



IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities

Vol. 11. No. 6, (2025)

ISSN: 2488- 9210 (Print) 2504-9038 (Online)

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Indexed: Academic Journals Online, Google Scholar, Igwebuike Research Institute

FILTERING THE FLOW: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF CANADIAN IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON NIGERIAN MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS, 2012–2023

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Abstract

Over the last decade, Canada has emerged as a top destination for skilled and educated Nigerians seeking better socio-economic opportunities abroad. This study critically appraises the impact of Canadian immigration policies on the migration aspirations of Nigerians between 2012 and 2023. Using a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, the research draws on content analysis of Canadian immigration policy documents, secondary migration data from IRCC and the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, and semi-structured interviews with intending Nigerian migrants and immigration consultants. The findings reveal that while Canada's points-based immigration system, study-permit pathways, and express entry programs have encouraged an increase in applications from Nigerians, recent policy adjustments, including higher proof of funds requirements, tighter work-permit rules, and caps on international students, have introduced new barriers. The paper concludes that Canadian immigration policies, though generally favourable compared to other Global North countries, remain selectively open and structurally limiting. It calls for a balanced migration policy engagement between origin and destination countries, while recommending Nigeria develop retention strategies for skilled talent.

Keywords: Canadian Immigration Policy, Nigerian Migrants, Migration Aspirations, Brain Drain, Global South–Global North Migration

Introduction

International migration has become a salient feature of global dynamics in the 21st century, with millions of individuals leaving their home countries in hopes of better opportunities elsewhere (Afrobarometer, 2018). Among such migratory flows, Nigerian citizens represent a significant contingent seeking new lives in various Western nations, notably Canada. Migration from Nigeria to Canada has been influenced by a plethora of factors, including socio-economic challenges, educational aspirations, and the quest for safety. Canada has positioned itself as a desirable destination for many Nigerians, primarily due to its stable economy, high-quality education system, and robust healthcare services. Furthermore, the Canadian government's commitment to



multiculturalism and diversity has made it an attractive option for migrants of various backgrounds (Akanle et al, 2018).

Between 2012 and 2023, Canada implemented various policy changes aimed at reshaping its immigration landscape (Adebajo, 2017). One significant shift was the introduction of the Express Entry system in 2015, which streamlined the immigration process for skilled workers. This system operates on a point-based framework, considering factors such as age, education, language proficiency, and work experience. The intent was to attract highly skilled immigrants to meet labor market demands while ensuring that the intake process is efficient and transparent (Bakewell, 2014).

In addition to Express Entry, Canada has also developed specific programs targeting international students and temporary workers. The International Student Program, which allows foreign students to study in Canada, has been expanded to cater for increasing numbers of Nigerian students seeking quality education. This policy not only offers a pathway to long-term residency for graduates but also enhances Canada's status as a global educational hub. Moreover, there has been a notable emphasis on supporting refugees and vulnerable populations, reflecting Canada's humanitarian commitments (Caidi, 2010).

The implications of migration policies are not solely confined to individual migrants but extend to broader socio-economic contexts in both Nigeria and Canada. In Nigeria, high emigration rates, particularly among educated youths, have given rise to concerns regarding brain drain. The outflow of skilled labour has strained sectors such as healthcare, engineering, and technology, which are critical to national development. This issue is compounded by endemic unemployment and socio-political instability, leading to a paradox where aspiring migrants contribute to the very challenges, they seek to escape from (Carling, 2018).

Conversely, Canada benefits from the influx of skilled labour, which bolsters its economy and demographic diversity. Nigerian migrants often contribute significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship, creating jobs and enhancing multiculturalism within Canadian society. However, the increasing reliance on Nigerian migrants raises questions about integration and the need for robust support systems to ensure their successful adaptation into Canadian society (Bailey et al, 1997). Moreover, the attractiveness of Canada as a migration destination has been significantly influenced by changing international migration policies. While Canada's migration policies have aimed to address various demographic and economic needs, the implications of these policies on intending migrants from Nigeria remain under-explored. These policies not only dictate the feasibility of migration but also intersect with the lived realities of prospective migrants (Immigration, 2021). The problem this study seeks to investigate is two-fold: first, how the evolving international migration policies of Canada have influenced the migration intentions of Nigerians; and second, how these policies have affected the experiences, accessibility, and outcomes of migration for Nigerian nationals.

