

Public Perception and Media Coverage of Brain Drain from Nigeria

*Ifedayo Akinwalere, PhD,¹ Daniel Gbolahan Akinrinola,²
Asekere Olujoke Funmilayo, PhD³
& Ime Umoren.⁴*

¹*Department of Mass Communication,
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye,
Ogun State, Nigeria.*

Email: ifedayo.akinwalere@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

²*Department of Mass Communication,
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun
State, Nigeria. Corresponding author.*

Email: akinrinola.daniel@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

³*Department of Mass Communication, Yaba College of Technology.*

Email: Olujoke.asekere@yabatech.edu.ng

⁴*Department of Mass Communication, Nigerian Institute of Journalism, Ogba, Lagos.*

Email: i.umoren@nij.edu.ng

Abstract:

The study examined public perception and media reportage of brain drain in Nigeria. The study adopted content analysis and in-depth interview designs. Agenda-setting theory was used to explain the study. Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed in tables and percentage; while the qualitative data were collected through in-depth interview and analysed in prose format. Findings showed that people travelled out of their home country in search of greener pasture when there is stagnant career growth and limited opportunities for career development. Also lack of recognition, feeling undervalued, persecution, environmental hostility and high rate of inflation motivate people to look for better a environment abroad. Others perceived that the level of remittance in term of financial transfer from abroad to the country is huge. The Punch and Vanguard gave sufficient coverage to the brain drain issue. A total of 56.8% editions of The Punch and 43.1% editions of Vanguard were employed to focus on brain drain issues during the period captured by the study. Finding depicted that the selected media gave sufficient prominence to the brain drain issue. Finding also showed that political frame was mostly employed to report the brain drain issued by the selected media. The study concluded that The Punch and Vanguard play a crucial role in coverage of brain drain issues. The study recommended that incorporating diverse perspectives and expert opinions in the press coverage of sensitive issues such as brain drain would enrich the discourse surrounding it and encourage meaningful dialogue on how to address the issue.

Keywords: Public Perception, Media Coverage, Brain Drain, Migration, Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Developing nations have long been concerned about the movement of highly trained and professional labour because they see it as a "brain drain" and believe that there may be a loss of economic potential as a result. The repercussions of skilled migration have been thoroughly researched and hotly contested since the 1960s, and it is currently a growing source of concern for emerging nations (Simbayi, 2019). Both the sending and receiving countries' populations were significantly impacted by the massive transatlantic migration, dwarfing current numbers. Countries as diverse as Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Austria-Hungary (during the second era) witnessed emigration rates above forty per thousand over the decades 1891-1900 and 1901-10. The New World immigration rates per decade more closely resembled the sending countries' rates. The degree of 19th-century migration had a significant influence on salaries on both sides of the Atlantic, significantly accelerating the convergence of earnings in both sending and receiving nations (Collyer, 2007). Tim (2015) noted that most migrants were unskilled, young people, men and unmarried. Due to the advanced ages of some of them, migrants would not have had many opportunities to learn skills in their home countries and might have learnt them elsewhere.

However, they were mostly in competition with native-born unskilled workers, which resulted in a decrease in the earnings of this kind of employment in their country of destination and an increase in their country of origin. The advantages of migration for the sponsoring nations, the destination countries, and the migrants themselves have decreased due to a number of problems, including illicit migration, inadequate integration and inadequate change management. Furthermore, public opinion on migration, which is frequently affected by the media, has a significant impact on the efficacy of migration policies. Images of migrants travelling across the Mediterranean in small boats, human trafficking, and unemployment are frequently linked to the public's opinion of migration. More so, the public's unfavourable opinion of migration may give rise to demands for tighter border security and return guidelines.

On the other hand, illegal migration will continue if labour demand stays the same, which will only serve to reinforce stigmas and unfavourable public perceptions. Reduced prospects for integration will result in less successful integration and increased public animosity for migrants, creating a self-reinforcing loop. The public may start to see immigrants as valuable members of society if there are legal entrance points and they show a desire to assimilate. This might create room for more positive immigration and native population-benefiting policies. Shavel (2019) reports that the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom employs an estimated 5,405 doctors and nurses with training from Nigeria.

