



Human Capital Flight (Brain Drain) and Academic Staff Job Performance in Selected Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: Enugu State in Perspective

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Abstract: Purpose: The objectives of this study are to identify the drivers of human capital flight among the academic staff in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the impact of human capital flight on academic staff job performance, the extent of the occurrence of human capital flight among the academic staff—to find out the most affected categories of the academic staff embarking on human capital flight (brain drain), and the job perceptions and attitudes of academic staff towards human capital flight. The study also explores the implications of human capital flight on job performance; teaching and learning, and commitment of the academic staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. **Methods:** This is a mixed-method survey research. Therefore, a quantitative field survey that leveraged both primary and secondary data was adopted in the study to descriptively content analyze data to arrive at the findings. **Results and Conclusion:** The poor salaries and other negative conditions of service prevalent in tertiary institutions in Nigeria resulted in the crisis of human capital flight, as the best academic staff emigrate overseas, where there are greener pastures. This, however, impacted negatively on the ranking, research outputs, innovations, quality of teaching and learning, and the job performance of the remaining academic staff in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. **Implications:** This study raises the alarm for urgent policy action to stop the human capital flight and revamp public tertiary institutions in Nigeria to guarantee quality education of the citizens if national development is to be achieved and sustained. With the current trajectory of human capital flight, achieving any of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria is difficult. Even appreciable progress will be difficult to record because the workforce—professionals with expertise knowledge, education and skills are leaving the country. Thus, the critical sectors of the economy will stagnate and suffer more. **Recommendations:** This study recommends immediate upgrade of teaching and learning facilities in tertiary institutions, reasonable increment in employees' salaries, timely promotion, and improvement in welfare and other conditions of service, are suggested as the panacea to overcome the problem of human capital flight in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. By so doing, the push-pull factors leading to human capital flight among seasoned academics that migrate outside Nigeria, especially to Europe and North America in search of greener pastures will reduce drastically. **Limitations:** Poor administration of tertiary institutions, unstable economy, insecurity, inflation, and other negative trajectories prevalent in Nigeria might force many academic staff who might want to remain in Nigeria to embark on human capital flight even if their salaries, welfare and other conditions of service are improved. So, there is a need to stabilize the economy and provide security and infrastructural development, which depend on a good governance system that is currently lacking in Nigeria, as evident in the drivers of human capital flight.

Keywords: Human Capital Flight (Brain Drain), Academic Staff Job Performance, Equity Theory, Push-Pull Factors, Employees' Sustenance

هجرة رأس المال البشري (هجرة الأدمغة) وأداء أعضاء هيئة التدريس في مؤسسات التعليم العالي

المختارة في نيجيريا: ولاية إينوجو من منظور شامل

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الملخص: هدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد دوافع هجرة رأس المال البشري بين أعضاء هيئة التدريس في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في نيجيريا، وتأثيرها على أدائهم الوظيفي، ومدى انتشارها بين أعضاء هيئة التدريس، وذلك لمعرفة الفئات الأكثر تأثراً بها، وتصورات أعضاء هيئة التدريس ومواقفهم تجاهها، كما تستكشف الدراسة آثار هجرة رأس المال البشري على الأداء الوظيفي، والتعليم والتعلم، والتزام أعضاء هيئة التدريس في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في نيجيريا. **المنهجية:** اعتمدت هذه الدراسة على أسلوب المسح متعدد الأساليب. لذلك، اعتمدت الدراسة مسحاً ميدانياً كماً، اعتمد على البيانات الأولية والثانوية لتحليل محتوى البيانات وصفاً للوصول إلى النتائج. **النتائج والاستنتاجات:** أدت الرواتب المتدنية وظروف العمل السيئة السائدة في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في نيجيريا إلى أزمة هجرة رأس المال البشري، حيث يهاجر أفضل الكوادر الأكاديمية إلى الخارج، حيث تتوفر فرص عمل أفضل، إلا أن هذا أثر سلباً على تصنيف الجامعات، ومخرجات البحث والابتكارات، وجودة التدريس والتعلم، والأداء الوظيفي لباقي الكوادر الأكاديمية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الحكومية في نيجيريا. **التداعيات:** دقت هذه الدراسة ناقوس الخطر، وتدعو إلى اتخاذ إجراءات سياسية عاجلة لوقف هجرة رأس المال البشري وإصلاح مؤسسات التعليم العالي الحكومية في نيجيريا لضمان تعليم جيد للمواطنين، إذ ما أريد تحقيق التنمية الوطنية واستدامتها في ظل المسار الحالي لهجرة رأس المال البشري يصعب تحقيق أي من أهداف التنمية المستدامة السبعة عشر في نيجيريا، وحتى تحقيق تقدم ملموس سيكون صعباً لأن القوى العاملة -من ذوي الخبرة والمعرفة والتعليم المهارات- تغادر البلاد وبالتالي ستصاب القطاعات الحيوية للاقتصاد بالركود وستعاني أكثر. **التوصيات:** توصي هذه الدراسة بالتحديث الفوري لمرافق التدريس والتعلم في مؤسسات التعليم العالي، وزيادة رواتب الموظفين بشكل معقول، والترقية في الوقت المناسب وتحسين الرعاية الاجتماعية وشروط الخدمة الأخرى كحل شامل لمشكلة هروب رأس المال البشري بين الأكاديميين المخضرمين الذين يهاجرون خارج نيجيريا، وخاصة إلى أوروبا وأمريكا الشمالية بحثاً عن فرص عمل أفضل. **القيود:** قد يجبر سوء إدارة مؤسسات التعليم العالي، وعدم استقرار الاقتصاد وانعدام الأمن والتضخم، وغيرها من المسارات السلبية السائدة في نيجيريا العديد من أعضاء هيئة التدريس الذين قد يرغبون في البقاء في نيجيريا على الشروع في هروب رأس المال البشري حتى لو تحسنت رواتبهم ورفاهيتهم وشروط خدمتهم الأخرى، لذا، هناك حاجة إلى استقرار الاقتصاد وتوفير الأمن وتطوير البنية التحتية، وهو ما يعتمد على نظام حوكمة رشيد يفكر إليه حالياً في نيجيريا، كما يتضح من عوامل هروب رأس المال البشري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هروب رأس المال البشري (هجرة الأدمغة)، أداء أعضاء هيئة التدريس في العمل، نظرية المساواة، عوال الدفع والجذب، دعم الموظفين.