Historical Context and Migration Trends from Nigeria to Canada



Since immemorial, migration has been a crucial part of everyday life for many Nigerians. It has evolved over the years from within the country (internal migration) to crossing the borders of Nigeria in the colonial / post-colonial period (international migration). The past decade has witnessed a significant surge in migration flows from Nigeria to Canada, transforming established diaspora communities and reshaping the demographic landscape of both nations. This period, spanning 2012 to 2023, is characterized by a dynamic interplay of economic, socio-political, and educational drivers pushing Nigerians to seek opportunities abroad, particularly in Canada, and corresponding shifts in Canadian immigration policies and societal perspectives. The period 2012-2023 represents a critical juncture in Nigerian history, marked by fluctuations in economic performance, escalating security concerns, and persistent governance challenges (Alabi & Olajide, 2022).

The allure of Canada as a destination was further amplified by its attractive immigration policies and relatively open approach to skilled migration. Canada's point-based Express Entry system, launched in 2015, significantly streamlined the immigration process for skilled workers and professionals, making it easier for qualified Nigerians to gain permanent residency. The system prioritizes factors like education, language proficiency, work experience, and age, aligning well with the qualifications and aspirations of many educated Nigerians. Moreover, provincial nominee programs (PNPs) offered alternative pathways for immigration, allowing provinces to select candidates based on their specific labour market needs. In 2021, Canada welcomed the most immigrants in a single year in its history, with 405,999 permanent residents, representing an increase of 120% from 2020. This was made possible, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, by ramping up production and leveraging innovative practices. Examples include pivoting to a focus on applicants already living in Canada by introducing time-limited Temporary Resident (TR) to Permanent Resident (PR) pathways, and using virtual landings and the digitization of paper applications to enable faster processing. In February 2022, Canada tabled its 2022–24 Immigration Levels Plan. It aimed to continue welcoming immigrants at a rate of about 1% of Canada's population per year, including 431,645 permanent residents in 2022, 447,055 in 2023, and 451,000 in 2024. With an increased focus on supporting our economic resurgence and post-pandemic growth, they increased our Levels Plan to further address the demand for increased labour, reuniting families, and resettling the world's most vulnerable (Oshelo et al, 2022).

The 2020 immigration data show about 1.25 million immigrants in Nigeria, representing 0.61% of the country's population (UN DESA, 2020). The proportion of immigrants to Nigeria's population is below the global average (3.6%) and in West Africa (1.9%). This proportion also means Nigeria has the lowest rate of immigrants per population. This is not surprising because of Nigeria's population size (Akindele, 2013). As more Nigerians gained permanent residency and citizenship in Canada, they were able to sponsor their family members, further expanding the Nigerian diaspora community. This chain migration effect contributed to the exponential growth in the number of Nigerian immigrants arriving in Canada. Moreover, the availability of educational opportunities in Canada served as another significant pull factor. Many Nigerian students sought higher education in Canadian universities and colleges, often with the intention of staying in Canada after graduation. The post-graduation work permit program allowed international students



to gain Canadian work experience, further enhancing their chances of obtaining permanent residency (Korinya & Dansale, 2025). In 2022, Nigeria was Canada's fourth top immigration source country, welcoming 22,085 Nigerian immigrants, making up 5.05% of Canada's total number of permanent residents. In addition, there are over 100,000 Canadians of Nigerian descent who call Canada home (Immigration, 2023)

Factors influencing Nigerian intending migrants to choose Canada

Nigeria, a nation brimming with entrepreneurial spirit and youthful ambition, is increasingly witnessing a flow of its citizens seeking opportunities beyond its borders. Among the popular destinations, Canada stands out as a particularly attractive option for Nigerian intending migrants.

