

Youth Education and Migration in The Pandemic Era

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Abstract

Education is a life-long process of transforming an individual to become a functional member of the society. It is a veritable legacy by any government to ensure that the citizens receive adequate training that will promote development of the society. Youths are the leaders of tomorrow; they must be given adequate education and provided with the necessary ingredients that would promote their existence. Youth is a developmental period between 15-35 years. In Nigeria, a youth is a young person within the age of 18-35 years of age. Most youths are in institutions of higher learning where they are empowered for survival. Migration is a normal human activity, involving movement away from the place of origin to a new environment. This movement maybe due to the 'push and pull' factors. These are the reasons why youths exit their origin to a destination or host environment. There are five types of migration: labour migration, forced migration or displacement, human trafficking or modern slavery, environmental migration and sponsored temporary migration. Today, the entire world is experiencing a lot of challenges, including the devastating COVID-19 pandemic. In the face of all the challenges, youths are not daunted, in their characteristics, they still find ways and means of surviving, either formally or informally, by migrating to greener pastures. Illegal migration should be discouraged as it exposes the youth to great risks. The youth should be provided with quality, equitable, inclusive education for life-long living to embark on safe, beneficial and sustainable endeavours.

Keywords: Youth, Education, Migration, Push and Pull factors,

Introduction

Migration in a generic sense involves animals, man and information and communication technology (ICT). In all, migration entails movement from one place to another in search of a better, more useful, or beneficial and appropriate environment. When people move from their place of origin to a host community, in search of safety (asylum), greener pasture, union with family member(s), it is migration. Animals migrate when they move from one environment to another in search of a conducive environment. In technology, when data are transferred (copied) from one location to another (pasted), it is called migration. In this presentation, we are concerned with migration involving man –the youth. The key concepts are explained: education, youth and youth education and migration. The reasons for youth migration, types of migration, COVID-19 pandemic and youth education, are discussed. The challenges of and opportunities for youth migration amid the pandemic are presented. Then, the way forward for youth education and migration is proffered.

Education

Education is a process which starts from birth and ends at death. It is an on-going, life-long process, which provides knowledge, skills, values and attitude to the recipients. It is a means of transmitting the culture of a people to the next generation. Education focuses on making citizens of a culture functional; imbuing in them the required behaviours for them to survive and live sustainable life in the environment. Education exposes the learners to imbibe the right knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It deals with the empowerment of individuals to solve their personal problems and those of their societies. Education and society are two-way traffic.

The society sends the children to school to be educated. At the end, they are returned to the society to impact its development. It is an ‘instrument for national development and social

change'¹. Education is not synonymous with schooling. It involves a life-long learning and life-wide learning². Life-long learning means that one learns at all phases of life and at all routes of learning (childhood, adolescent, youth, adult). Life-wide learning entails learning in whatever positions or responsibilities one finds oneself. This is experiential.

Youth and Youth Education

Youth is normally regarded as the period of life between childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organization (WHO) under the United Nations officially revised the age standards in 2015³. A person is now seen as young before 44 years of age. According to the new classification, the young age is from 25-44 years, middle age is 44-60; elderly age is 60-75, senile age is 75-90 and long livers are after 90 years. This presentation focuses on the youth, which is 18 -44 years of age (see table 1).

¹Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) 2014. *National policy on education*, (Lagos: Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council Press, 2014).1-4.

²Obanya, PAI. *Educationeering*, (Ibadan: HEBN Publishers PLC, 2014), 55-68.

³Dyussenbayev, A. (2017). Ages periods in human life. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*. 4(6), 258-263.

