that migration contributes to shared prosperity rather than brain drain. Investment in digital migration management systems would help track migrants, protect their rights, and improve accountability.

Finally, both Nigeria and South Africa should engage their diaspora communities through structured partnerships for knowledge transfer, innovation, and national development projects. Recognizing the diaspora as a strategic development partner can transform migration from a challenge into an opportunity for sustainable growth.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study adds to existing knowledge by comparing how Nigeria and South Africa manage migration within the wider African context. It shows how the two countries represent different sides of migration Nigeria mainly sends migrants abroad, while South Africa receives many from other African countries. Although Nigeria has expressed commitment to African Union migration goals, it often struggles to apply them consistently at home. By highlighting these differences, the study helps explain how African migration policies work in practice and how national actions affect continental goals, offering a clearer picture of migration governance in Africa. It also underscores the need for stronger coordination between national and regional institutions to ensure that migration policies are effectively implemented. Ultimately, the findings provide useful insights for policymakers seeking to balance national interests with Africa's collective development objectives.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

While this study relied on secondary data, future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining legal and policy analysis with empirical fieldwork, including interviews with policymakers, migrants, and diaspora networks. Further studies could also expand the comparative scope to include Francophone and Lusophone African states, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of migration governance across the continent. Additionally, research could explore the influence of external actors such as the European Union, bilateral migration agreements, and global funding mechanisms on African migration policies, as these significantly shape local implementation outcomes.

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1) E.O. Adesanya (May, 2025): Deportation, Irregular Migration, and Restrictive Policies: Assessing the Human Rights Challenges Faced by Nigerians Abroad (The African Journal of International Affairs and Development, Lead City University Press Ltd. Ibadan)

2) E.O. Adesanya & O. Ojedokun (October 2025): Policy Responses to Brain Drain and Repatriation in Nigeria (NOUN Journal of Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences)

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The University Compliance Certification

This is to certify that the thesis written by Emmanuella Opeyemi ADESANYA with matriculation number LCU/PG/006449, in the Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, is in full compliance with the approved University format and style.

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Signature Date