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Introduction

Quality human capital drives development anywhere in the world; whether it is at the level of individual, organization, or nation. People determine what gets done, and undone, thereby attesting to the centrality of quality human capital (resources) in advancing organizational or national goals (Elechi, 2013; Onah *et al.*, 2023a). Gone are the days of the erroneous assumption that material resources (landmass, geography, vegetation, and mineral deposits) determine the greatness of a nation cum national wealth and prosperity (Rana, 2012; Eze, 2010). In today's world, the emphasis is no longer on material resources but on developing a pool of quality human resources, which material and other resources depend on and are activated to serve useful purposes (Abonyi, 2021; Onah *et al.*, 2023b). This is why recruitment – a means of sourcing quality workforce (human resources) is a serious business in any organization that wants to succeed; achieve its goals, have an edge over competitors (Armstrong, 2009), and consequently remain relevant in the present highly competitive and dynamic global society. In other words, no organization especially service sector organizations like tertiary institutions can excel remarkably and remain globally relevant and competitive without having the right quality and quantity of workforce deployed timely in the right proportion to deliver services.

Therefore, attracting and retaining high-quality performers in organizations is central to achieving organizational goals. It is a tedious process that requires deliberate and strategic human resource planning and systemic implementation of a succession plan, by the top management cadre of organizations in conjunction with the human resources department or the establishment unit (Abonyi, 2021). Thus, organizations providing the same

or similar services like tertiary institutions across the globe compete against one another. Higginbotham (2022) noted that the reason is that careers in tertiary institutions and their environment are very competitive; hence universities are mainly under pressure to employ the best possible staff. However, the driving force behind the competition in tertiary institutions as service-oriented organizations is anchored on having a pool of well-trained, talented, skillful, educated, competent, well-behaved, and knowledgeable workforce, whose services are top-notch and immutable, thereby keeping tertiary institutions afloat ahead of competitors. The UNDP (2023) noted that developing high-quality human capital/resources is the first crucial factor of the human development index that drives other factors in the scheme of national development.

The intense competition and evaluation exigencies required of tertiary institutions to checkmate progress and performance in building knowledge blocs, research, and innovations are ranked globally. Among the parameters used for ranking universities globally by The Times Higher Education are global visibility and ability to attract foreign students (international outlook), high-quality research outputs, and publications (research and citations) in the globally recognized academic databases such as Thomson Reuters/Clarivate, Scimago (SJR), Scopus, and Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP), students-lecturers ratio, and availability of modern teaching and learning facilities among others (see The Study Portal, 2023; IseOlorunkanmi *et al.*, 2021).

The yardsticks for ranking universities especially the students-lecturers ratio and quality of research outputs and publications have been drastically bastardized and reduced by the incessant human capital flight witnessed in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is a result

of various push-pull factors responsible for the emigration of academic staff from Nigerian tertiary institutions to other countries. The World University Ranking in 2023 and 2024 survey reports exposed the negative impact of human capital flight in Nigerian universities. Hence, the University of Ibadan, and the University of Lagos, in Nigeria, in 2023 ranked among the category 401-500 best universities in the World University Ranking. But in 2024, the best universities in Nigeria – the Covenant University, and the University of Ibadan ranked among 801-1000 (The Times Higher Education (THE), 2024). This huge drop (i.e. 300 gap backwardness) from the best 401-500 in 2023 to the best 801-1000 in 2024 ranking epitomized the crisis of human capital flight in Nigerian universities, as the best brains are leaving in droves in search of greener pastures.

The massive emigration of academic staff has an untold negative effect on service delivery in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. However, scholars such as Okunade & Awosusi (2023), Isbell & Ojewale (2018), Elechi (2013), and Anene, Njoku, & Iyala (2019) noted that several factors such as poor-quality education, unemployment, bad economy, and insecurity have been identified as the drivers of human capital flight among the Nigerian youth. Specifically, in the education sector, the academic staff who suffer strikes and threats from the government, poor teaching and research facilities, poor salary structure, bad conditions of service, and limited chances of career growth culminating in job dissatisfaction and de-motivation find succor in brain drain by emigrating abroad where there are better offers and good working conditions than what they get at home in Nigeria (Elechi, 2013; Okoro *et al.*, 2014; Attah *et al.*, 2023).

Academic staff members of any country constitute the reservoir of brain density for national growth and development through knowledge discovery and transfer to the

citizens. Therefore, the human capital flight of professionals, especially academics is a huge setback to national development. Offor *et al.* (2022) posited that continuous loss of critical mass of intellectuals and professional personnel from any country leads to a dangerous depletion of the economy of that country and should be a serious cause to worry about. Human capital flight in Nigeria is among the highest in Africa (Lukman *et al.*, 2022), and has risen unimaginably in the last 2 decades especially, following the aftermaths of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This is to the extent that mass emigration of Nigerians to the Northern Hemisphere and around the world now has a popular vernacular in Nigeria known as '*japa*' – a Yoruba language meaning to leave Nigeria for abroad through any possible means in search of greener pastures (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). Academic staff members of tertiary institutions in Nigeria have a large chunk of the human capital flight taking place daily in Nigeria. According to Ogbu (2019), about 2 million Nigerians are currently residing in the USA alone, and out of this figure, 20,000 are medical practitioners, and over 10,000 are academics working in various universities and research institutes in the USA. The above figure of human capital flight is from the USA alone. Therefore, this figure from the USA is the tip of the iceberg. Imagine what the figure will look like when we aggregate the total number of Nigerian professionals working abroad mainly in Europe and America continents alone.

Towards this end, the study raised the following research questions:

1. what are the drivers/factors responsible for human capital flight among the academic staff in the selected tertiary institutions?
2. what are the impacts of human capital flight on the academic staff job performance in the selected tertiary institutions?

3. to what extent is the human capital flight among the academic staff in the selected tertiary institutions?
4. what are the job perceptions and attitudes of academic staff towards human capital flight in the selected tertiary institutions?