Table 1 Classification of age by different International organizations

Entity/Instrument/Organization	Age	Reference
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO	Youth: 15-24	UN Instruments, Statistics
UN Habitat (Youth Fund)	Youth: 15-32	Agenda 21
UNICEF.WHO/UNFPA	Adolescent Youth: 15-32	UNFPA
UNICEF/ The Convention on Rights of the child	Child until 18	UNICEF
The African Youth Charter	Youth: 15-35	The African Union, 2006

Source : www.un.org/esa

There are no universally accepted international definitions of the youth age group. However, for statistical purposes, the United Nations without prejudice to any other definitions by Member States, defines youth as those persons between the ages of 15-24 years. This definition is flexible. According to the World Youth Report (2018), there are 1.2 billion youth aged 15-24 years, making for 16 per cent of the global population. These people need to be educated as they are the life wire of the society. Youth education is the training, empowerment and capacity building provided to young persons. In Nigeria, a youth is a young person between the age of 18 and 35 years. Most youths are in tertiary education. Tertiary education is training given after post basic education in institutions such as: colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics, universities and inter-university centres⁴.

⁴Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) 2014. National policy on education, (Lagos: Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council Press, 2014). 39.

Through education, youths are empowered to become future leaders. The youth is the age of strength. They think big, hope for the best and envision tomorrow. The youth turn their dreams into concrete actions⁵. The age is a phase of thorough and whole change, it transports one from one world to another. It is a phase of transition in terms of physique, mentality, society and environment. They like to explore; they have practical and pragmatic tendencies. Jahan⁵ believes that youths need quality education to function effectively. For him, people without education are like weapons without bullets.

Education is instrumental for the realization of one's innate self, strength, natural fitness and factual being. In the absence of it, one may choose improper path of life. Education helps the youth to quench the thirst for realizing their potentials.

So, they must be provided with the best possible education and facilitated with favourable conditions to attain their skills and contribute to the development of their communities. In this globalized and knowledge-based world, every young person should be given the opportunity to develop his or her potentials to bring about the needed change in behaviour.

Education is a means to reform the minds of the young people. Young people who lack education cannot differentiate between wrong and right, good and bad. They cannot impact their society. Rather they can be a clog in the wheel of societal development. The majority of the combatants, in Afghanistan, and Pakistan, members of Boko Haram, kidnappers, armed robbers, in Nigeria are the young people.

⁵Jahan, T. (2014). European Youth Insight. <https://europeansting.com/2014/10/03/how-can-education-empower-youth-to-become-tomorrows-leaders/>

They become problematic to the communities. Proper education is one way of handling these challenges. Education encompasses all developments. The environment and societal conditions determine the fate and destiny of the youth.

Education to the youth is as important as the soul is to the body. With proper education imparted to them, they can become productive, scientific-oriented, broad-minded, and ideal citizens of the society as the society is significantly influenced by this category of people. When the environment does not satisfy their needs, they seek for them elsewhere, hence, migration.

Migration

Migration simply means movement from one place to another. This movement can either be done by man or animal. There is also migration in computer, when data or software are moved from one location to another. In this presentation, our focus is movement by man, youth, to be specific. It can also be seen as an act of movement of persons from one country or locality to another.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM)⁶ explains migration as, movement of people who move away from their usual place of residence, whether within a country or to another, temporarily or permanently, and for various reasons⁷. So, for a layman, a migration is the movement of a person from one place to another. For example, we have migrant fishermen,

herdsmen, hunters, etc. Migration is a normal human activity. Man has always moved from one locality or place of residence to another. We move from our families into our homes. We migrate from our homes to regions, cities and towns. We also migrate to countries. These movements are as a result of some factors. Man is always looking for a more conducive environment or condition in which to live, a means of survival, or a greener pasture.

According to IOM⁶ migration is movement of people from one geographical area to another. When people leave their place of residence (origin) to live in another area (host), it is migration. Migration can be permanent or temporary with the intention of returning to the original home in future.

Reasons for Youth Migration

There are a number of reasons why young people migrate. These reasons are termed the ‘Push’ and ‘Pull’ factors⁷. The ‘Push’ factors are the reasons why young people want to leave their countries or places of residence; while the ‘Pull’ factors are the reasons why they want to go to a country. The Push/Pull factors are shown in figure 1 below.

