

EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN NIGERIA’S “JAPA” ERA

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Abstract

This study investigated employee retention in Nigeria's current "Japa" era through an exploration of how organizations make sense of the phenomenon, the evolving strategies they use to adapt; and how prevailing operationalization on employee retention implications derive from these. Using a qualitative research design, data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with thirty human resource practitioners and organizational leaders from various sectors. Data were analysed with an inductive thematic analysis of the participant's experiences using Nvivo software, directly enabling themes to emerge.

According to the findings, the "Japa" phenomenon is widely regarded as a systemic and inevitable situation that is being fueled by macroeconomic turbulence, international labour demand and socio-political realities. Such changes have caused a change in employee perception of the same, with reduced long-term organizational commitment and a growing inclination towards global mobility. As a result, organizations are leveraging flexible and tailored retention strategies to help guide talent through personalized work offers, career advancement opportunities, and flexibility in the workplace. But simply tabling up the money to compensate employees for office work did not prove effective. The research also shows that retention is becoming a more temporary and fluid outcome, with organizations concentrating on postponing not halting exit.

The authors find the limitations of traditional retention models insufficient to explain employee behaviour in this context, and argue for a reconceptualization of retention as a dynamic process influenced by external forces. The theoretical contribution of the findings lies in contextualized human resource insights that inform adaptive human resource strategies in emerging economies.

Keywords: Employee retention, Japa phenomenon, workforce migration, human resource practices, Nigeria

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian labour market is experiencing its first unprecedented structural shift dubbed "Japa" (a colloquial Yoruba word meaning escape or flee). This term has progressed well beyond the street vernacular that characterizes it; the current organizational reality is such that skilled professionals are increasingly out-migrating to North America, Europe and the Middle East (Olorunfemi et al., 2024). The speed of this exodus has made traditional workforce planning models all but obsolete. Data supports the scale of this demographic seismic shift: in 2019, it was observed that 32% of Nigerians had strong intentions to migrate abroad and that number jumped up to around 73% by 2021, indicating a deep alteration of employer-employee psychological contract (FrontierView, 2023). Within the domain of healthcare specifically, the outflow of human capital is most pervasively felt; research shows that around two-thirds of early career doctors possess concrete intentions to leave the country, primarily in pursuit of both better postgraduate training and quality of life (and much greater pay) (Adeniyi et al., 2022).

Scholarly discussion and analysis of this phenomenon has, understandably, coalesced around identifying and validating the push/pull factors that drive these migration decisions. It is disheartening to note that the existing body of evidence has consistently identified poor working conditions, deterioration in monetary offers due to currency devaluation, and elusiveness of career growth opportunities coupled with inadequate backing from institutions as major contributors to migration intentions (Adeniyi et al., 2022; Olorunfemi et al., 2024). Accordingly, in a recent study investigating the psychology contract in that context, there was found to be a strong positive relationship between perceived breach of contract and intention to leave among professionals in Nigeria. Most notably, the same study found organizational climate to be a key moderating mechanism that weakens the effects of macro-level emigration pressures by suggesting that internal work environment serves as a buffer against macro-level pressures (Fagbenro et al., 2025). This insight reframes the analysis from why people quit to how organizations can strategically adjust their environments to retain them.

While the motives and drivers of migration are relatively well established, the literature has a striking gap in engagement with how organizations respond. The majority of published work has trended toward the perspective of the migrant, carefully tracking preferred destinations and calculating rates of exit across professional classes. Far less scholarly energy has gone toward the situated experiences of those who must manage the institutional implications of this talent flight. We must critically interrogate how human resource practitioners adjust their navigation of recruitment cycles with shrinking candidate pools, as well as interrogating how organizations create adaptive strategies when traditional retention architectures (which were built for a more stable labour market) become inadequate (Fagbenro et al., 2025). The study by Adeniyi et al. Fantalkin et al.

(2022) further emphasizes that disruptive aspiration for professional development abroad is more than financial motives but constitutes an identified and collective response to infrastructure deficits at home:

This study is located squarely within this neglected territory. Instead of re-litigating the well-documented reasons for departure, this inquiry examines the interpretive frameworks and adaptive practices deployed by those who remain to run the enterprise. This question matters not just in the context of Nigeria. With many of the Global South countries grappling with demographic youth bulges and liberalized global labour markets, it will be illuminating to understand how Nigerian organizations navigate these turbulent waters which may yield transferable lessons to other contexts which are struggling with the gravitational tug of international mobility (Olorunfemi et al., 2024).