Conceptual framework of the study

The author's understanding of the variables being discussed is succinctly captured through

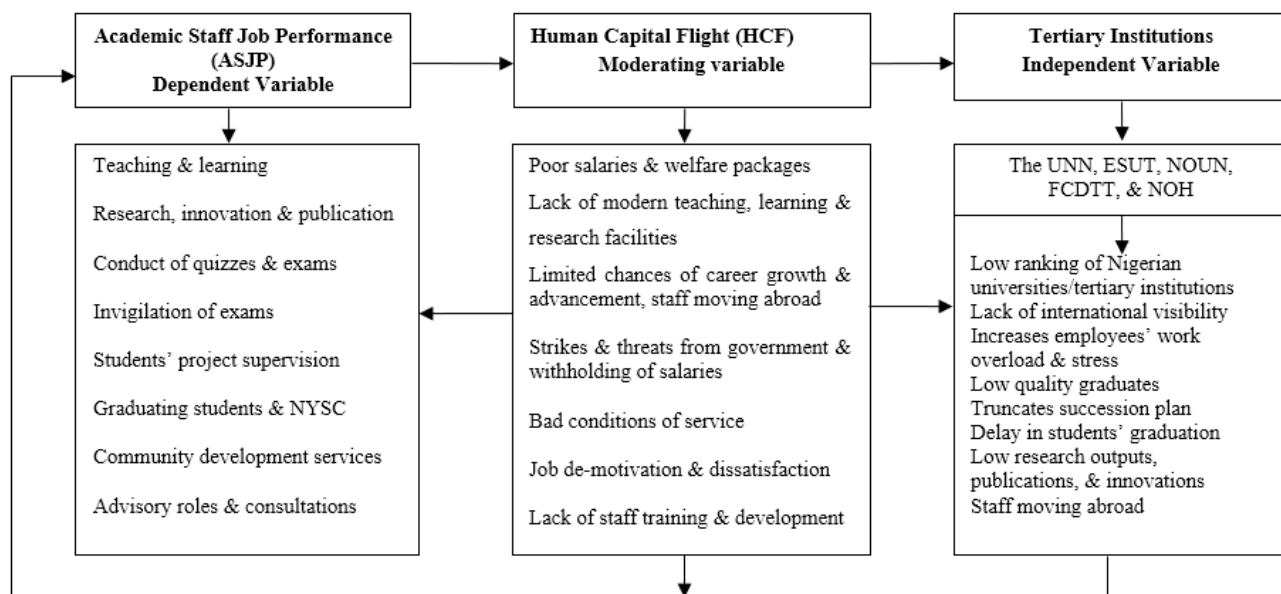


Figure (1): Conceptual framework.

Source: Researchers' conceptualization, 2024.

This shows the impact of human capital flight (brain drain –aka *japa*) and the relationship between academic staff job performance and tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on motivation theory that specifically leverages “equity theory” to analyze human capital flight and academic staff job performance in tertiary education in Nigeria. The proponent of the equity theory is Adams (1963; 1965) who stated that the theory is based on an exchange relationship – a situation where employees give something (time, work, energy, productivity, etc.) to an organization and expect something as a reward (good pay rise, fairness, good working conditions, etc.) in return from the organization. Equity theory is one of the

the conceptual framework depicted below (Figure 1), with their proxies thus:

The researchers' understanding of the independent and dependent variables and their proxies, being discussed in the study, are succinctly captured through the conceptual framework depicted below:

motivation theories that explain human/employee behaviour in a workplace, be it a public or private enterprise. The theory has two strands of thought based on (1) employees' perception of what they get, and how they are treated (equity-equality) concerning what other employees who do the same job get (inequity-disparity/gap). The second strand of thought is the inputs and the outcomes ratio (Al-Zawahreh & Al-Madi, 2012) driving employees' performance in organizations.

Some of the basic assumptions of the equity theory are that when employees perceive inequity, they seek means to address it (Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976; Pritchard, 1969), and when inequity is perceived, the employees involved will undergo occupational anxiety and distress (Walster & Berschied, 1973). Therefore, inequity is injustice and requires

actual or psychological restoration that alters employees' behaviour toward the organization and/or convinces the employee to accept inequity as equity (Al-Zawahreh & Al-Madi, 2012; Adams, 1965).

This theory is apt in explaining and analyzing human capital flight and the performance of academic staff in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. By application, the theory affirmed that inequities in the workplace may at times lead to absenteeism, lower employee morale, and job dissatisfaction, and consequently culminate in resignation (Greenberg, 1999), if not nipped in the bud at the early stage. Therefore, the massive human capital flight of academic staff that undermines service delivery in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is a result of the inequities in salaries, poor facilities, and infrastructure, bad conditions of service, strikes, and so on prevailing in tertiary institutions in Nigeria when compared with what academic staff members get outside the shores of Nigeria (see Abubakar, 2022; Deborah, 2022). These push factors responsible for human capital flight with its attendant poor performance in academic staff service delivery (Okoro *et al.*, 2014) are sustained by inequalities in the homeland. Academic staff members suffer inequities when they compare their job descriptions, salaries, conditions of service, welfare, etc. with what academic staff members in other parts of the world are earning. Thus, there are lots of inequities facing academic staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Orji & Nwokocha, 2014), leading to massive human capital flight to other countries of the world where there are better pay, better working conditions, and modern equipment that make work and life easier. The massive human capital flight in Nigeria is triggered by inequities in employees' motivation and job dissatisfaction. This according to Ogolo *et al.* (2016) has a cascading effect on the

performance of academic staff in Nigeria; lowers their morale, and alters their job perceptions and work attitudes in recent times.

Literature review

Human capital flight otherwise known as brain drain is the massive exodus of the skilled workforce and other professional citizens, usually moving away from developing countries to the developed countries of the world, in search of better livelihoods. The emigration of well-trained and educated experts from different critical sectors of the economy such as healthcare, education, ICT, engineering, science and technology, etc. depletes the national economy and renders it incapable of auto-centric growth and development. The reason according to Onah *et al.* (2023a; 2023b) is that it is the pool of the skilled workforce of a nation that drives economic growth and all other factors of national development. Relatedly, Amadi & Alolote (2019), noted that it is the intangible qualities of a workforce such as competencies, human intelligence, skills, education, and abilities of individuals known as human capital that are deployed in the production processes for manufacturing goods and delivering services. Therefore, when a large chunk of the skilled labour force in a country engages in human capital flight, the economy is 'stripped naked' and consequently stagnates and retrogresses. This is the plight facing tertiary education and academic staff performance in Nigeria. Thus, Kennedy (2014) asserted that human capital flight has a severe negative impact on the educational and economic sectors in Nigeria.