⁶International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2019).<https://www.iom.int/who-migrant-0>

⁷Woldeab, R. (2019). Why do people migrate? The 4 most common types of migration.
<https://populationeducation.org/why-do-people-migrate-the-4-most-common-types-of-migration/>

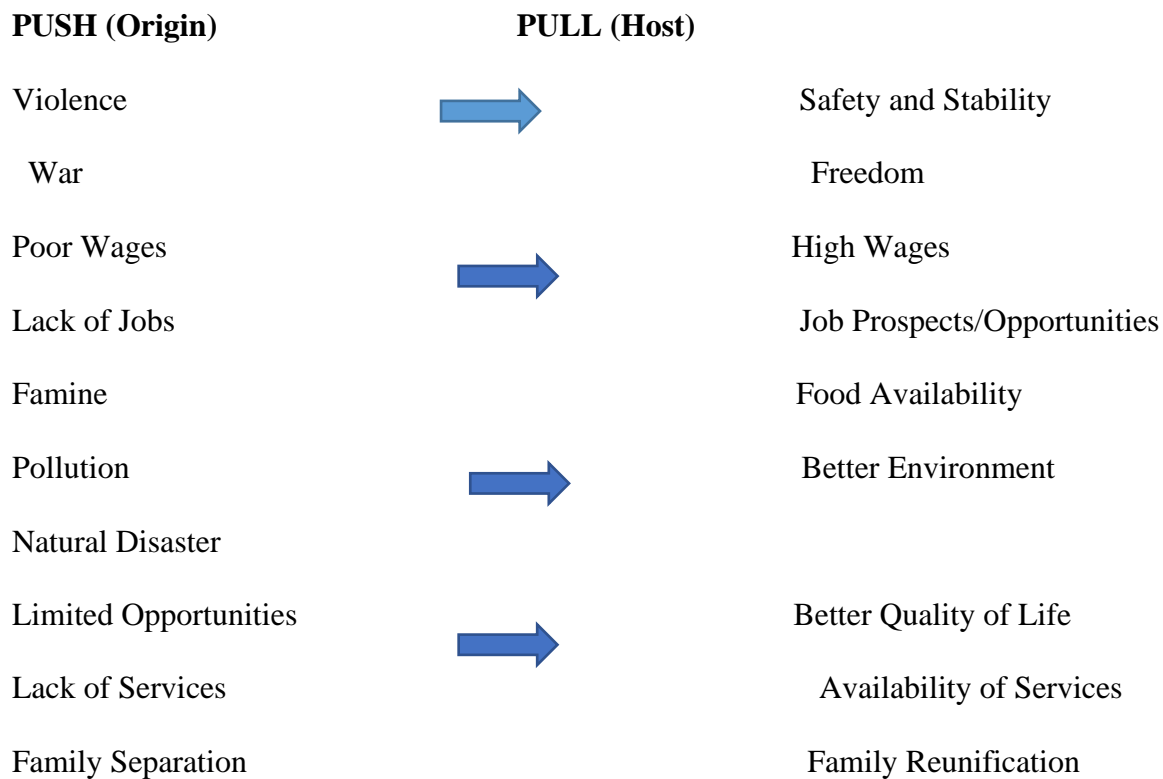


Fig. 1: The Push and Pull Factors in Migration (Offorma G. 2022).

Figure 1 above presents the reasons why young people migrate to other places of residence. In a situation where a country or community experiences violence or war, the youth normally seek for safety, and freedom and so, they migrate to another country or community that is stable and peaceful. In a country where workers' wages are poor, the youth move to countries with higher wages.

If there is lack of job, they move to where they can get employment. For example, the Nigerian medical personnel (doctors, nurses, medical laboratory technologists, physiotherapists) and engineers are exiting the country for greener pastures in the United Kingdom, Canada, United States of America, the United Arab Emirate, etc. Within the past two decades, policy discussions

on migration have been dominated by images of young Africans taking rickety boats to Europe due to poverty and lack of opportunities including jobs⁸

In a situation where there is famine, as in Somalia, the youth move to a better environment. Countries that experience pollution or natural disaster normally will lose majority of the young people. They are mobile and full of energy and would not want to waste their lives in an uncondusive environment.