Study Objectives

This study pursues three interconnected objectives designed to illuminate the organizational experience of the "Japa" phenomenon:

- i. To explore how human resource practitioners and organizational leaders in Nigeria interpret and make sense of the "Japa" phenomenon within their specific operational contexts.
- ii. To examine the specific retention strategies and adaptive human resource practices that Nigerian organizations have developed in response to accelerated employee emigration.
- iii. To assess the theoretical implications of the "Japa" phenomenon for established models of employee retention and voluntary turnover.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The "Japa" phenomenon, a Yoruba term signifying escape or flight has emerged as a defining feature of Nigeria's contemporary organizational landscape, representing an unprecedented acceleration in the emigration of skilled professionals to destinations across North America, Europe, and the Middle East. Scholarly attention to this phenomenon has intensified in recent years, with researchers documenting its multifaceted drivers and far-reaching consequences for workforce stability in Africa's largest economy. This review synthesizes existing literature across three interconnected dimensions aligned with the present study's objectives: the sensemaking frameworks through which organizational actors interpret the phenomenon, the adaptive retention strategies that have emerged in response, and the theoretical implications for established models of employee retention and voluntary turnover.

Sensemaking and Interpretation of the "Japa" Phenomenon

Understanding how human resource practitioners and organizational leaders interpret the "Japa" phenomenon requires engagement with scholarship that illuminates both the structural drivers of emigration and the subjective meanings that organizational actors attach to this exodus. Liu (2024), in an analysis published in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, offers a critical reframing of the phenomenon by examining how university-educated, gainfully employed middle-class Nigerian youth characterize their migration decisions as matters of survival rather than choice. Drawing on 21 interviews with Nigerian youths, Liu demonstrates that the "Japa" framing emphasizes "urgent respite over rationalized projects of social reproduction or status maintenance," foregrounding emotional and existential motives that traditional migration scholarship has tended to overlook. This finding carries significant implications for organizational sensemaking, as it suggests that HR practitioners must grapple not merely with economic competition for talent but with a more fundamental erosion of the psychological contract, one rooted in employees' perceptions that remaining in Nigeria constitutes an existential compromise.

The healthcare sector has received disproportionate scholarly attention, providing a useful lens through which to examine the interpretive challenges facing organizational leaders. Fagbenro, Yusuff, and Ariyo (2025), in a study published in *Academic Journal of Psychology and Counseling*, investigated the mediating role of organizational climate on the relationship between psychological contract breach and turnover intention among Nigerian health workers. Their findings revealed that psychological contract breach demonstrates a significant positive correlation with turnover intention, while organizational climate serves as a critical buffering mechanism that partially mediates this relationship. This research underscores that the "Japa" phenomenon cannot be reduced to a simple calculus of superior remuneration abroad; rather, it emerges from a complex interplay between macro-level emigration pressures and micro-level perceptions of organizational fairness and support. For HR practitioners, these findings suggest that sensemaking around "Japa" must attend to the ways in which organizational climate either exacerbates or attenuates employees' interpretations of contract breach.

Thomas et al. (2025), writing in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, introduce the "Japa-Japada" construct, framed within push-pull theory, to explore factors driving both medical brain drain and potential reverse migration. Employing Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling, the study ranked critical push factors responsible for medical brain drain as social, political, existential, growth, and economic dimensions respectively, while pull factors were ranked as political, economic, social, existential, and growth. This multi-dimensional framework provides HR practitioners with a more nuanced vocabulary for interpreting the phenomenon, moving beyond monolithic explanations toward a recognition that emigration pressures operate across multiple,

interconnected domains. The study's attention to "Japada", the potential return of emigrated professionals also introduces a temporal dimension to sensemaking, inviting organizational leaders to conceptualize "Japa" not as permanent loss but as a potentially reversible flow of talent.