Similarly, data from the British Government revealed that 4% of the 137,000 foreign workers from 202 countries who support British doctors and nurses are Nigerian health professionals. Furthermore, the bulk of African migrants in the US are Nigerians (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). Boyo (2013) pointed out that the ageing of their population helps nations like the United States and Canada meet employment shortages without having to foot the bill for their schooling. A result of brain drain on Nigeria's

socio-economic growth is a reduction in service quality, which impacts the nation's shortage of skilled workforce as well as the financial benefits of remittances.

People are going through a period of intensely felt insecurity. Threats to national security like terrorism pose a problem. The increasing level of global economic competitiveness gives rise to concerns about job losses. The public portrayal of immigrants and migratory phenomena by the media and politicians is frequently biased or negative, associating them almost entirely to security issues. Commonly used terms (such “fraudulent asylum seekers” and “welfare scroungers”) have frequently taken on derogatory connotations, despite the fact that migrants are diverse groups with varying prospects and expectations (Marcel, Ricklef, Anna, Frederic & Peter, 2006).

1.1 Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the public perception and role of the press in reportage of the brain drain issue in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate public perception of brain drain in Nigeria.
2. To examine the frequency of coverage of brain drain by The Punch and Vanguard newspapers.
3. To investigate the level of prominence attached to brain drain stories by The Punch and Vanguard newspapers.
4. To examine the frame used to publish brain drain stories by The Punch and Vanguard newspapers.

2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND MEDIA COVERAGE OF BRAIN DRAIN

The public's perception of brain drain is a major issue, and in response, various policies have been implemented, including tighter border controls, campaigns against human trafficking, more transparent asylum laws, ongoing emphasis on integration policies, and collaboration with third nations to help manage migrant flows. The common theme throughout these policies, notwithstanding their rising importance, is the role that public perception plays in facilitating efficient migration management. However, it appears that the issue of public opinion is the one that is lacking and rarely addressed (Marcel, Ricklef, Anna, Frederic & Peter, 2006).

Thus, one of the obvious consequences of brain drain is the dearth of educated individuals in critical industries including business, research, health, education, and technology. In addition, migrants typically have higher levels of education, are healthier, more enterprising, and have enough money to cover their travel expenditures, according to Adepoju, Naerssen, and Zoomers (2008). Once more, Adepoju *et al.* (2008) claimed that a deficiency of qualified personnel in this case directly and adversely affects the quality of services provided to the public in Nigeria. According to Adepoju *et al.* (2008), there has been a drop in educational quality as a result of the loss of skilled professors and instructors in the field of education. The experts claimed that the problem has also

hampered the creation of new knowledge. In the healthcare industry, the brain drain epidemic has led to poor healthcare delivery services (Adepoju *et al*, 2008).

Odunsi (1996) declared that the discrepancy in the proportion of doctors and other healthcare professionals to patients is concerning, confirming the finding of Adepoju *et al*. (2008). Despite the severe demand for medical workers in the United States, Oni (2002) indicated that roughly 2,000 Nigerian physicians are expected to work in the country. Though brain drain hinders rising nations' progress, there are still certain advantages that can be gained from the issue. Remittances are one benefit of the brain drain that is currently occurring to developing nations such as Nigeria and other African countries.

Nigeria's progress has been severely hampered by brain drain, since many of its experts frequently relocate to richer nations in quest of better living conditions that they believe are not available in Nigeria. Nigerians have expressed their hopelessness over the country's abysmal economic situation and the fact that their only option is to leave for "greener pastures." Employment, instability, and a general feeling of pessimism are among the reasons they mention for migrating abroad. Regarding development, it has been argued by Kapur (2017), Naicker *et al* (2017), and Rapoport (2016) that the brain drain may be seen as having a negative externality on the population that remains in the homeland.

