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NIGERIAN TALENT EXPORT PROGRAMME (NATEP): INTENT, FRAMEWORK, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This study examines the Nigerian Talent Export Programme (NATEP) as a public policy initiative situated at an intersection of labour migration governance and adult education. Drawing comparative insights from India and the Philippines, two countries with established migration management systems, the study examines NATEP's intent, institutional design, and anticipated challenges. Anchored in adult learning theories, particularly Knowles' andragogy and Mezirow's transformative learning theories, the paper adopts a qualitative and analytical approach to explore how NATEP can function beyond a labour export mechanism as a structured lifelong learning ecosystem. The analysis highlights migration as an extended learning process encompassing pre-departure preparation, transnational work experience, and post-migration reintegration. NATEP represents a policy shift toward organizing skilled migration through training, certification, and international placement, with the potential to convert global mobility into sustainable human capital development. Findings suggest that NATEP's effectiveness will depend on institutional integration, alignment of training with adult learners' professional goals and the formal recognition of overseas experience with domestic labour markets. Reintegration emerges as a critical yet underdeveloped phase, where transformative learning can translate individual skill acquisition into collective developmental outcomes. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at strengthening NATEP as both a migration strategy and a lifelong learning framework.

Keywords: Adult Education; Labour Migration; Lifelong Learning; National Development; Nigerian Talent Export Programme;

Introduction

Lifelong learning has become central to contemporary policy debates as adult workers increasingly navigate careers that span sectors, national borders, and employment forms. International labour migration is no longer a singular economic decision but an extended learning trajectory shaped by preparation, workplace experience, and reintegration. This evolving understanding is also evident in migration scholarship, which increasingly frames mobility not only as an economic strategy but also as a process through which individuals acquire skills and reshape their professional identities (de Haas, 2021). Such perspectives highlight the broader developmental potential of migration, particularly in developing countries where mobility is closely linked to livelihood strategies and human capital formation. The National Talent Export Programme therefore represents a critical yet underexamined site for lifelong learning policy.

Migration has historically been associated with remittance inflow and economic strategies in Nigeria. Despite this, limited attention has been given to how migration can be systematically harnessed as a tool for skills development and national growth. Nigeria's skilled migration landscape has been undermined by gaps in institutional coordination and informality which has reduced the extent to which migration experiences translate into sustainable socio-economic benefits. The Nigerian Talent Export Program (NATEP), launched in 2023, aims to address these challenges by formalising and organising skilled migration through training, certification, and international labour placement.

Situated at the intersection of labour migration and adult education, NATEP presents an opportunity to rethink migration beyond labour export, as a system which supports learning across a person's life. Despite this potential, there is limited scholarly analysis of NATEP's conceptual foundations, institutional design and likely implementation challenges. Existing

studies on migration in Nigeria have largely focused on economic outcomes, often overlooking the role of adult learning frameworks in shaping migration experiences and outcomes. This gap reinforces the need for a more integrated analytical approach that connects migration policy with lifelong learning and human capital development. This paper therefore, positions NATEP not simply as a labour export initiative, but as a lifelong learning intervention embedded within public policy.

Focusing on the Nigerian Talent Export Programme (NATEP), this paper considers its intent, framework, and key challenges, while drawing lessons from the Philippines and India that have more institutionalised migration systems. Anchored in adult learning theories, the study argues that migration policies that recognize adult learners' experience, motivation, and capacity for transformation are more likely to convert global mobility into sustainable national human capital development.

Theoretical Framework

To ensure analytical clarity, this study adopts two complementary adult education theories particularly suited to understanding migration as a learning process: andragogy and transformative learning theory (Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 2000).

Andragogy

Knowles' theory of andragogy conceptualizes adults as self-directed learners, whose engagement is driven by immediate relevance to social and professional roles. These assumptions align closely with NATEP participants, who pursue overseas employment to enhance employability, income security, and career mobility. NATEP's emphasis on Pre-departure training and skills certification reflects andragogical principles that prioritize applied competencies, problem-solving, and recognition of prior experience. From a policy perspective, andragogy underscores the importance of flexible, competency-based training systems aligned with labour market realities.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory frames adult learning as a process of critical reflection prompted by disorienting experiences. Migration often exposes workers to unfamiliar professional norms, technologies, and cultural expectations, making it a powerful context for perspective transformation.

Within NATEP, transformative learning is particularly relevant during reintegration, when returnees renegotiate professional identity, social status, and future aspirations. Structured reintegration programs can support this transformation and facilitate productive reinvestment of acquired skills.

Conceptualising Talent Export

Talent export refers to the organised cross-border deployment of skilled workers to meet international labour demands while generating domestic developmental benefits (Docquier & Rappaport, 2012). Unlike spontaneous migration, talent export requires coordinated institutions, skills standardization, and continuity in learning and professional development.