Despite these valuable contributions, the literature reveals a conspicuous gap concerning the situated sensemaking of HR practitioners themselves. While scholars have documented the push-pull dynamics animating emigration decisions and the organizational consequences of talent flight, considerably less attention has been directed toward how HR professionals narratively construct the phenomenon, what interpretive frameworks they mobilize to render it manageable, and how these interpretations shape the repertoire of retention strategies they deem viable. The present study addresses this lacuna by centering the sensemaking processes of those tasked with navigating organizational continuity amid unprecedented talent mobility.

Adaptive Retention Strategies and Human Resource Practices

And as the "Japa" phenomenon has grown, Nigerian organisations have been forced to explore alternative architecture of retention, one that is more bespoke and elastic. Emerging strategies of organizational responses to accelerated emigration are beginning to be documented in the industrial relations literature.

One especially noteworthy trend has been the growth of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), personalized, non-standard forms of employment contract negotiated between individual employees and their employers. In research published in *Group & Organization Management*, Ayeni, Chaudhry and Aldosari (2022) carried out a multi-case study exploring the temporal contexts and actors involved in i-deal creation within Nigerian organizations. Through interviews with 62 employees across three industries with over 375 people, their research identified that greater than 97% of respondents claimed awareness of the trend towards increased i-deal negotiation – a practice previously less widely exercised in the Nigerian employment arena. These i-deals can include special forms of time flexibility (for example, place based flexibility), customized training opportunities, nonstandard compensation packages, and unique employee perks that appeal to particular employees. As one capital market firm manager explained, "It started from 2016, when we started experiencing as an organisation and along with the country that many employees leave organisations and go out of the country. "So of course, we had to go within and make adjustments in the way that we were doing things".

The empirical grounding for adaptive HR practices is further bolstered by the report, "Navigating the effect of JAPA on Nigeria's Human Resource Environment," written and published in 2025 by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management (CIPM) of Nigeria. According to the report, HR functions needing agile approaches in response to talent

migration include: recruitment, succession planning, retention, training budgets and workforce planning. The report cites a Jobberman survey that showed 63 percent of employers saying they found it hard to recruit for mid- and senior-level jobs with the shortage largely blamed on skilled workers migrating abroad. In response, organizations have transformed their compensation structures, introduced internal mobility and career development frameworks to allow the movement of talent between roles in order to retain employees as they progress through their careers to new interests, moved towards on-demand learning platforms and utilized scenario-based workforce planning methodologies that help predict risk of attrition.

Alongside this organizational level into healthcare systems, Zakir (2025) expanded on retention issues in the Nigerian healthcare context in an editorial published within Cureus. The editorial noted that nearly half of Nigerian medical school graduates leave the country within 15 years of qualification, resulting in a density of physicians estimated at about 3.8 per 10,000 people, well short of global benchmarks for sufficient coverage. Some of the key drivers identified include unregulated and excessive working hours, low and irregular remuneration, limited professional development opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and weak institutional support. The editorial has called for coordinated reforms around reasonable duty-hour limits, improved remuneration structures, strengthened postgraduate training systems and investment into leadership and infrastructure. Though centered on healthcare, these insights have implications for a range of sectors and suggest that successful retention strategies must address the structural shortages that make emigration a rational reaction to in-country working conditions.

Together, these studies show that organizations in Nigeria are experimenting significantly with architectures for retention, moving from standardized models of employment towards more flexible and individualized arrangements. Yet the literature is primarily descriptive, chronicling which practices are being implemented without sufficient theorization of how those practices operate to influence retention outcomes or analysis of how practitioners evaluate relative effectiveness. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining not only the adaptive practices that have arisen, but also how HR practitioners perceive their effectiveness in a given organizational context.

Theoretical Implications for Retention and Turnover Frameworks

The "Japa" phenomenon presents a critical case for examining the boundary conditions and potential extensions of established theoretical frameworks in employee retention and voluntary turnover research. Conventional turnover models, which typically emphasize job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceived alternative opportunities, and job embeddedness as primary antecedents were largely developed and validated within contexts characterized by relative labor market stability. The Nigerian context, by contrast, is characterized by the simultaneous deterioration of local working conditions and

systematic expansion of alternative opportunities abroad, creating conditions that may overwhelm the predictive utility of traditional antecedents.