Economic Prospects and Career Advancement: The Allure of Opportunity

Nigeria, despite its vast natural resources, faces significant economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, especially among young graduates, and limited opportunities for career advancement in certain sectors. In contrast, Canada's robust and diversified economy offers a compelling alternative. Canada's demand for skilled labour across various sectors, including healthcare, technology, engineering, and skilled trades, creates a palpable pull for Nigerian professionals seeking career growth and financial stability. The Canadian labour market offers competitive salaries and benefits packages, a stark contrast to the sometimes-stagnant wage growth and limited benefits experienced in Nigeria. Many Nigerian professionals find that their skills and experience are highly valued in Canada, leading to opportunities for promotions and leadership roles that may be difficult to attain within the Nigerian context (Obogo, 2025). Furthermore, the stable and predictable Canadian economy offers a sense of security that is often absent in Nigeria, where economic fluctuations and uncertainty can significantly impact career trajectories. This promise of economic stability, coupled with the potential for significant career advancement, makes Canada a highly attractive destination for Nigerian intending migrants seeking a brighter financial future. The prospect of upward mobility and the ability to provide a better life for their families are powerful motivators for many Nigerians considering migration (Arhin-Sam, 2023).

Access to Quality Education: Investing in Future Generations

Education is deeply valued within Nigerian society, and the desire to provide children with access to a high-quality education system is a significant driver of migration decisions. While Nigeria has made progress in expanding access to education, the quality of instruction, infrastructure, and resources available in many Nigerian schools and universities can fall short of international standards. This deficiency motivates many Nigerian parents to seek educational opportunities for their children in countries like Canada (Korinya & Dansale, 2025). Canada boasts a world-renowned education system, characterized by its emphasis on critical thinking, innovation, and practical application of knowledge. Canadian universities consistently rank among the top institutions globally, offering a wide range of programs and research opportunities. Furthermore, the Canadian government invests heavily in education, ensuring that schools and universities have the resources necessary to provide a high-quality learning experience (Al Jazeera, 2023).



For Nigerian families, the prospect of their children attending Canadian schools and universities is particularly appealing. The rigorous academic standards, diverse learning environments, and exposure to international perspectives offered by Canadian education institutions are seen as crucial factors in preparing their children for success in the globalized world. Moreover, access to student loans and scholarships, coupled with the relatively affordable tuition fees compared to other developed countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, makes Canada a financially viable option for many Nigerian families seeking to invest in their children's future (Bailey et al, 1997).

Canadian Immigration Policies and Programs: A Welcoming Gateway

Canada's immigration policies and programs are deliberately designed to attract skilled workers and contribute to the country's economic growth and social development. Unlike many other developed nations that have adopted more restrictive immigration policies, Canada maintains a relatively open and transparent immigration system, making it a more accessible destination for aspiring migrants. Programs like the Express Entry system, Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs), and family sponsorship programs provide various pathways for Nigerians to immigrate to Canada. The Express Entry system, in particular, rewards candidates based on factors such as age, education, work experience, and language proficiency, creating a merit-based system that favors skilled professionals and graduates. Provincial Nominee Programs allow Canadian provinces to nominate individuals who possess skills and experience that are in demand within their specific regions, further expanding the opportunities for Nigerian migrants to find suitable pathways to permanent residency (Barnes, 2007).

The Canadian government has also actively promoted its immigration programs in Nigeria through various outreach initiatives, including information sessions, recruitment drives, and collaborations with educational institutions and professional organizations (Adegbe, 2025). These efforts have increased awareness among Nigerians about the opportunities available in Canada and have facilitated the application process for many aspiring migrants. The relatively streamlined and transparent nature of the Canadian immigration system, coupled with the active promotion of its programs, makes Canada a more welcoming and accessible destination compared to other countries with more complex and restrictive immigration policies (Moore & Coomes, 2016).