Mary and Natalie (2020) concluded that a number of factors, including the event's magnitude, its impact on society, its relevance to the target audience, and the newspaper's editorial priorities, influence how prominent a story appears in the newspaper. Newspapers frequently provide greater prominence to stories that are judged significant, urgent, or impactful, placing them on the front page or as headline news. The newspaper's editorial position may have an impact on the degree of prominence. Newspapers emphasise particular stories because they support their editorial stances or because they think the readership will find them interesting. This increases the prominence and relevance of these stories. Furthermore, newspaper stories can become more well-known by using attention-grabbing headlines, eye-catching images, in-depth reporting, and knowledgeable commentary. These components have the power to capture readers' interest and communicate the importance of the narrative, increasing its exposure and effect. Readers and scholars alike can learn more about how news is viewed, prioritised, and presented in the media by comprehending the elements that influence the prominence given to newspaper items. This knowledge can also be useful when assessing the impact and audience of various news articles in the larger context of public discourse and journalism.

Maxwell (2011) said that the prominence of news articles in newspapers had a significant impact on how the public perceives events and how agendas are created. Newspapers arrange their news according to reader impact, perceived importance, and relevancy. Strategies such as headline size, front-page placement, and accompanying images are employed to make some stories more visible than others. Usually, front-page

articles are saved for the biggest and most noteworthy stories of the day. The goal of these pieces is to draw in readers and establish the tone for the newspaper's coverage. Newspapers communicate to their readers the significance of these events by featuring stories prominently on the front page, which also serves to draw attention to important topics. The height and style of headlines can also serve as indicators of the prominence of a topic, in addition to front-page placement. For significant breaking news or stories of national or international importance, bold, large-font headlines are frequently employed. These headlines direct readers' attention to the most important stories of the day by acting as a visual cue (Maxwell, 2021).

In general, newspaper editors intentionally choose which articles to highlight in order to enlighten, interest, and sway readers. We can learn more about how the media shapes public opinion and how people view current events by analysing how newspapers prioritise and present their articles (Maxwell, 2021). Micheal and Ijeoma (2017) Explain that the economic loss frame, which emphasises the financial impact of brain outflow on the nation, is the common framework utilised by Nigerian journalists to publish stories about brain drain. The loss of qualified workers and the resulting economic fallout, such as decreased productivity and innovation, are the main topics of this framing. The "human capital flight" frame is an additional framework that highlights the exodus of skill and knowledge from Nigeria. This frame emphasises the human element of brain drain by depicting it as the disappearance of important resources that could the advancement of the country. Newspapers also employ the "policy failure" paradigm, which assigns accountability to government programs and policies that are unable to retain qualified workers. In this frame, the emphasis is shifted to the necessity of policies that combat brain drain and foster an atmosphere that supports talent retention.

The national development frame, which emphasises how brain drain affects Nigeria's advancement, is another common frame. This frame demonstrates how the nation's progress and prospects for the future are hampered by the loss of qualified professionals. The "brain gain" perspective is an alternative framework that aims to reinterpret brain drain as a chance for knowledge transfer and diaspora engagement. In order to further the growth of Nigeria, this frame highlights the possible advantages of interacting with the Nigerian diaspora. Furthermore, by presenting first-person narratives of professionals who have departed Nigeria, the "personal stories" framework humanises brain drain. Newspapers arouse empathy and illuminate the motivations underlying people's decisions to migrate by featuring human experiences (Brittany & Emly 2020).

When discussing brain drain, policy recommendations are another important framework that appear in Nigerian newspapers. In order to successfully address brain drain, this framework focuses on making policy recommendations and solution suggestions. Newspapers frequently feature suggestions including enhancing working conditions, funding research and education, and developing incentives to keep qualified workers. Furthermore, the "global perspective" framework is utilised to place brain drain in the context of the worldwide migration issue. This framework offers a more

comprehensive understanding of the problem and its global ramifications by contrasting Nigeria's brain drain with comparable patterns in other countries.

The influence on healthcare and education is another framework that is commonly employed in Nigerian publications on the brain drain. This frame demonstrates how the withdrawal of highly qualified individuals from critical services in Nigeria, including physicians and teachers, has an impact. It highlights the burden that the loss of qualified workers is placing on the education and healthcare systems. Furthermore, the "youth perspective" frame emphasizes how young Nigerians' chances and aspirations are impacted by brain drain. This frame explores the challenges faced by the youth in pursuing their careers locally and the factors that drive them to seek opportunities abroad, shaping the narrative around generational perspectives on brain drain (Micheal & Ijeoma 2017).