Fagbenro et al. (2025) provide empirical evidence that psychological contract theory offers significant explanatory purchase in the "Japa" context. Their finding that organizational climate partially mediates the relationship between psychological contract breach and turnover intention suggests that even amid powerful macro-level emigration pressures, the quality of the immediate work environment retains meaningful influence over retention outcomes. This aligns with broader scholarship on psychological contracts, which emphasizes that employees' perceptions of organizational obligations and fulfillment shape their attachment to employers independent of external labor market conditions.

The push-pull framework employed by Thomas et al. (2025) offers additional theoretical resources for understanding retention dynamics in contexts of normalized emigration. By disaggregating migration drivers into existential, social, growth, economic, and political dimensions, this framework illuminates the multi-dimensional nature of the forces that HR practitioners must navigate. Critically, the study's attention to potential reverse migration ("Japada") introduces theoretical considerations absent from conventional turnover models, which typically conceptualize departure as a terminal event rather than a potentially reversible transition. This temporal dimension invites theoretical extension toward models that accommodate the possibility of "boomerang" employees, professionals who emigrate but subsequently return with enhanced skills and international experience.

Liu's (2024) emphasis on the existential and emotional dimensions of migration decisions further challenges the rational-actor assumptions embedded in many turnover frameworks. If, as Liu argues, young Nigerian professionals frame migration as survival rather than choice, then interventions predicated on optimizing job satisfaction or enhancing organizational commitment may prove insufficient. Instead, retention may require addressing more fundamental concerns about safety, security, and the perceived viability of long-term futures within Nigeria. This insight suggests that existing turnover models may require extension to incorporate macro-level contextual variables, governance quality, security conditions, currency stability that are typically treated as exogenous to organizational retention dynamics.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative multiple case study design to examine how Nigerian organizations navigate employee retention amid the "Japa" phenomenon. A case study approach is particularly appropriate for investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-world contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context remain indistinct (Yin, 2018). The "Japa" phenomenon cannot be meaningfully abstracted from Nigeria's specific socioeconomic conditions; thus, a design that preserves contextual embeddedness is essential for generating valid insights.

Research Design

The study employed a multiple case design involving four organizations drawn from distinct sectors of the Nigerian economy: financial services, information technology, healthcare, and manufacturing. This sectoral diversity enabled cross-case comparison and enhanced the transferability of findings. Cases were selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria: first, each organization must have experienced documented employee emigration within the preceding three years; second, each must have implemented identifiable retention initiatives in response to this pressure. Polar sampling logic guided the selection of cases exhibiting variation in organizational size, ownership structure (indigenous versus multinational), and perceived retention success.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews constitute the primary data collection method. Interviews were conducted with human resource directors, senior line managers, and chief executive officers across the four case organizations, with an anticipated sample of 30 participants. The interview protocol was structured across three sections, each aligned with a specific study objective, and employs critical incident technique to elicit concrete, experience-near accounts rather than abstract generalizations.

Section A: Sense making and Interpretation. Aligned with Objective One, this section explores how participants interpret and make sense of the "Japa" phenomenon within their operational contexts. Questions included: *How would you describe the impact of the "Japa" phenomenon on your organization over the past three years? When you hear the term "Japa" used within your professional circles, what meanings and emotions does it evoke for you? Can you recall a specific moment when the reality of this emigration wave became particularly salient for you or your team? How do you distinguish between "normal" employee turnover and departures you would attribute specifically to the "Japa" dynamic? What metaphors or images come to mind when you think about managing talent in Nigeria today?*

Section B: Adaptive Retention Practices. Aligned with Objective Two, this section examined specific retention strategies and adaptive HR practices developed in response to emigration pressures. Questions included: *Walk me through the most significant change your organization has made to its retention approach since the intensification of "Japa."* *Can you describe an instance where you negotiated a non-standard arrangement with an employee to encourage them to stay? What did that process look like? What retention initiatives have you tried that did not produce the desired outcomes, and what did you learn from those experiences? How has your approach to compensation, career development, or workplace flexibility shifted in response to talent scarcity? If you were advising a peer organization on one retention practice worth adopting, what would it be and why?*