Human development indexes such as education and healthcare contribute immensely to measuring and building human capital development, which triggers economic growth and national prosperity in other sectors (Kubalu, Mustapha, & Suwaid, 2017). The

major roles of academics in tertiary institutions are to engage in research, innovations, discoveries, publications, community development service, teaching, and project supervision, as evident in their key performance indicators (KPIs) (Safonov *et al.*, 2022; Onah & Chikeleze, 2024), which are drivers of human capital development, and when stifled through human capital flight, leads to poor performance among the academic staff. Jacob, Onmoba, & Idagu (2020) identified access to better research facilities, funding of research proposals, grants, and scholarships that culminate in quality education as parts of the pull factors of emigration of Nigerian academic staff to the Global North. On the other hand, among the push factors driving human capital flight in Nigeria are meager salaries, frequent strikes, poor conditions of service, lack of modern facilities and infrastructure, de-motivation, delay in promotion, and limited career opportunities among others (Attah *et al.*, 2023; Offor *et al.*, 2022; Lukman *et al.*, 2022).

Adeosun & Popogbe (2021) research work using the ARDL (autoregressive distributive lag) method on data collected between 1986 and 2018 found that human capital flight and output growth nexus from Nigerian is very disadvantageous to the Nigerian economy and very beneficial to the recipient economies in the Northern Hemisphere. The authors further concur with other scholars such as Wanger & Aras (2022), Adeagbo and Ayandibu (2014), and Udah (2011) who noted that brain drain merely benefits Nigeria through foreign remittances from Nigerians who left in search of greener pastures, when they send money back to the homeland. Investing in intellectual capital of a workforce in organization drives growth by improving employees' performance, hence firms should increase their interest in building human capital (Nour & Momani, 2021). The flip side of developing human

capital in Nigeria is that after building the national workforce to a point that the individual employees can render excellent job performance to improve the system, the country eventually loses many of them to advanced economies abroad. For decades now, Nigeria has been turned into a poaching/hunting field for recruitment of international labour force and forced migration, especially to the Northern Hemisphere.

There are two factors responsible for human capital flight among academic staff in Nigeria. These factors are generally known as push-pull factors (Van Hear Bakewell & Long, 2017; Oluwaseyi & Oluyemi, 2022). The push factors are those ugly conditions of service in Nigeria such as (poor salary, strikes, outdated research and teaching facilities, delays in promotion, etc.) that frustrate and force academic staff to embark on human capital flight abroad. On the other hand, the pull factors are those comfortable and attractive conditions of service abroad such as (good salary, better conditions of service, flexible work arrangement, recognition, speedy growth rate, infrastructure, better working tools, etc.) that lure academics from Nigeria to embark on human capital flight abroad. In other words, what the government could not offer those in her payrolls in public tertiary institutions at home, the employees embark on human capital flight to get, which is popularly known as 'greener pastures'.

Academics who engage in human capital flight hardly come back to Nigeria due to the warm receptive pull factors they enjoy in Europe and North America such as good salaries, job flexibility, availability of modern teaching and learning facilities, provisions of infrastructure, security, political stability, job satisfaction, and better conditions of service among others (Mohammed *et al.*, 2022). Regrettably, even postgraduate students are leaving Nigeria for South Africa due to the availability of opportunities like fee remission,

research grants, scholarships, timely graduation, modern research equipment, and funding (IseOlorunkanmi *et al.*, 2021) that are hardly available and accessible in reasonable quantity in Nigeria. The authors further noted that the majority of the Nigerian students studying abroad are not willing to come back to Nigeria after graduation, thereby being lost to different kinds of capital flight such as (brain drain, tuition fees flight, flight tickets, accommodations, and health insurance). Therefore, tertiary education in Nigeria is battling both human capital flight and financial capital flight at the same time. The short and long-term consequences are explicitly cloaked in the reality that the current and the future academic staff in Nigeria are lost to a brain drain conundrum, thereby leaving the entire tertiary education system in quagmire.

Education is a critical tool for national development across the globe. Chibuokwu & Nwosu (2016) research on “Education and human capital development in Nigeria: The way forward” found that education is a veritable tool capable of changing Nigeria’s underdevelopment status through policies that address the challenges facing education in Nigeria, and by investing in human capital. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria especially universities are faced with an exodus of bright scholars from different schools, departments, and research institutes. The problem of human capital flight in the universities in Nigeria has compounded in the recent past. It has shifted emphasis from the academic staff brain drain to the postgraduates’ brain drain, thereby distorting succession plans and programs for continuity and delivery of quality tertiary education in Nigeria. IseOlorunkanmi *et al.* (2021) asserted that Nigeria has over 120 universities, yet it is among the top 10 countries in the world that send students abroad to seek admission to tertiary education. This paradox epitomizes the damage human capital flight and

other factors have done to university education in Nigeria.

Nigeria’s government investments in education and funding generally continue to dwindle as evident in its poor budgetary allocation to the education sector. A look at the annual budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria in the past few years shows that it is often below the recommended benchmark, which is too low when compared to the international standard advice by the UNESCO, that a nation should invest 4-6% of its GDP to fund education to steer growth and development in the economy through building quality human capital (Ojo, 2023). Education seems not to be a top priority of the government in Nigeria. It is on record that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria has gone on strike 16 times in 23 years while trying to force the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to obey laws on university autonomy, pay outstanding arrears of earned academic allowance, and to implement MoUs the Government signed with the Union (Deborah, 2022). These push factors facilitate human capital flight from tertiary institutions in Nigeria. During the 8 months strike embarked on by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria, in 2022, many of the academic staff left Nigeria to pursue their teaching and research careers abroad, following the inability of the Federal Government to resolve the incessant crisis in the tertiary education sector (Abubakar, 2022).

Safonov *et al.* (2022), and Onah & Chikeleze (2024) noted that the key performance indicators (KPI) of academic staff in tertiary institutions such as research, innovation, publication, conferences and workshops attendance, community services, teaching, theses supervision, conduct of examinations and quizzes, and graduating students are knowledge and service-oriented. Therefore, human capital flight in tertiary

institutions in Nigeria retards the performance of academic staff. Nkpurukwe *et al.* (2022) research evidence shows that there is a strong correlation between knowledge investment and the performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities. In other words, once the best brains leave, it creates a huge vacuum that takes months and in some instances years to fill. The reason is that human capital is expensive to build, and requires time, patience, and deliberate efforts that take long-term strategic human resource planning and implementation to build a pool of quality workforce (Eze, 2010). Academic staff performance according to Falowo (2022) is measured by teaching effectiveness, supervision, and quality of creative outputs. Thus, the realization of these performance indicators –goals of the tertiary institutions when hindered by human capital flight widens the gap in the lecturers-students ratio. The Statista (2022) survey report revealed that the lecturers-students ratio in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is among the worst in the world. The implications of this gap are increase in work overload, and inducement of occupational stress and anxiety that distract the remaining academic staff from focusing on their jobs. Human capital flight, therefore, distorts the human resource planning of academic staff, thereby impacting their job performance negatively. Abonyi (2021, p. 17) averred that it is through “human resource planning that an organization repositions its staff strength to be more prepared to achieve its objectives and make for the organization’s growth and development”. This is unrealistic in today’s human resource planning of academic staff in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, especially in the universities due to human capital flight, leading to job performance issues.