Perceived Quality of Life and Social Security: A Foundation of Wellbeing

Beyond economic opportunities and access to education, the perceived quality of life and social security offered in Canada are major factors attracting Nigerian intending migrants. Canada consistently ranks high in global indices measuring quality of life, based on factors such as healthcare, safety, environmental quality, and political stability. Access to universal healthcare is a significant draw for many Nigerians, where healthcare services can be expensive and access to quality care is often limited, particularly in rural areas. The Canadian healthcare system provides free or heavily subsidized healthcare services to all permanent residents, ensuring that individuals have access to the medical care they need without incurring significant financial burdens (Briney, 2019).



Furthermore, Canada boasts a relatively low crime rate and a safe and secure environment, providing a sense of peace of mind that is often absent in Nigeria, where security concerns are a significant issue. The Canadian government also provides a robust social safety net, including unemployment benefits, social assistance programs, and affordable housing options, ensuring that individuals and families have a support system in place during times of need. The combination of access to universal healthcare, a safe and secure environment, and a strong social safety net contributes to a high quality of life that is highly appealing to Nigerian intending migrants seeking a more stable and secure future for themselves and their families. (Filani. 1999)

Strong Nigerian Diaspora: A Network of Support and Integration

The presence of a thriving and supportive Nigerian diaspora in Canada plays a crucial role in influencing the decision of intending migrants to choose Canada as their destination. Over the years, a significant number of Nigerians have immigrated to Canada, establishing vibrant communities in major cities such as Toronto, Calgary, and Edmonton. These communities provide a network of support, guidance, and resources for newly arrived migrants, facilitating their integration into Canadian society. The Nigerian diaspora in Canada offers a sense of familiarity and cultural connection, easing the transition for newcomers who may be experiencing culture shock or homesickness. Community organizations, cultural associations, and religious institutions provide platforms for Nigerians to connect with one another, share their experiences, and celebrate their cultural heritage. These networks offer practical assistance, such as help with finding accommodation, employment, and navigating the Canadian system. Moreover, the success stories of Nigerians who have thrived in Canada serve as inspiration and encouragement for intending migrants. The presence of successful Nigerian professionals, entrepreneurs, and community leaders in Canada demonstrates the potential for achievement and integration, reinforcing the perception of Canada as a land of opportunity. The existence of a strong and supportive diaspora network provides a sense of comfort and reassurance, making Canada a more attractive and less daunting destination for Nigerian intending migrants (Udo, 1970).

Perception of Canadian migration policies among Nigeria Migrants

The perception of Canadian migration policies among Nigerian migrants is not monolithic; rather, it is shaped by a range of factors including socio-economic background, educational attainment, access to technology and information, and personal experiences with the application process. Generally, Canada's immigration system, with its emphasis on skilled workers and family reunification, is viewed positively as a structured and potentially fair system compared to those of other popular destination countries. The Express Entry system, in particular, is perceived as transparent and points-based, offering a clear pathway for skilled professionals to gain permanent residency. This system is lauded for its objective criteria, allowing applicants to gauge their chances of success and plan accordingly. Nigerian migrants with strong educational qualifications, professional experience, and language proficiency often see Express Entry as a viable route to achieving their Canadian dream (Filani, 1999).



However, this positive perception is often tempered by the complexities and challenges inherent in the application process. The sheer volume of applications and the competitive nature of the point-based system can be discouraging, particularly for those who may not possess the "ideal" profile. The cost associated with the application process, including language proficiency tests, credential evaluations, and legal representation, can also be a significant barrier for many Nigerians. Furthermore, the perceived arbitrariness of certain criteria, such as the emphasis on specific skills and work experience deemed "in-demand" in Canada, can lead to frustration and a feeling that the system is not fully reflective of the skills and potential of Nigerian professionals. The lack of recognition for Nigerian qualifications and professional experience can also be a significant hurdle, often requiring migrants to undergo further education or training in Canada to secure employment in their field (Udo, 1975).