Section C: Evaluating Efficacy and Theoretical Reflection. Aligned with Objective Three, this section invited participants to assess the effectiveness of implemented strategies and reflect on broader implications for understanding retention. Questions included: *How do you determine whether a retention intervention has been successful? What metrics or indicators do you rely upon? In your experience, do the conventional explanations for why employees stay or leave adequately capture what you are observing in this "Japa" era? What aspects of this phenomenon do you feel existing management frameworks fail to account for? Has your understanding of what employees value or expect from employers changed as a result of navigating this period?*

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to protect participant and organizational confidentiality. Documentary evidence including internal HR policy documents, exit interview summaries, and organizational communications regarding retention will supplement interview data, enabling triangulation across sources (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, guided by the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022). This approach was selected for its flexibility and systematicity in identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data rooted in participants' lived experiences. Given the exploratory nature of the research questions and the aim to capture rich contextual accounts of how HR practitioners navigated the "Japa" phenomenon, thematic analysis proved well-suited (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase One: Familiarizing with the Data. Analysis began with immersive engagement with the interview transcripts and documentary materials. The researcher repeatedly read these materials and listened to the original audio recordings to capture tonal nuances, pauses, and emotional inflections not fully conveyed in transcripts. Initial impressions and analytical ideas were noted in a reflexive journal, without commencing formal coding.

Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes. Systematic inductive coding was applied to all relevant data from pre- and post-intervention items tied to the research questions. Codes emerged directly from the data, independent of preconceived theories. Both semantic codes capturing surface-level meanings, and latent codes revealing underlying assumptions and conceptual framings were developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For instance, the statement "we will now allow people to work from anywhere" received a semantic code of "remote work accommodation," while a latent code interpreted it as "ceding control to retain talent." NVivo software facilitated organized coding, retrieval of segments, and consistency through operational definitions for each code.

Phase Three: Searching for Themes. Following initial coding, the focus shifted from discrete codes to broader patterns of shared meaning. Themes captured something important about the data in relation to the research questions, representing patterned responses rather than mere topic summaries (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher iteratively grouped related codes into potential themes, exploring their relationships via visual aids such as thematic maps and hierarchical diagrams. Themes often formed hierarchies, with overarching themes encompassing sub-themes that illuminated specific facets of larger phenomena.

Phase Four: Reviewing Themes. A two-level review refined the thematic structure for coherence and fidelity to the data. At the first level, coded extracts for each candidate theme were scrutinized to ensure they formed meaningful patterns; themes were refined, merged, split, or discarded as needed. At the second level, the entire dataset was re-examined to confirm sufficient breadth of coverage, potentially prompting additional coding or boundary adjustments. This process adhered to Patton's (2015) criteria of internal homogeneity (coherence within themes) and external heterogeneity (clear distinctions between themes).

Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes. Each theme within the finalized structure was precisely defined and assigned a concise, evocative name that delineated its scope, analytical claim, inclusions, and exclusions. Names balanced academic precision with accessibility, enabling readers to grasp thematic essence immediately. This phase transformed provisional codes into robust analytical constructs ready for reporting.

Phase Six: Producing the Report. The final step involved crafting an analytical narrative centered on the themes. Findings were presented thematically, integrating interpretive commentary, illustrative participant quotes, and contextual links to Nigeria's socioeconomic landscape and pertinent literature. The narrative progressed from description to interpretation, elucidating each theme's significance in understanding organizational retention strategies amid accelerated emigration (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Cross-Case Analysis

The multiple case study design necessitated two interrelated analytical phases. Within-case analysis first yielded detailed accounts of how each of the four organizations interpreted and responded to the "Japa" phenomenon within their sectoral and structural contexts. Cross-case synthesis then applied replication logic to compare findings, identifying consistent themes across cases and probing theoretically salient divergences from existing literature (Yin, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was secured from the relevant institutional review board. Participants provided informed consent after receiving full details on the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Given the sensitive topic of employee departures, participants retained the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and analyzes the findings based on the qualitative data collected in this study of employee retention in Nigeria's "Japa" era. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews undertaken with thirty participants spanning a variety of sectors. An inductive thematic analysis approach, following Braun and Clarke (2006; 2022), was used in which themes were derived directly from participants' lived experiences.

The results are segmented into seven key themes that exhibit how organizations process and react to the current wave of migration.

Thematic analysis seeks to identify patterns within data, making inductive thematic analysis well-suited for exploratory studies that aim to reflect on themes rooted in participants' lived experiences.