Materials and methodology

The study methods

This is a quantitative field survey research that leveraged both primary and secondary data. The use of mixed methods in research is advantageous according to Tegan (2022) because it harvests the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, thereby helping the researcher to gain a thorough and complete perspective than the use of a single discrete method. The qualitative – secondary data were sourced from textbooks, journal articles, The Times Higher Education survey report, Nigerian newspapers (Daily Trust, Punch, Vanguard, Cable, etc.) reportage on brain drain in Nigeria, and other online materials relevant to human capital flight and academic staff job performance variables of the study were gathered and subjected to descriptive-content analysis, thereby testifying and pointing to the validity of the results obtained from the primary data –quantitative data. Meanwhile, the quantitative data – primary data were structured questionnaire items addressing each of the 4 research questions; unstructured in-depth interviews (IDIs), and focused group discussions (FGDs) organized by the researchers to elicit additional but relevant information/data from the participants/respondents from the selected tertiary institutions investigated in the study.

Furthermore, the primary data from the questionnaire were coded; ranked, and subjected to descriptive statistical analysis presented in tables, frequencies, percentages, and cumulative. The purpose of this kind of survey and choice of data presentation is to aid understanding, interpretation of data, and drawing of conclusions, for effective decision-making (Manikandan, 2011; Onah, Aduma, & Eze, 2023). Thus, we chose the survey ranking research method because of its suitability to this work, as evident in Babbie (2013) postulation

that survey research is advantageous to field research in social science because, it enables researchers to collect large amounts of data directly from the respondents in a limited time.

The population of the study and sample size

The population of the study is (5,707). The population is made up of the staff of the selected public tertiary institutions where the study took place among the academic staff in Enugu State such as:

1. The University of Nigeria Nsukka, (UNN)
2. The Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT)
3. The National Open University (NOUN), Enugu
4. The Federal College of Dental Technology and Therapy (FCDTT), Enugu and,
5. The School of Orthopedic Cast Technology (NOH), Enugu.

Table (1): The Population Distribution.

SN	Name of Universities	Population	Sample Size	Percentage (%)
1	The University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN).	2,937	94	51
2	The Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT).	1,993	64	35
3	The National Open University (NOUN), Enugu.	49	2	1
4	The Federal College of Dental Technology and Therapy (FCDTT), Enugu.	527	17	9
5	School of Orthopedic Cast Technology (NOH), Enugu.	200	7	4
Total		5,707	184	100

Source: Authors' compilation, 2023.

The Taro Yamane (1968) formula for determining sample size, with a 91% - 94% confidence level of maximum variability ($p < 0.05$), facilitated the adoption of 184 manageable sample size for the study; after the distribution, retrieval, sorting, scoring, cleaning, evaluation, and analysis of questionnaires based on their being returned and correctly filled. The 184 respondents were deliberately picked randomly among the academic staff of the 5 tertiary institutions that constitute the major categories the study participants were divided such as the HoDs, Senior Lecturers, and Junior Academics. Thus, a purposive and multi-stage sampling technique that utilized random sampling was deployed in choosing and administering questionnaires to the participants. Moreover, with the aid of 2 research assistants who took extensive notes, we conducted 2 different IDIs and FGDs around April, and September 2023 in the institutions. In compliance with anonymity and ethics principles, we did not record the interviews and the discussions on

any electronic device since the participants declined such a move due to the fear of the unknown. However, the extensive notes taken by the research assistants helped a lot –they were coded in themes, and transcribed for ease of understanding and interpretation, thereby exposing more data in detail on the subject matter of the research.

Justifications of the study methods

The population of the study is categorized according to the different clusters they were made up of, hence the reason for adopting a multi-stage sampling technique that reveals different observations and questions (see Ajah *et al.*, 2022), with different implications. The proportional sampling technique was chosen to ensure fair and balanced representations among the 5 schools understudy. In other words, this is to make sure that schools with small numbers of staff strength (populations) do not get equal or even more questionnaires than schools with larger populations since the populations of the schools differ significantly. Thus, in making

decisions for data collection and distribution of questionnaires in this type of study, Onah & Chikeleze (2024) noted that equity needs to prevail in the allocation of questionnaires according to the percentage of the population of each school or group, to avoid biases or distortion of results to be obtained from the data.

To get the best out of the interviews from the different groups of participants, we adopted multi-stage sampling technique, because all the groups cannot be subjected to the same interview questions while probing deeper into the factors responsible for human capital flight and its impact on the academic staff job performance in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. So, each tertiary institution has its number of questionnaires allocated to them based on the percentage of its population (proportional sampling technique) as indicated in Table 1. Likewise, each group (HoDs, Senior Lecturers, and Junior Lecturers) has its unique interview questions designed to elicit specific information from them based on their job roles and designations, opportunities –advantages, and work experience, which they can provide better than the other groups. For example, you do not ask a junior academic/lecturer or even a senior lecturer about the interim and succession plans for managing brain drain in the department. The reason is that they do not belong to the decision-making cadre that manages the vacuum created by brain drain at the departmental level. Rather, this question and other similar ones, go to the HoDs, who allocate courses every semester among the academic staff, and consequently determine who teaches what course when a staff resigns and moves abroad in search of greener pastures. Also, this justifies the reason for the adoption of FGDs which are for the HoDs category due to this kind of essential information needed in the study but can only be gotten from people in this cadre –HoDs.

Again, a question like “are you planning to embark on human capital flight?” was mainly directed to the middle career academics like the senior lecturers, and lecturers 1 and 11, who constitute the bulk of the brain drain witnessed in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The senior lecturers are the most dynamic and mobile category. The reason is that they have doctorate certificates; are already mature in the job with reasonable wealth of experience, and energetic with the drive to explore opportunities outside the shores of Nigeria. The junior lecturers often do not have these advantages, and for the professors who have the advantages, age is usually not on their side. Thus, they were not asked this kind of question. In other words, each group is unique and reveals vital information needed for the study. Thus, Onah, Aduma, & Eze (2023) rightly noted that in studies with all these precautionary measures taken in choosing the study methods, procedures, criteria, and sources of data, reliability and validity are often guaranteed from the result of the findings, and the conclusion to be drawn from primary and secondary data. The conclusion reached on a study, therefore, is based on the result of the findings from analysis and revelations made from data used in a study.