The perceived accessibility and efficiency of Canadian immigration information also play a crucial role in shaping perceptions. While the Canadian government provides extensive information online, the sheer volume of data can be overwhelming for many. The accessibility of this information is also dependent on access to technology and internet connectivity, which can be limited for some Nigerians, particularly those in rural areas. Consequently, many migrants rely on anecdotal information from friends and family, which can be unreliable or outdated. Immigration consultancies and agents play a significant role in providing guidance and support, but their services can be expensive and their advice may not always be in the best interest of the applicant. Therefore, a clearer, more concise, and culturally sensitive communication strategy from the Canadian government is crucial to ensure that potential Nigerian migrants have access to accurate and reliable information (Kirk-Green et al, 2023).

Family reunification is another critical aspect of Canadian immigration policy that resonates strongly with Nigerian migrants. The opportunity to sponsor family members, including spouses, children, and parents, is a major draw for many. However, the perceived lengthy processing times for family sponsorship applications can be a source of considerable stress and anxiety. The rigorous requirements for demonstrating genuine relationships and financial stability can also be challenging, particularly for those who may have limited financial resources or complex family situations. The geographical distance and separation from loved ones can take a significant emotional toll, highlighting the need for streamlined and more efficient family reunification processes (Badejo, 2023).

Beyond the application process, perceptions of Canadian society and culture are also shaped by pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences. The image of Canada as a multicultural and tolerant society is often a major factor in attracting Nigerian migrants. However, the reality of life in Canada can sometimes differ from these expectations. While Canada is generally considered to be a welcoming and inclusive country, Nigerian migrants may still face challenges related to cultural integration, discrimination, and social isolation. Finding employment that matches their qualifications and experience can also be difficult, leading to feelings of frustration and disillusionment. The perception of a "glass ceiling" preventing advancement for visible minorities in certain industries can also be a significant concern (McGinn, 2010).



Furthermore, the perceived political stability and social safety nets in Canada are strong attractions for Nigerian migrants who may be fleeing political instability, insecurity, or economic hardship in their home country. The Canadian healthcare system, education system, and social welfare programs are viewed as superior to those in Nigeria, offering a greater sense of security and opportunity for themselves and their children. However, the cost of living in Canada, particularly in major urban centres, can be a significant concern, especially for newly arrived migrants who may be struggling to find employment and establish themselves financially (McGinn, 2010).

Challenges faced by Nigerian intending migrants under Canadian policies

Canada represents a land of promise and a chance to build a more secure and fulfilling life. One of the foremost challenges is the complex and rigorous application process. Canadian immigration policies, particularly those under the Express Entry system, prioritize candidates with high levels of education, extensive work experience, and strong language proficiency. While many Nigerians possess these attributes, the process of documenting and verifying these credentials according to Canadian standards can be daunting. Educational credential assessments (ECAs) conducted by designated organizations often require significant time and resources, potentially exposing discrepancies or delays that can jeopardize an application (Georgina, 2025). Furthermore, verifying work experience, especially in the informal sector which constitutes a significant portion of the Nigerian economy, can be particularly challenging. Securing verifiable letters of recommendation and pay stubs that meet the stringent requirements of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) proves difficult for many applicants. The onus is placed squarely on the applicant to meticulously document their experience, and any perceived inconsistencies or gaps can lead to rejection (Sandfort, 2012).

Language proficiency in English and/or French is a critical component of the Canadian immigration system. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) serve as standardized measures of language ability, and achieving competitive scores is paramount for success. While English is widely spoken in Nigeria, the level of proficiency required for immigration purposes often demands dedicated preparation and significant financial investment in test fees and preparatory courses. Many aspiring migrants, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, struggle to afford the necessary resources to achieve the required scores, effectively excluding them from the selection pool. Moreover, the accent and dialectal variations in Nigerian English can sometimes be misunderstood or misinterpreted by examiners, potentially impacting test scores. This creates an unfair disadvantage for Nigerian applicants who may possess strong communication skills but struggle to adapt to the nuances of the standardized testing system (Dyce, 2013).