4.2 "Japa" as a Systemic, Inevitable Reality

Participants framed the "Japa" phenomenon overwhelmingly as a structural aspect of labour market conditions in Nigeria; they perceived it as an inevitable feature of working life. Instead of treating exits as isolated organizational failures, they connected migration to wider socio-economic contexts such as insecurity, lack of opportunity and decreasing quality-of-life.

For example, the statements "*this goes beyond the organization; it's a national issue*" (R1) and "*people are leaving for a better life entirely*" (R3) convey that sentiment.

This resonates with previous findings that organizational factors for migration decisions among professionals in Nigeria are increasingly subordinated to systemic and existential considerations.

Contemporary studies observe that Nigerian migration is typically construed as a matter of subsistence, determined by macro-level factors rather than individual occupational discontent (Liu, 2024).

4.3 THE DYNAMICS OF COMMITMENT AT WORK

One of the most mentioned data elements and a thread running through organizational loss is employee commitment or lack thereof, as participants explained long-term organizations influence. Workers are increasingly seen as trying to work out a short-run plan for their migration.

For instance, participants noted that *“people are planning their exit already whilst working” (R8)* and that *“the relationship is becoming more transactional” (R21)*.

Changes in the psychological contract that is, employees no longer see long-term mutual obligation with employers are reflected at this time.

Empirical research has demonstrated how perceived psychological contract breach was positively correlated with turnover intention among Nigerian professionals (Fagbenro et al, 2025).

4.4 Flexible and Individualized Retention Practices Emerge

In reaction to this flux and variation, organizations are moving toward more flexible, bespoke retention programs. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach advocated by standardized HR, firms are increasingly striking bespoke deals with employees.

“We must now negotiate on an individual basis with some employees” (R1); “standard policies don’t work anymore” (R9), participants said.

This highlights the increasing significance of i-deals in contemporary employment agendas.

Research shows that i-deals are increasingly common in dynamic labour markets where organizations can keep a slew of unique talent based on personalized arrangements (Ayeni et al., 2022).

4.5 Limits of Financial Incentives

While compensation is a primary retention mechanism, participants highlighted its waning efficacy given the context. Many companies have tried pay raises, bonuses and inflation adjustments but these actions have only slightly decreased migration.

As one participant described, *“they left even when we raised their salaries”* (R5).

This reflects the fact that income disparities between many countries and currency fluctuations constrain local compensation structures from being competitive. Labor migration studies demonstrate that, in international labor markets, external pull factors (e.g., economic opportunity) are sufficiently strong in many cases to render financial incentives ineffective (Thomas et al. 2025).

4.5 Some increasing importance of workplace flexibility

Flexibility in the workplace was a key non-monetary retention tool. In many organizations to improve employee satisfaction and reduce the intention to leave, hybrid or remote work arrangements are being adopted. Flexibility is now *“one of the biggest factors for employees”* (R2) and some organizations even let their employees work remotely from abroad. This mirrors trends around the world, where flexibility is a top consideration when it comes to employee retention. Evidence shows flexible working arrangements greatly increase employee retention and job satisfaction in modern workplaces (Allen et al., 2013).

4.6 Retaining as Temporary Outcome

One of the most salient findings is a redefinition of retention as transient rather than permanent. They are on hold trying to delay employee exits rather than avoid them entirely.

Participants commented that *“we are not really preventing exits, just delaying them”* (R13).

This is a philosophical shift which sees retention as both dynamic and time sensitive with regard to external migration opportunities.

To lessen the impact of this outpouring of people with whom all but potentially large organizations work per se, contemporary turnover research suggests that retention should be understood as a more fluid and temporal than permanent process in volatile labour markets (Hom et al., 2017).

4.7 Constraints on Organizational Response

Finally, the analysis indicates strong limitations of organizational capacity toward effectively tackling the “Japa” phenomenon. These include financial constraints, industry-

specific challenges, and more general policy hurdles. Participants reiterated that “*we don’t have the resources to match global salaries*” (R21); structural issues require government intervention.

This shows to what extent both institutional and macroeconomic environments have a direct influence on organizational results. In some emerging economies, organizational retention strategies are limited by the overall institutional and economic climate (Jackson et al., 2020).