To ensure the validity of the instruments, two expert sociologists in industrial sociology/relations from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka validated the instrument using the face and content validity method. Thus, all proxies extracted from the human capital flight and academic staff job performance variables from each of the tables from Table 2 - Table 5 were agreed and confirmed to be the cause-effect relationships probing and eliciting valid data/information from each of the survey research questions on human capital flight and academic staff job performance in tertiary institutions. Therefore, the choice and design of

the Tables for data presentation in frequencies, percentages, and their cumulative are suitable in eliciting the rate of occurrence of each of the different phenomena being investigated from the independent and dependent variables of the study.

The study procedure and limitations

The questionnaire instrument was specifically designed and categorized according to the research questions of the study, which was stated in the consent letter sent to the participants with their approval secured before we embarked on including any academic staff from the selected schools to participate in the study. We attached a questionnaire with the consent letter, stating the objective of the study, ethical compliance; confidentiality, anonymity, and the risk-free nature of the research to the human participants, which made many of the academic staff approached to be interested in the study because the study affects them directly as academic staff of tertiary institutions, thereby triggering their zeal and willingness to participate in the study. No personal details such as name, phone number, office or email address, and staff number among others were captured in the questionnaire to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. These precautionary measures facilitated compliance for data collection.

The study areas

The study took place in Enugu State. The state was created in 1991. It is one of the 5 states in Southeast, Nigeria, and one of the 36

states that make up the Nigerian federation. Enugu State is predominantly a civil service-oriented state. Thus, accounting for having the largest concentration of tertiary institutions in Southeast, Nigeria, thereby justifying our choice of chosen the State for the study. The State has a sufficient number of tertiary institutions, both public and privately owned. Thus, the compositions of the 5 tertiary institutions in the State selected for the study attest to this fact. The 5 of them are public tertiary institutions owned by both the Federal and State governments. We purposely selected conventional tertiary institutions and specialist tertiary institutions –(see the last two schools in Table 1 above) for the diversities of their services, especially being tertiary healthcare educational institutions with teaching hospitals. Thus, human capital flight is enormous in the schools in sufficient volumes required to draw attention and its implications in concluding this study. We deliberately did not choose private tertiary institutions, because the human capital flight is more in the government-owned tertiary institutions due to the push factors responsible for its occurrence, and its high level of manpower development recognized at home and abroad more than private tertiary institutions and the other lower levels of tertiary institutions such as polytechnic and college of education (CoE).

Result of findings

First Research Question: What are the drivers/factors responsible for human capital flight in the selected tertiary institutions?

Table (2): The factors responsible for human capital flight in the selected tertiary institutions.

S/N	The drivers/factors responsible for human capital flight in the selected tertiary institutions (Measurement items)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	Low salary.	51	[27.7%]	27.7
2	Incessant strikes.	32	[17.3%]	45.0
3	Threats from governments and withholding of salaries.	25	[13.5%]	58.5
4	Delay in promotion and payment of promotion arrears.	12	[6.5%]	65.0
5	Poor conditions of service.	30	[16.3%]	81.3
6	Poor teaching, learning, and research facilities.	10	[5.4%]	86.7

S/N	The drivers/factors responsible for human capital flight in the selected tertiary institutions (Measurement items)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
7	Lack of opportunities for career advancement.	8	[4.3%]	91.0
8	Lack of opportunities for constant training.	6	[3.2%]	94.2
9	De-motivation and job dissatisfaction.	5	[2.7%]	96.9
10	Government's inability to reasonably sponsor research, publication, workshops, and conferences.	3	[1.6%]	98.5
11	Poor leadership, mismanagement, and policy implementation by tertiary institutions.	2	[1.0%]	100.0
Total		184	100	

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Second Research Question: what are the impacts of human capital flight on academic staff job performance in the selected tertiary institutions?

Table (3): How does human capital flight impact academic staff job performance in the selected tertiary institutions?

S/N	How does human capital flight impact academic staff job performance in the selected tertiary institutions (Measurement items)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	No lecture/teaching for students in courses that the lecturers who handle them exited until the courses are reassigned by the HoDs to other lecturers.	49	[26.6]	26.6
2	Delay in the conduct of quizzes and exams of lecturers who exited.	15	[8.1]	34.7
3	Low research outputs, publications, and innovations from tertiary institutions.	42	[22.8]	57.5
4	Obstruction of students' project supervision.	21	[11.4]	68.9
5	Increases workload and stress.	8	[4.3]	73.2
6	Delay in students' graduation.	4	[2.1]	75.3
7	Low-quality graduates from schools.	17	[9.2]	84.5
8	Distorts succession plan.	3	[1.6]	86.1
9	Low ranking of schools.	25	[13.5]	100.0
Total		184	100	

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Third Research Question: To what extent is the human capital flight among the academic staff in the selected tertiary institutions?

Table (4): The extent of human capital flight among the academic staff in the selected tertiary institutions.

S/N	The extent of human capital flight among the academic staff in the selected tertiary institutions (Measurement items)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	The extent of professors leaving Nigeria to abroad.	2	[1.0]	1.0
2	The extent of associate professors (readers) leaving Nigeria to abroad.	3	[1.6]	2.6
3	The extent of senior lecturers leaving Nigeria to abroad.	98	[53.2]	55.8
4	The extent of lecturer 1 leaving Nigeria to abroad.	40	[21.7]	77.5
5	The extent of lecturer 11 leaving Nigeria to abroad.	24	[13.0]	90.5
6	The extent of assistant lecturers leaving Nigeria to abroad.	13	[7.0]	97.5
7	The extent of graduate assistants leaving Nigeria to abroad.	4	[2.1]	100.0
Total		184	100	

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Fourth Research Question: what are the job perceptions and attitudes of the academic staff towards human capital flight in the selected tertiary institutions?

Table (5): Job perceptions and attitudes of the academic staff towards human capital flight in the selected tertiary institutions.