Economic barriers represent another significant obstacle. The Canadian immigration system requires applicants to demonstrate sufficient funds to support themselves and their dependents upon arrival. The required settlement funds, which are adjusted annually based on family size, can be a substantial sum, often exceeding the annual income of many Nigerian families. Gathering these funds can necessitate drawing on personal savings, borrowing from family and friends, or even selling assets. The instability of the Nigerian economy and the volatility of the Naira



exchange rate further complicate matters, making it difficult to predict and plan for the financial requirements of immigration accurately. Furthermore, the cost of application fees, medical examinations, and travel arrangements can be prohibitive, especially for those residing outside major urban centres. These financial burdens effectively limit access to the Canadian immigration system to a select few, often those with significant financial resources or access to international funding (Myfanwy et al, 2025).

Beyond the tangible requirements of documentation, language, and finances, Nigerian intending migrants often face subtle yet significant challenges related to perceived credibility and the risk of visa refusal. Due to past instances of fraudulent applications and visa overstays, Canadian immigration officials may scrutinize applications from Nigeria with heightened vigilance. This can manifest in more frequent requests for additional documentation, lengthy processing times, and a higher likelihood of interviews. The burden of proof rests on the applicant to demonstrate their genuine intention to abide by Canadian immigration laws and to return to Nigeria if their temporary residency status expires. Establishing strong ties to Nigeria, such as owning property, having significant family responsibilities, or demonstrating a clear career trajectory in their home country, becomes crucial in mitigating these concerns. However, for many Nigerians, particularly those seeking asylum or fleeing persecution, demonstrating these ties may be impossible or even counterproductive (Maxwell & Justin, 2018).

Furthermore, Canadian immigration policies regarding family reunification, while intended to promote social cohesion and integration, can present challenges for Nigerian migrants. The eligibility requirements for sponsoring family members are often stringent, demanding significant income levels and proof of financial stability. The waiting times for family sponsorship applications can also be lengthy, causing prolonged separation and emotional distress. For Nigerian migrants who have left behind elderly parents or dependent children, the prospect of being separated for extended periods can be emotionally taxing and financially challenging. The inability to easily reunite with family can hinder integration into Canadian society and limit their ability to contribute fully to the Canadian economy (De Haas, 2010).

The dynamic nature of Canadian immigration policies further exacerbates these challenges. Regular changes in eligibility criteria, points systems, and application procedures necessitate continuous adaptation and updated information. Nigerian intending migrants must remain vigilant in monitoring these changes and adjusting their applications accordingly. This requires access to reliable information sources, legal advice, and the ability to navigate the complexities of the IRCC website and application portals. Those lacking these resources are at a significant disadvantage and may inadvertently make errors that jeopardize their chances of success (Xhardez & Tanquay, 2024).

Implications for Nigerian Development

Migration is a topic everyone ranging from politicians to shopkeepers has an opinion on and that is in the news almost every day. People are interested in migration because almost everyone is affected by migration, directly or indirectly. Migration affects all areas of life, social, economic



and political which makes the analysis of migration extremely relevant as well as more complicated. Canada's migration policies, characterized by a points-based system prioritizing skilled workers, family reunification programs, and pathways for international students, directly influence the profile of Nigerian migrants. The emphasis on education, language proficiency, and professional experience attracts highly skilled individuals, often referred to as “brain drain.” The Canadian government's initiatives like the Express Entry system, Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs), and international student programs create accessible and well-defined pathways for qualified Nigerians to obtain permanent residency. The relatively stable political and economic climate in Canada, coupled with the promise of higher wages and better access to healthcare and education, further incentivizes migration. Consequently, Nigeria experiences a loss of its most educated and talented citizens, impacting its human capital base and hindering its capacity for sustainable development (Paquet & Lawlor, 2022).

Those who migrate are often the youths leading to high school drop-out, loss of labour and averagely literate groups from rural communities. This leads to increased pressure on infrastructural facilities like housing, water supply etc.; poverty and the growth of urban slums. The family structure is gradually weakening as a result of migration; young men and women are exposed to societal vagaries from which they may not be recover in adulthood; the family security which children enjoyed by virtue of the presence of both parents is being lost. It has become a thing of pride to have at least one member of the household living outside the shores of the country in Nigeria. The picture that readily comes to mind is that of prosperity and unlimited opportunities for other members of the household or extended family to benefit from the success of the first person. This would appear logical given that the ‘member abroad’ would send some foreign currency home, eventually get established and be able to give information that could help others access the same opportunity (Okafor & Kalu, 2023).