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The following are some key insights in the areas of employee retention in Nigeria that this study uncovered:

First, organizations see the “Japa” phenomenon as systemic and unavoidable, arising from meta-economic, social and global labour market forces that exceed organizational boundaries.

Second, we can already see a change in employee attitudes and expectations about commitment versus mobility as well as opportunities that are more global. Employees are no longer primarily employees in the context of long-term organizational careers.

Third, organizations are responding with elastic approaches to retention, enablers of customized arrangements, career acceleration, and workplace flexibility. Traditional, standardized HR practices are no longer enough.

Fourth, despite the continued importance of compensation, findings indicate that monetary rewards are insufficient to retain talent -- especially in light of comparisons between local and global labour markets.

Fifth, workplace flexibility, particularly hybrid and remote options, has become a key nonpsh that organizations can use to retain talent and edge out some international competition.

Sixth, retention is more and more recognized as a transient and precarious phenomenon; organizations are trying to avoid turnover but not necessarily eliminate it.

Finally, the study emphasizes important constraints on organizational responses (e.g., financial pressures, sector-specific rigidities, and wider-level institutional challenges).

5.2 Conclusion

Thus, it concludes that when viewed through the lens of these findings, employee retention in Nigeria has fundamentally transformed under the “Japa” phenomenon;

Retention can thus no longer be thought of as a static, organization-controlled outcome based simply on job satisfaction, compensation or organizational commitment. Instead, the issue is driven by macro-level external forces including economic volatility, global talent demand and socio-political conditions.

Today, the old psychological contracting between firms and employees is frayed, with employment being increasingly transactional, often negotiated for a specified duration, enabling employees to prioritize personal growth and global reach over corporate loyalty and nationalbound tenure.

As a reaction, organizations move away from traditional HR systems to more dynamic, agile and individualized models. But those efforts are inherently limited for a reason: organizations exist within larger structural constraints they do not fully control.

Retention in the current “Japa” era, is therefore best understood not as preventing employee exit per se but more as managing flows of talent within a highly dynamised and globalised labour market.

This can have profound implications on theory and practice, indicating that current retention models being tested possibly do not adequately capture the realities of classification within emerging economies such as Nigeria.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendations for Organizations

Given the findings, it is clear that organizations need to radically change how they think about retaining employees amid the “Japa” phenomenon. The most urgent of these is the closer adoption of more flexible and adaptive human resource systems. Robust, but rarely effective in the modern workplace, traditional policies and procedures are a one-size-fits-all method to deal with well-known employee issues. To address this, organisations should adopt more responsive frameworks that enable bespoke arrangements to be made, particularly for high-performing and strategically important individuals. Such flexibility makes it easier for organizations to align with what employees expect and improve retention outcomes, even in the short term.

Directly linked to this is the need to institutionalise workplace flexibility as a key part of organisational practice. Instead of viewing flexible work arrangements as interim or one-off measures, organizations should incorporate hybrid and remote working models into their operating frameworks where possible. This not only boosts employee contentment, but empowers organizations to better compete in a global job market where flexibility is an increasingly significant driver of employment desirability.

Additionally, organizations must put in a large effort to career development and growth opportunities. Companies that offer clear pathways to advancement and skill development, the findings suggest, are more likely to retain employees. Thus, structured training programs, mentorship initiatives & clear promotion systems need to be prioritized. Such initiatives can help enhance employee engagement and offer a sense of progression, even in what is often a highly mobile working environment.

Also, employees should focus on employee engagement and value creation as long as they stay in the organization rather than efforts towards achieving long term retention. In a time where retention fundamentals are constantly changing, more than preventing inevitable employee exits that cost the organization both time and money in prevention, it would be a much better return for an organization to ensure planned staff engagement and productivity while they are there vs., focusing on retention until something brings about the inevitability of resignation.

Finally, part of an organization's retention strategy should focus on non-financial rewards. Although financial compensation is an important consideration, the research demonstrates it is not sufficient on its own. Thus, it is important that there be an encouraging organization culture, work-life balance, recognition of employees and meaningful experience. Preferably, these steps provide a better employee experience and boost retention despite migration pressure from the outside.