Viewed through an andragogical lens, talent export is most effective when learning opportunities are clearly linked to occupational practice and career progression.

Transformative learning further suggests that its value lies not only in income generation but also in enhanced competence, confidence, and agency. NATEP's conceptual strength rests on its capacity to integrate these learning dimensions into migration governance.

Labour Migration and Policy Context in Nigeria

Nigeria's migration patterns have been shaped by economic volatility, demographic pressure, and sustained global demand for skilled labour. Although remittances have contributed significantly to household-level welfare, placing Nigeria among Africa's leading remittance recipients (World Bank, 2022), unmanaged migration has intensified shortages in sectors

such as healthcare and education (Noushad & Parida, 2020). Previous policy responses focused largely on regulation and border control, with limited attention to skills development or reintegration.

NATEP represents a departure by framing migration as a planned workforce strategy. Comparative experiences from India and the Philippines demonstrate that migration outcomes depend less on scale than on institutional design. Fragmented systems tend to externalize learning benefits, whereas coordinated models embed training, worker protection, and reintegration within national policy frameworks.

Literature Review

The literature on skilled migration highlights its dual effects. Migration can generate remittances, skills transfer, and international exposure, but may also intensify brain drain in the absence of strong domestic institutions (Docquier & Rappaport, 2012).

Studies in India show that fragmented governance and weak professional development pathways contribute to persistent emigration of skilled workers (Kumar, 2023; Noushad & Parida, 2020). In contrast, the Philippine labour export system demonstrates how structured recruitment, worker protection, and reintegration can enhance developmental outcomes (Dimaya, R. M., McEwen, M. M., Curry, C. W., & Bradley, S. 2012; Opiniano & Ang, 2024).

Evidence from Ghana similarly underscores the role of bilateral agreements and skill-focused migration policy in mitigating adverse effects on domestic labour markets (Quartey & Blankson, 2004; Awumbila, 2017).

While lifelong learning scholarship increasingly recognizes work and mobility as key learning contexts, migration-related learning often remains informal and underrecognized in policy frameworks. This gap is particularly evident in the Global South and reinforces the relevance of adult education for analysing NATEP.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, comparative approach based on document analysis of policy reports, academic literature, and international migration data. Key sources include reports from organisations such as the World Bank, International Organisation for migration (IOM), and OECD, as well as relevant academic studies on migration and adult learning. These documents were systematically analysed to examine the structure and policy context of the Nigerian Talent Export Programme (NATEP) and to draw comparative insights from countries such as India and the Philippines. The data further informed the discussion on institutional coordination, skill recognition, and reintegration frameworks presented in the analysis section serve as reference cases for identifying institutional patterns relevant to Nigeria. Adult education theory provides the analytical framework for interpreting NATEP's design and potential learning outcomes.

Findings and Discussion

Institutional Design

Effective talent export depends on institutional coordination. Where training, recruitment, and reintegration are fragmented, migration outcomes disproportionately benefit receiving countries. NATEP's success will depend on its capacity to function as an integrated platform rather than a stand-alone employment initiative.

Learning and Retention

Andragogical principles highlight the importance of aligning training with adult learners' goals. Without recognized career pathways and post-migration opportunities, retention remains weak. Formal recognition of overseas experience within domestic labour markets is therefore essential.

Reintegration and Transformation

Transformative learning theory identifies reintegration as a pivotal stage in the migration cycle. Although returnees often possess enhanced skills, institutional barriers limit their reinvestment. Targeted reintegration education can translate individual transformation into collective developmental outcomes. The comparative experiences from the Philippines and India for instance, reveals how structured migration systems help support national development. With the integration of pre-departure orientation, skills certification, and reintegration programmes, migrations contribute not only to remittances but also to skill development and national growth (OECD, 2019; IOM, 2022).

NATEP as a Lifelong Learning Policy Model

Interpreted through lifelong learning theory, NATEP can be understood as a cyclical learning system encompassing preparation, transnational work experience, and reintegration. Andragogy informs learner-centred, competency-based training, while transformative learning emphasizes reflection and identity change. Recognition of informal and experiential learning acquired abroad is central to this model.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has argued that NATEP's long-term effectiveness depends on its treatment as both a migration policy and lifelong learning framework. Applying andragogical principles ensures relevance and learner engagement, while transformative learning underscores the importance of reintegration and reflective practice.

Recommendations

1. Design competency-based training aligned with adult learners' professional goals.
2. Institutionalize mechanisms for recognizing overseas experience within domestic labour markets.
3. Develop reintegration education that supports reflection, entrepreneurship, and mentoring.

4. Monitor learning outcomes across the full migration cycle.

Together, these measures can strengthen NATEP's contribution to lifelong learning and national capacity development.

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