One of the most significant implications of this migration pattern is the loss of skilled professionals in crucial sectors. Nigeria, facing significant challenges in healthcare, engineering, technology, and education, relies heavily on its skilled workforce to address these issues. The emigration of doctors, nurses, engineers, IT specialists, and academics leaves critical gaps in these sectors, weakening the capacity to deliver essential services and hindering economic growth. If you take into consideration for instance, the country’s health and education sectors, you will see there are levels of brain drain especially in the health sector. It is on record that because of the government’s unfriendly attitudes to the welfare of workers that many of the best brains are leaving the shores of the country in search for greener pastures in Canada. The health sector in the last decades has suffered greatly because there those who are professionally trained to do the job are not been paid handsomely thereby making them consider countries in Canada where their services are needed and paid for with handsomely and friendly packages. And it is heart breaking that there is no single sector in Nigeria presently, especially those that requires special skills that are without brain drain (Ikwuyatun, 2016).

This sector is not alone as a lot of the scholars who were sent on scholarships abroad no longer feel comfortable to return home because of poor conditions of service in the Nigeria university



system. Furthermore, the migration of highly educated and skilled individuals often leads to a decline in innovation and entrepreneurship within Nigeria. The absence of these individuals, who are often the driving force behind technological advancements and the development of new businesses, can stifle economic diversification and reduce Nigeria's competitiveness in the global market. The loss of potential innovators and entrepreneurs limits the country's ability to create employment opportunities and generate wealth, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. This "brain drain" effect also undermines the effectiveness of educational institutions and research facilities within Nigeria, as experienced faculty and researchers seek opportunities in countries with better resources and research infrastructure (Akindele, 2013).

However, the impact of Canadian migration policies on Nigerian development is not entirely negative. Remittances sent back to Nigeria by migrants in Canada constitute a significant source of foreign exchange, contributing to household income and national economic growth. These remittances often provide crucial financial support for families back home, enabling them to invest in education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship. This influx of capital can stimulate local economies, create jobs, and improve the overall quality of life for many Nigerians. While remittances may not directly address the systemic issues hindering national development, they offer a vital safety net and a source of empowerment for individuals and communities.

Moreover, the migration of Nigerians to Canada can indirectly contribute to skills transfer and knowledge exchange. Many Nigerian professionals in Canada gain valuable experience and expertise in their respective fields, often working in cutting-edge industries and environments. This exposure to best practices, innovative technologies, and international standards can be invaluable if and when these individuals choose to return to Nigeria or collaborate on projects with Nigerian institutions. The prospect of attracting diaspora professionals back to Nigeria, even for short-term consultancies or collaborative ventures, can significantly enhance the skills base and contribute to the modernization of various sectors (Gamlen, 2014).

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the evolution and effects of Canadian immigration policies on the migration aspirations of Nigerians between 2012 and 2023. It finds that while Canadian policies have opened new migration channels through transparent points-based systems and study pathways, they have also introduced selective constraints that filter and regulate access. These changes have generated mixed responses; hope, anxiety, and recalibration among Nigerian migrants, particularly those from middle-class and skilled backgrounds.

The research highlights a paradox: while Canada remains a beacon for opportunity, it simultaneously reinforces gatekeeping mechanisms that subtly disadvantage applicants from the Global South. For Nigeria, the steady outflow of talent, spurred in part by the perception of accessible Canadian pathways, deepens the challenges of brain drain and weakens domestic capacity building.



To address this dual challenge, policy makers in both countries must rethink the long-term consequences of one-sided migration flows. Canada must balance inclusivity with equity in its migration policy, especially in relation to economic and cultural diversity. Nigeria, on the other hand, must create viable conditions, through job creation, education reform, and diaspora engagement, that reduce the compulsion to migrate. Without such bilateral and systemic approaches, the aspirations of Nigerian migrants will continue to collide with the shifting contours of Canadian immigration law

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