In a situation of limited opportunities to grow or lack of services, the young people seek for better quality of life, and availability of the needed services. Many Nigerian youths are exiting the country because of limited opportunities, unemployment, poor infrastructure, insecurity, incessant strike actions by different groups of workers, poor facilities in schools, and uncertainties. So, those who have the opportunity migrate to other countries, that have organized systems and good quality of life.

Newly married youths join their spouses in another country to start new families. Some youths join their siblings who have established in the host countries to start earning their living.

⁸Boampong, M. & Assamah, D. (2021). Migration amid COVID-19: Young Africans weigh their options. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/january-2021/migration-amid-covid-19-young-africans-weigh-their-options> Retrieved 29/12/21

Types of Migration

There are four most common types of migration categorized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as reported by Woldeab⁷. They are labour migration, forced migration or displacement, human trafficking or modern slavery and environmental migration. The specific causes of migration can fall under these wide-range categories. For example, both migration due to displacement/forced migration and environmental migration can include migration due to natural disaster.

1. Labour Migration

Labour migration is the movement of people (youth inclusive) from one state to another in search of employment. IOM indicated that in 2017, an estimated 164 million migrant workers globally were involved in this type of migration. This was 59% of the world's international migration population.

Labour migration can be movement from rural to urban cities or movement across national borders. It is attributed to economic inequalities, search for employment. Economic, political and environmental factors all contribute to this type of migration. The figure below shows sub-Saharan Africans going to Europe.



Fig. 2: Sub-Saharan Africans going to Europe. Source: eureporter.co

2. *Forced Migration of Displacement*

This type of migration is the movement of persons who have been forced to flee from their homes due to war, generalized violence, violation of human rights or human-made disasters. For example, people in the North-East geopolitical zone: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe who were displaced due to Boko Haram insurgency, and conflicts. Benue State of Nigeria experienced internal displacement as a result of herdsmen attack. In Borno and Adamawa States, there were 3, 118 movements by people between 3rd -9th January 2022.⁹

This was higher than the movement between December 27, 2021 -January 2, 2022, which was 2,972. This indicates that internal displacement in Nigeria is on the increase. It was reported that Nigeria has the highest number of internally displaced people in Africa (2.7 million) 2013-2020. Africa has the highest of such in the world¹⁰

⁹Nigeria Emergency Tracking Tool Report No. 257. 3rd – 9th January, 2022. <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/nigeria-%E2%80%94-emergency-tracking-tool-report-257-3-9-january-2022>

¹⁰Varrella, S. (2021). Number of internally displaced persons in Nigeria 2013-2020. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1237374/number-of-internally-displaced-persons-in-nigeria/>

IOM indicated that in 2018, of the 70.8 million forcibly displaced people, 41.3 million (58%) were internally displaced and the remaining 25.9 million refugees and 3.5 million asylum seekers (42%) were externally displaced.

The report showed that over the past 10 years, the number of forcibly displaced people both within countries and across borders has increased to over 50%.

3. *Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery*

This type is explained as the action of illegally transporting people from one country or area to another.

The main purpose of this action is for forced labor or sexual exploitation. We have heard about people who deceive young people, promising them gainful employment overseas, only to employ them as sex workers or in forced labour. Youths are mainly involved in this type of migration. IOM stated that in 2016, of the 25 million victims of forced labor, 5 million are estimated to have illegally crossed an international border.

4. *Environmental Migration*

Environmental migration is the movement of people who mainly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment which adversely affect them, are forced to leave their places of residence temporarily or permanently. This movement can be within the country or abroad. For example, in 2012, when Nigeria experienced flooding, the people of Anambra state, Delta state and Kogi state migrated to nearby towns, temporarily. They went back to their homes

when the flood subsided. According to IOM, in 2018, 17.2 million people across 144 countries and territories were displaced due to environmental disasters. This movement was mainly within the countries. Very few migrated to other countries.



Fig 3: Pictures showing the devastating effects of flooding in Anambra and Delta States of Nigeria in 2012.