The "economic impact" framing is another one that is frequently utilised in Nigerian publications when discussing brain drain. This framework focuses on how the economy is impacted by the loss of skilled workers, covering topics such as decreased productivity, loss of knowledge, and consequences for economic expansion. It explores the financial effects of brain drain on several economic sectors in Nigeria. The "government response" framework also clarifies the measures and directives that the Nigerian government has put in place to counteract brain drain. This framework addresses programs, rewards, and tactics used to draw in and keep qualified workers in order to lessen the detrimental impacts of brain drain on the nation's development (Micheal & Ijeoma, 2017).

Brittany and Emilly (2020) additionally clarify why the social impact frame on brain drain is frequently noticed in Nigerian newspapers. This framework examines the ways in which Nigerian communities and societal systems are impacted by brain drain. It covers topics such as how the departure of skilled workers affects families, communities left behind, and the social fabric of the nation. Moreover, the "brain gain" framework presents an alternative viewpoint by emphasising the prospects that result from talented Nigerians returning home or making overseas contributions to the nation's advancement. This framework examines programs, partnerships, and success stories that encourage knowledge transfer and brain gain in order to offset brain drain.

3. THEORETICAL REVIEW

3.1 Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory emerged in the 1970s to address concerns raised by the idea that, while news media may not be in a position to instruct people on how to think; it may and does influence the topics that people choose to think about (Boyce, 2007). The purpose of this theoretical idea is not to explain how subjects are chosen in the media. On the other hand, it seeks to support the notion that public agenda-setting is influenced by the choice and order of issues in media communication. Lippmann (1922) articulated some of the postulates related to agenda-setting. McCombs and Shaw (1972) conducted empirical

research that culminated in the creation of the agenda-setting hypothesis as late as the early 1970s. According to the agenda-setting theory, the media thus have the power to influence their audience's thinking and to offer the audience the most important topics.

4. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Nwosu et al (2024) examined how *Vanguard*, *Daily Trust*, and *Punch* newspapers reported brain drain in Nigeria's health sector. Using content analysis, they found frequent and prominent coverage but noted a lack of depth and positive framing. The study highlights the media's limited role in addressing structural health challenges and calls for urgent policy interventions to mitigate workforce migration. Similarly, Okagbare et al. (2025) analyzed *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers' 2023 coverage of health professionals' emigration in Nigeria. Using content analysis, they found consistent reporting but predominantly negative framing of brain drain. The study concluded that while the coverage aligns with social responsibility, it overlooks alternative perspectives like remittances and collaboration, limiting broader public discourse and policy development.

Olu-Owolabi et al. (2020) explored media influence on brain drain among Nigerian professionals, highlighting a research gap in recognizing mass media as a push/pull factor. Using Maslow's theory, ex-post facto design, and Creswell's mixed methods, the study identified the media's potential to either escalate or mitigate migration. It advocated strategic media engagement to address brain drain. Baridam and Don-Baridam (2020) examined brain drain challenges in Nigerian university administration, attributing the crisis to poor leadership, inadequate facilities, academic repression, and insecurity. They emphasized that personality traits mediate migration decisions. Consequences include diminished research output, low academic standards, and reduced graduate employability. The authors recommend creating enabling environments and internationalizing Nigerian universities to curb academic brain drain.

Okoro et al. (2014) investigated the impact of brain drain among librarians on university service delivery in Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey, they found that emigration reduced mentoring, ICT capacity, and manpower for shift duties. The study concluded that improved funding and strict staff development policies are essential for enhancing staff retention and sustaining effective academic library services. Similarly, Akaeze (2024) conducted a qualitative study exploring strategies to curb brain drain in Nigerian higher education. Through interviews with deans and faculty, five key themes emerged: institutional responses, drivers, challenges, retention strategies, and leadership roles. The findings emphasized competitive compensation, professional development, and leadership reforms as essential for faculty retention, proposing a policy framework to sustain educational quality.

5. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted content analysis and In-depth interview. The study examined the content of *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers. The sampling frame of the study was drawn from *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers in Nigeria. The sampling frame is 730 editions, that is 365 editions for each of the stated national newspapers starting from January to December 2023 respectively. The selected newspapers are national dailies in Nigeria. They cover Nigeria local issues, and they have correspondents all over the country. They are among the most widely read and distributed newspapers in the country. Taro Yamane Technique of Calculating Sampling Size: N = Sampling frame, n = Sample size, 1 = constant while e = sampling error (level of tolerable error).