S/N	Job perceptions and attitudes of the academic staff towards human capital flight in the selected tertiary institutions (Measurement items)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	Lowers academic staff job morale.	27	[14.6]	14.6
2	Induces occupational anxiety.	20	[10.8]	25.4
3	Discourages organizational citizenship and extra-role behaviour.	11	[5.9]	31.3
4	Shatters organizational culture.	6	[3.2]	34.5
5	Induces unserious attitude over duties.	41	[22.2]	56.7
6	Academic staff perceive ineptitude in management and lack trust in their leadership.	25	[13.5]	70.2
7	Career disruptions.	30	[16.3]	86.5
8	Academic staff perceive their career with uncertainties (low job satisfaction and security).	16	[8.6]	95.1
9	Lateness to duty, absenteeism, and poor commitment.	8	[4.3]	100.0
Total		184	100	

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Discussions of findings

First research question: Human capital flight is enormous in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The drivers are so much implicated in the scholarly literature on the push-pull causes of human capital flight in Nigeria (Oluwaseyi & Oluyemi, 2022; Lukman *et al.*, 2022). This is also in tandem with the findings of the present research work as shown with indicators which low salary 51 [27.7%], incessant strikes 32 [17.3%], and poor conditions of service 30 [16.3%] are the highest factors responsible for human capital flight among academic staff (see Table 2). The other indicators recorded low frequencies. However, it is the responsibility of the government to roll back the push factors by increasing salaries and improving the conditions of service and welfare of the academic staff of tertiary institutions. By so doing, the frequencies of the occurrence of the indicators propelling human capital flight that culminate in job dissatisfaction (Okoro *et al.*, 2014) will drop down. The myriad of drivers of human capital flight shows that the quality of work life (QWL) of academics in Nigeria is at a low ebb, thus to reduce human capital flight, the authorities must improve the quality of work life (QWL) of the academic staff (Akinwale & Owolabi, 2023). Similar and

recent research findings by Attah *et al.* (2023) on healthcare providers show that working conditions correlate with performance, and should be improved. Otherwise, it will trigger other negative consequences in organizations that will undermine performance.

The Nigerian Government has been unable to tackle the brain drain going on in every sector of the economy. Rather, in the bid to curb the crisis of human capital flight in the health sector, the government attempted to pass a bill in the parliament to force young medical practitioners to stay back in Nigeria and work up to 5 years after graduating from medical schools. Thus, the government wants fresh graduates from the health sector especially medical doctors to serve up to 5 in Nigerian hospitals and other health institutions after graduation, before they can be granted a license and allowed to embark on human capital flight to work abroad. However, the bill was dropped due to public outcry and condemnation on account of being against the ILO laws and infringes on the fundamental rights of health workers to travel and work anywhere outside Nigeria (Ajoseh, Langer, Amoniyani, & Uyah, 2024).

Threats from the government, poor policies, and leadership of tertiary institutions contribute

to the poor funding that cripples research, publications, and innovation among the Nigerian professional workforce. These dovetail to poor teaching in healthcare institutions and poor provisions of learning facilities and infrastructure that eventually demotivate employees and lead to job dissatisfaction that triggers human capital flight among Nigerian professionals (Akinwale & Olusoji, 2023). In other words, the government does not put sufficient interest in the provisions of those facilities that benefit the academic staff directly like a good pay rise, installation of modern teaching facilities, staff training and development, good welfare packages, better conditions of service, and growth rate of the employees. Yet, they do not provide those facilities that benefit the students and the institutions such as learning and research facilities, and infrastructural development. Other drivers (push factors) of human capital flight as shown in (Table 2) indicate that the government responds poorly when it comes to funding education in Nigeria. Also, this finding is in tandem with the ritualization of strikes in Nigerian universities as ASUU courageously activate strike/industrial action from time to time, to compel the government to implement the memorandum of understanding (MoU) negotiated and signed with the ASUU, as the pathways to restore the lost glory of tertiary education in Nigeria (see Deborah, 2022; Abubakar, 2022).

Second Research Question: There are lots of negative impacts of human capital flight on academic staff job performance as evident from the findings of this study. The three highest frequencies among the negative impact of the indicators are students not being taught when a lecturer embarks on human capital flight until the HoD reassigns the course to another lecturer to continue from where the latter stopped 49 [26.6], whereas low research outputs, publications, and innovations from the tertiary

institutions recorded 42 [22.8], and low ranking of the schools recorded 25 [13.5] as a consequent of the first-two negative impact of human capital flight on academic staff job performance. This is not a coincidence. Why? One of the strongest parameters for ranking universities globally is the quality and quantity of research outputs published in the recognized top and leading peer-reviewed impact factor journals (Chowdhury & Rahman, 2021; The Study Portal, 2023). Hence, when the best brains in the universities embark on human capital flight, research gradually collapses and the universities' achievements and visibility roll back in the global university ranking such as evident in Nigeria dropping deep down from ranking among the best 401-500 best universities in the world in 2023 to ranking among the best 801-1000 universities in the world in 2024 and 2025, respectively (see The Times Higher Education, 2024). This backwardness in ranking has no better explanation than human capital flight and the collapse of research in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Nevertheless, other factors such as poor funding of tertiary education and corruption among the top management in the system play a huge role in undermining quality education; teaching and learning experience and outcome, and poor remuneration (Akinniyi, Erinsakin, & Emma-Ayire, 2021), thereby accelerating human capital flight among academic staff of tertiary institutions, who face career setbacks and frustrations due to the occurrence of the negative trajectories prevalent in Nigerian tertiary education sector.

Another top cascading effect of human capital flight on academic staff job performance is low-quality graduates from the schools 17 [9.2], which is dangerously impacting the fundamental aim of establishing tertiary institutions as citadels of learning and knowledge production centres. A tertiary institution producing poor-quality graduates is

a serious concern that requires urgent attention by the government. The traditional key performance indicators (KPIs) of tertiary institutions are negatively impacted by human capital flight with different frequencies and percentages (see Table 3), because it is the right quality and quantity of human capital that drive and sustain organizational/national growth and development through excellent performance of the workforce (Abonyi, 2021; Elechi, 2013; Onah, Aduma, & Amujiri, 2023; Eze, 2010). This is currently lacking in tertiary institutions in Nigeria as evident from the findings on the extent of human capital flight (see Table 4). This finding corroborates with Nour, Bouqalieh, & Okour (2022) research finding that developing intellectual capital of a workforce in a corporate organization drives corporate governance efficiency because the value of private sectors are rooted in developing human capital.