Source: http://www.igbofocus.co.uk/Anambra_State/Anambra-in-Flood.jpg

The picture on the left shows the residence of people submerged in Delta state, while the one on the right was in Anambra state. The then Governor, His Excellency, Mr. Peter Obi was informed of the flooding in the place, at Omasi. He went with his team to render some help by 2.00 am. On their way back, to get to where their cars were parked, the flood had covered the whole road including their cars.

9. Sponsored Temporary Migration

Apart from these four common types of migration, there is an emerging one, known as Sponsored Temporary Migration. This is experienced when young people, especially in academics, are sponsored overseas for educational training/programmes by educational funding

agencies, such as, Ministries of Education, Governments, Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund); or quality assurance bodies, like National University Commission (NUC), French Embassy in Nigeria (for teachers of French language), and institutions of higher learning. Some of the sponsored youth stay back in the host country at the end of the programme, because of better quality environment, availability of services, employment, security, higher wages or joining a spouse.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Youth Education

The world experienced a lot of challenges due to the unprecedented and rapid spread of COVID-19 pandemic, which started in 2019. It spread to many nations in 2020. Since then, different variants of the virus are emerging: Delta and Omicron. The impact has been huge on the economy, education, health and social mobility of the youths. At a stage, it was like the entire world came to a halt, and many countries declared lockdown and closed schools and their borders in a bid to contain the spread of the virus.

In a global survey on the immediate impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the education of youth, among other aspects of their lives was conducted by partners of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth¹¹. It involved 12,000 respondents aged 18-29 years, from 112 countries. The study population was made up of students and workers with a tertiary education, who accounted for a quarter of the youth in the sampled countries.

¹¹International Labor Organization (ILO) (2020). Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights, mental well-being. Survey Report 2020.

The results showed that for youths who were studying or combining study and work before the crisis, 73% experienced closure of school. Not all were able to transition into on-line and distance learning.

This mode of teaching learning became an alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic. 13% did not have access to education – courses, teaching and learning. This was acute among youth in lower income countries. It shows the sharp digital divide that exists between regions.

Despite efforts for schools and training institutions to provide continuity in education through on-line delivery mode, 65% of the youth indicated that they learnt less since the pandemic. 51% believed their education would be delayed. 9% expressed fear that their education would suffer or even fail.

Education is a key instrument for human and economic transformation in all nations of the world. But this fundamental role of education seems to elude some countries, such as Nigeria. The challenges facing the education sector in Nigeria were explained as: inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, shortage of qualified personnel, political instability, poor policy formulation and implementation and endemic corruption¹². These problems were aggravated by the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic. They have their negative impacts on youth education.

Challenges and Opportunities of Youth Migration amid the Pandemic

COVID-19 pandemic has both the good and bad aspects in terms of youth education and migration.

¹²Akor, A.I. & Ali, R.B. (2019). Rethinking and repositioning the Nigerian education sector: Challenges and ideas. BSUJEM 1(1), 48-55.

Challenges

- The problem of unemployment existed before the pandemic. Despite the increased investment in education, African youth experienced uncertainties with transitioning from childhood to adulthood.
- The pandemic has further exacerbated the challenges including disruption in education, training, employment, while some were laid off their jobs and some had their working hours reduced.
- Some young people who could not find jobs at home were compelled to migrate to other countries in search of employment opportunities. Some youths take the risk of their lives by adopting irregular migration.
- Migration for education and work increasingly has been the common phenomena in Africa. Data from the International Migrant Stock 2019 Report indicated an estimate of 272 million migrants, showing an increase of 51 million since 2010. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) reported that about 20% of all international migrants in the South are young Africans of under the age of 20 years. This makes Africa the youngest region of international migrants¹³.
- Due to poverty and unemployment, young people migrate using different means of cheap transportation, such as rickety boats to Europe; donkeys, motorcycles, to neighbouring African countries. These are very risky as they may lose their lives enroute their destinations.

• ¹³United Nation (2018). World Youth Report. <https://www.un.org>.

- Restriction on travel as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and closure of borders by some countries have impinged on or delayed migration of youth within and outside Africa.

Opportunities

A number of opportunities emerged with the existence of COVID-19 pandemic.