Therefore,

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N * (e)^2}$$

$$n = 730$$

$$1 + 730 (0.05)$$

$$n = 730$$

$$1 + 730 (0.0025)$$

$$n = 730$$

$$1 + 1.825$$

$$n = 258.41 \quad \text{Then sample size} = 258$$

The sample size used was simple random style.

The content data and categories that are analyzed are:

- Placement (Prominence):** It is to find out the prominence given to issues of public perception and media coverage of brain drain within the study in selected newspapers. It is done via news placement, that is, where public perception and media coverage of the brain drain story is placed. The unit of analysis under prominence are: front page, back page, centre spread and inside page.
- Frequency:** Refers to the number of times that brain drain reports appear in each newspaper within the study period.
- Frame:** Is like the structure that defines the boundaries and scope of the study. It sets the context and outlines what the study aims to achieve.

5.1 Results

It was gathered that because of poor remuneration, the government has lost experts in a variety of fields, including doctors, nurses, surveyors, and entrepreneurs, who have left Nigeria to work in industrialised nations leading to the brain drain. Outcomes revealed that brain drain occurs when career progress is static, i.e., when options for professional development, training, and advancement are few. In addition to a lack of acknowledgement and a sense of undervaluation, salaries have remained constant despite rising costs of goods and services. This has led to a decline in motivation, which has increased stress and the need to find new sources of income.

It was found that the transfer of experience and knowledge from one nation to another might be caused by environmental animosity, which drives people to relocate in search of better opportunities abroad. While it is difficult to say for sure whether brain drain is entirely bad, individuals who migrate overseas remit some money to their home countries.

Based on the fact that human life is insecure in the country, insecurity may lead some individuals to relocate to other countries. Another significant factor contributing to the nation's brain drain is the government's failure to provide an environment that should be favourable to foreign investment in terms of infrastructure, security, and social safety. Economic conditions have degenerated so much that nationals have migrated to other countries which have less Gross Domestic Product (GDP) compared to Nigeria.

There are numerous reasons for which brain drain occurs in Nigeria. These include poor welfare, poor funding of education, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure and insecurity. Most people want a better way of life, which has led to the brain drain. Among medical professionals, brain drain is widespread. The country's poor infrastructure has been impeding the economic development. Newspaper readers point out that there is widespread worry about the effects of qualified professionals quitting the education sector. Readers frequently view brain drain in education as a serious issue that has an impact on the nation's overall educational results as well as the calibre of teaching and research. It is believed that the loss of seasoned researchers and educators will impede the advancement of the educational system.

Readers generally agree that the exodus of gifted people from the education sector hurts the system and obstructs efforts to raise the standard of education in the country. The respondents considered brain drain in the healthcare industry to be a significant problem that affects Nigeria's healthcare services' quality. Media commentators worry about the exodus of qualified healthcare workers, such as physicians, nurses, and specialists. They see brain drain in the healthcare industry as a serious problem that adds to the burden on the system, resulting in understaffing, increased wait times, and less public access to high-quality care.

The loss of experienced healthcare workers weakens the capacity of the healthcare sector to effectively meet the needs of the teeming population. This exodus of talent is

seen as a barrier to improving healthcare infrastructure, advancing medical research, and enhancing the overall quality of healthcare services. Moreover, media analysts emphasize the importance of addressing the underlying factors that drive healthcare professionals to seek opportunities abroad, such as inadequate working conditions, limited career advancement prospects, and insufficient resources in the healthcare system.

Table1:
Frequency of Reportage of Brain Drain case from January 2023 to December 2023

	The Punch	The Vanguard	Total
	158	120	278
PERCENTAGE (%)	56.8%	43.1%	100%

A total of 158 editions in *The Punch* published brain drain issues which represent a percentage of 56.8%. *The Vanguard* used 120 editions to publish brain drain stories which was 43.1% of the total editions.