Third Research Question: The expositions from this finding show that the extent of the categories of academic staff that embark on the human capital flight are predominantly the Senior Lecturers (SL) 98 [53.2%], Lecturer 1 40 [21.7%], and Lecturer 11 24 [13.0%] (L1 and L 11), respectively. Meanwhile, the professorial cadres (Professors 2 [1.0%] and Associate Professors/Readers 3 [1.6%]), Assistant Lecturer (AL) 13 [7.0], and the Graduate Assistant (GA) 4 [2.1], that is, the two topmost and the two lowest cadres are less responsive to human capital flight. The reasons are obvious; the professors and the associate professors (readers) are at the pinnacle of their careers, they enjoy higher pay, have access to appointments to head important positions in the schools, make more money to complement their meager salaries, and close to retirement with age disadvantage factor. Hence, the zeal to embark on human capital flight in search of greener pastures is very low among the professorial cadre (Okoro *et al.*, 2014).

On the other hand, transcribed interviews involving the other lowest category known as the assistant lecturers and graduate assistants (ALs & GAs) when they were asked if they planned to embark on human capital flight during the in-depth interviews (IDIs) stated that *“they have the desire and willingness to embark on human capital flight but are deprived of the opportunities, mainly due to the lack of qualifications like possession of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) terminal degree, requisite teaching and research experience, and a reasonable number of publications in impact factor journals, which are often the prerequisites for getting academic appointment abroad.”* This disconnection existing between the top most and the lowest cadres among academics in tertiary institutions in Nigeria as a result of human capital flight of the middle career academics (SL, Lecturers 1, & 11) in large numbers creates a huge gap and crisis in leadership, mentorship, succession plan, communication, and delegation issues in the school system. Hence, the problem of continuity looms in tertiary education in Nigeria if the current wave of brain drain is not averted. The reason is that many of the AL, GA, and other junior academics, and even prospective ones who left Nigeria for the pursuit of terminal degree –PhD, usually do not come back to lecture in Nigeria at the end of their studies, instead they secure job to teach abroad thereby remaining there as implicated in extant literature (see IseOlorunkanmi *et al.*, 2021).

Recently, the Nigerian Government through its official sponsorship of academic staff training and development programs for public tertiary institutions under the auspices of TETFund, in a public statement and letter released in the last quarters of 2024, notified the public and especially the tertiary institutions in Nigeria that the TETFund has stopped its overseas training sponsorship for the academic

staff (Ambali, 2024). The reason for such termination of training sponsorship abroad is not lack of funds. Rather, the majority of those trained, that is, the beneficiaries after undergoing training overseas and acquiring Masters and Doctorates often refuse to return home to continue teaching and researching in Nigeria. The beneficiaries of the TETFund overseas sponsorship who refused to return home often cite issues of low pay packages, and poor conditions of service among other hostile trajectories in Nigeria when compared with the mouth-watering offers they get in universities abroad, improved living standards in the foreign economies, and opportunities for a better life, which are lacking in Nigeria. So, human capital flight among the academic staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria has reached a crisis proportion that schools are losing their workforce through so many routes. In today's Nigeria, almost every young person, especially in Southern Nigeria wants to leave the country, except those without any opportunity to travel out. Therefore, human capital flight in Nigeria has assumed a crisis proportion that requires urgent attention from the government.

Fourth Research Question: The job perceptions and attitudes of the academic staff towards human capital flight are filled with mixed reactions. The perceptions and attitudes of academic staff towards brain drain are full of disruptive emotions, stress, and occupational anxieties. Ogolo *et al.* (2016) research finding pointed to the direct consequences of the negative job perceptions and attitudes of employees over human capital mismanagement as part of the drivers of poor performance in service delivery. Employees who are dissatisfied with their jobs following the push factors will surely put up certain inimical behaviours that are anti-workplace environment. This is shown by the data evidence of the three top indicators (see Table 5) such as indices of unserious attitude over

duties 41 [22.2%], career disruptions 30 [16.3%], and lower academic staff job morale 27 [14.6%]. These indicators point to what one of the HoDs revealed as his experience during one of the FGDs saying “*that whenever a bright staff suddenly starts showing the lack of commitment to duty for a long time like absenteeism, lateness, and unnecessary excuses, it is a possible sign that the staff is undergoing visa application processes to ‘japa’, or the likes. Thus, human capital flight looms.*”

Other perceptions and attitudes of the academic staff on human capital flight speak volumes of its correlation with their job performance such as ineptitude to management and leadership 25 [13.5%], inducing occupational anxiety 20 [10.8%], career uncertainties 16 [8.6%], and others. This finding is in tandem with the previous research work which states “that work burden has a significant influence on human capital flight intent” (Etuk *et al.*, 2023). Organizational citizenship and extra-role behaviour ranked 11 [5.9%], which are parts of organizational culture that stand at a 6 [3.2%], are negatively perceived and thus likely withheld by the academic staff, due to human capital flight that discourages such healthy workplace culture and human relational approach that boost productivity. This aligned with the previous study by Lindsay & Neel (2015) published in *Harvard Business Review* which confirmed that an organization's culture can shape employees' motivation positively or negatively, depending on how well the organization manages its culture to engineer high performance. Emotional disruptions and job dissatisfaction following push factors driving human capital flights are crippling academic staff job performance in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These need to be urgently addressed by the government and

school authorities before it becomes too late to revamp tertiary education in Nigeria.

Conclusion and recommendations

From the findings of this study, we conclude that there are lots of push-pull factors responsible for the human capital flight of academic staff from tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The extent of the occurrence of the brain drain is too much that it creates a gap between the top most and the lowest cadre in academia, disrupts succession plans, and continuity, hampers research and innovation, jeopardizes the delivery of quality services that culminate in the production of low-quality graduates. Hardly will any organization survive a mass exodus of its brightest employees due to human capital flight for a long time. The negative implications of human capital flight on academic staff job performance, job perceptions, and attitudes are dangerous to tertiary education in Nigeria. Therefore, we recommend that the government should quickly address the identified drivers of the brain drain hampering tertiary education in Nigeria, thereby reasonably improving wages, teaching and learning facilities, and infrastructure, taking academic staff welfare and conditions of service seriously. These steps will stem the tide of human capital flight so that the best brains in tertiary institutions will stay back in Nigeria and contribute to national growth, sustenance, and development through research, innovations, publications, and imparting knowledge on the teeming population of the current and future students, who are the potential workforce of the nation to drive development in all sectors.

Declaration statements

- No funds were received by the author/s
- No conflict of interest
- Data available on reasonable request from the corresponding author

- Ethical declaration – the research was risk-free, and thus there was no harm to the human participants in the study. So, informed consent was obtained from the participants.
- AI was not used in writing the paper

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