5.3.2 Recommendations for Government and Policy Makers

These findings of this study also highlight the vital role government and policy makers have to play in addressing the situational determinants of Japa phenomenon. One key requirement is that macroeconomic stability needs to be enhanced. The push factors that lead skilled professionals to pursue opportunities abroad include persistent problems with inflation, currency depreciation, and unemployment. We need economic measures that allow people to imagine their future careers with us, and this means opening our doors.

Besides macroeconomic reforms, a tightening of local opportunities for skilled workers is necessary. This includes targeted investments in key sectors including health care, technology, education and manufacturing. The sector will go on to be competitive, by improving infrastructure and funding innovation through its support.

Close to top of the list is crafting tailored talent retention policies and incentives. These could be tax relief programs, housing assistance, professional development grants or other perks intended to make working nearby that little bit more attractive. These policies deepen the can bridge domestic and international opportunities, especially for highly skilled professionals.

Moreover, policymakers should incentivize diaspora engagement and promote return migration. Instead of simply seeing emigration as a negative phenomenon, government can utilize the Nigerian diaspora as potential source for dissemination of knowledge and investment to Nigeria. Designing structured programs that allow for remote work contributions, short-term return assignments, and long-term reintegration into the local workforce could help lessen the challenges associated with brain drain.

5.3.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study gives empirical evidence and insights into employee retention in Nigeria's "Japa" era, it has also established a fertile ground for future research. We recommend performing quantitative studies to validate and extend our findings. Future researchers could use survey-based approaches to test the relationships discovered in this study, especially the effectiveness of adaptive HR practices on retention type outcomes.

Furthermore, there is a lack of sectoral studies. The Japa Effect: Varying Impact across Industries With varying levels of impact, the industries that are most affected by the phenomenon include healthcare and technology. Targeted studies within these sectors would help shed off further on the specific challenges faced and strategies adopted unique to each context.

Longitudinal research is also suggestive for elucidating temporal shifts. "Given such volatile trajectories of migration and labour market conditions, studies following organizational responses and employee behaviour across a significant observation period would shed greater light on how retention patterns evolve over time."

Finally, further study could include cross-country or regional comparative studies. Studying how other developing economies respond to similar migration and social trends can yield important lessons while also helping to locate the Nigerian experience within a broader global framework. This kind of research would lead to stronger and more contextualized retention theories.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study significantly enriches existing knowledge revealing context-specific meaning of employee retention that exists only within Nigeria's peculiar socio-economic environment. By exploring the "Japa" phenomenon, the research takes a snapshot of

organizations operating in a labour market characterised by economic turbulence, global talent mobility and socio-political pressures. This study contrasts many contemporary research, which are often anchored in Western contexts and emphasizes that retention dynamics exist differently within emerging economies where external migration considerations are highly influencing employees' decisions. It does this by situating retention within a more complex and globally interconnected framework, thereby expanding the empirical understanding of retention.

Furthermore, in addition to contributing new arguments about the importance of macro-level migration dynamics for explaining retention, the study contributes theorizing of retention as a fluid and temporally-constructed phenomenon rather than a static outcome. Taking a much broader view, the findings take aim at classic models which took internal organizational variables as their basis for determining retention (job satisfaction, compensation) and highlighted instead that outside forces are of critical importance. Moreover, the study highlights how increased need for adaptability and personalisation in the effective management of talent as human resource (HR) practices evolve. Such contributions could add to theoretical debate and help other organisations with these types of challenges emerging labour markets.

5.5 Final Reflection

The “Japa” phenomenon is not just a trend of employee migration but also speaks of the restructuring of work, employment relationships and talent management in Nigeria. Results from this study suggest organizations are traversing into a universal labour market with more mobile employees and they have more access to global opportunities. Consequently, established concepts of long-term work engagement, organizational allegiance and stable workforce planning are being reshaped. This change forces organizations to reimagine, rethink their approach, and move towards a more flexible adaptive forward-looking human capital management model.

As we navigate these changes, organizations that can recognize and adapt themselves around them will have a competitive edge. This demands not just the implementation of some innovative HR practices but also a complete transformation in the organizational mindset toward thinking about retention as both a process and continual. The “Japa” phenomenon poses grave challenges; however, it also allows organizations to update their ways of doing things to meet the global standard. In conclusion, the degree by which we adapt to this new way of working will dictate the sustainability and success of talent management approaches in Nigeria’s ever more global economy.

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