TABLE 2: **Level of prominence attached to brain drain stories by The Punch and Vanguard newspapers**

No of Column	The Punch	The Vanguard	Total	Percentage
Front Page	58	62	120	43.2
Inside Page	49	38	87	31.3
Centre Page	-	-	-	-
Back Page	43	28	71	25.6
TOTAL	150	128	278	100%

Table 4.2 above depicts that the highest coverage rate of 43.2% graced the front page, 31.3% were placed in inside pages, and 25.6% of the stories were on the back page while no story was placed at the corner pages. Therefore, the highest level of prominence attached to brain drain stories were placed on the front page.

TABLE 3: Frame used to Publish Brain Drain Stories by The Punch and Vanguard newspapers

No of Column	The Punch	The Vanguard	Total	Percentage
Economic	39	64	103	37%
Social	25	62	87	31%
Political	28	68	96	34.5%
TOTAL	92	186	278	100%

The table depicts that majority (37%) of the frame used to publish brain drain stories were economic, whereas 31% of the tone used to publish the brain drain stories in the two selected newspapers were social, and 34.5% of the tone used to publish brain drain stories in the two selected newspapers were political.

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 Public Perception of Brain Drain

Results showed that low pay has caused the government to lose experts in a variety of fields, such as physicians, nurses, surveyors, and business owners who left Nigeria to work in industrialised nations as a result of the country's poor economic conditions. This phenomenon is known as brain drain. Additionally, information acquired showed that brain drain occurs when career progress is static, i.e., when there are little options for professional development, training, or advancement. It was also shown that environmental antagonism may be a cause of the migration of experienced and knowledgeable individuals from one country to another. However, remittance benefits from overseas, and financial transfers to the Nigeria are associated with brain drain. The situation in Nigeria is so poor that many of its residents have fled to neighbouring countries where the GDP is not equal to that of Nigeria.

Respondents underscore the widespread apprehension regarding the consequences of proficient professionals departing from the Nigerian educational sector. Readers frequently view brain drain in education as a serious issue that has an impact on the nation's overall educational results as well as the calibre of teaching and research. It is believed that the loss of seasoned researchers and educators will impede the advancement of the educational system. However, the results demonstrate that the public's perceptions of brain drain differ. Marcel, Ricklef, Anna, Frederick, and Peter (2006) shared the opinion that different people in each of the 25 member states have different perspectives on migration. Results showed that The Punch featured stories about mental health in a larger proportion of its editions than Vanguard did while reporting on brain drain. This discrepancy in coverage reveals how different newspapers' editorial priorities and attention to particular subjects

vary.

The front page saw the greatest coverage rate of 43.2%, followed by the inside pages with 31.3%, the back page with 25.6%, and the corner pages with no stories. As a result, the main page featured stories about brain drain with the highest degree of prominence. This supported the argument made by Maxwell (2011), according to which the most noteworthy and important events usually make the top page news.

According to the results, the economic framework accounted for 37% of the stories and was the most prevalent. Furthermore, 31% of the stories used the social frame and 34.5% of the stories used the political frame. This indicates that the Punch and Vanguard newspapers most frequently use the economic frame. These results corroborate the assertion made by Michael and Ijeoma (2017) that Nigerian newspapers frequently print articles about brain drain under the economic loss frame, which emphasizes the financial toll that the phenomenon has on the nation.

6. CONCLUSION

According to a study conducted on the public's perception of brain drain and the media's coverage of it in The Punch and Vanguard newspapers, the media outlets that were chosen have a significant impact on bringing attention to the problem of brain drain in Nigeria. The study highlights the media's role in influencing public opinion and discourse on important socio-economic issues such as brain drain.

6.1 Recommendations

1. Based on the research findings on public perception and media coverage of brain drain in *The Punch and Vanguard* newspapers, it is recommended that both newspapers continue to play an active role in highlighting the issue of brain drain and prescribing solutions in Nigeria.
2. Government should improve the condition of service for workers and provide enabling environment for people to achieve and maximize their potentials.
3. To further enhance public awareness and understanding of this critical topic, it would be beneficial for the newspapers to collaborate on in-depth investigative pieces that provide a comprehensive view of the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to brain drain.
4. Incorporating diverse perspectives and expert opinions in their coverage can enrich the discourse surrounding brain drain and encourage meaningful dialogue on how to address this pressing issue.

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