- Migration benefited both the communities of origin and destination. As the migrants render services to the host communities, they also earn their living, which impact their families.
- COVID-19 gave boost to automation of education and businesses. Digitalization poses a unique opportunity to migrant youth. During COVID-19 pandemic, new mode of education, strategies and pedagogy were introduced. The youth acquire new skills by engaging in on-line teaching and learning.
- Youth are called the digital citizens and they embraced skills they would not have learnt if there was no lockdown.
- The pandemic brought opportunities for families to be close to their young children. During the lockdown both parents and their children stayed together and even guided the youth on-line class assignments posted to them by their teachers. The opposite was the case before the pandemic.
- Migration for young people who experience multiple shocks with little or no social protection in their place of residence may increase, especially for families seeking ways of combating their socioeconomic challenges.
- There are also opportunities for youth who possess useful and required skills in the host countries. Youths with skills in the health sector are in high demand by such countries

especially in the pandemic era. For example, between March and April 2020, some countries in the West offered work or exchange visitor visas to encourage people with medical training and expertise to migrate. This explains why most young doctors, nurses, electronic engineers find it easy to get visa to overseas countries, where their services are needed. Once employed, these migrants play a major role in supporting their families back home.

Recommendation

Below are some recommendations.

1. There are limited migration pathways for low-skilled African youth migrants. Governments should think of investing money in building training institutions to prepare such needed manpower and export them to the destination countries. This will yield foreign exchange for the countries of origin.
2. Young people should be granted access to quality education, employment and freedom of mobility within Africa to achieve their aspirations and to contribute to the development of the continent.
3. Both skilled and unskilled workers' wages should be increased to motivate the youths to stay in their countries of residence. Nigeria has approved minimum wage of ₦30,000.00 for workers. Though it is not adequate, some state governments are yet to implement the policy. Increase in salaries of workers will curb the incessant strike actions by different workers' groups due to poor conditions of service and nonpayment of salaries. Many people send their children overseas for education because of the uncertainty of the

graduation period due to incessant strike action by tertiary education teachers, poor learning environments and dearth of teaching resources.

4. Massification of access to education should be supported by adequate funding. In Nigeria the budget for education is only 7%, which is in contradistinction with the UNESCO recommendation of at least 25% budget allocation to education by countries. Governments should bear this in mind while allotting funds to different sectors of the economy. The researcher observed that as of September 2021, there are 170 universities made up of 43, 48, and 79 federal, state and private universities, respectively. There are 152 colleges of education: 27, 54 and 82 federal, state and private colleges respectively. Nigeria has also 17 federal and 26 state polytechnics; and five inter-university centres.
5. The sharp digital divide between low-income and high-income countries should be bridged through partnership among nations. This is the last of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
6. Youths should be encouraged to adopt regular, ordered and safe migration to avoid taking risk of their lives.
7. Governments, NGOs, should create awareness for the youths through the social media, of safe migrant pathways, dangers of irregular migration and opportunities at home to help the youths to take proper decision on migration.
8. Parents who encourage their young children to travel overseas by selling their property to get the required money to sponsor them should rather advise them to use the money and start a little business in Nigeria. This will blossom if they work hard. Illegal migration should not be encouraged, as it entails a lot of hardship and probable loss of life.

9. Educational institutions should adopt blended learning mode and governments should encourage and support its effective implementation, by ensuring that the teachers are well trained in the required skills and adequate infrastructure and facilities provided in the schools.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed youth education and migration amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Education is the hub of all development and a veritable instrument for national development. Migration is an aspect of globalization and has its pros and cons. Youth migration has been shown to have been motivated by poverty, unemployment, insecurity, inadequate implementation of educational programmes and policies, lack of infrastructure, poor workers' wages, corruption among others.

COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating, affecting the entire world. It has adversely affected the economic, social, health and education of the youth. Nevertheless, the youth in their characteristics are struggling to survive and taking risks to migrate to other destinations in search of greener pastures.

The youths are future leaders and should be given access to quality, equitable and inclusive education to prepare them to live a sustainable life.

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