

Perceived Economic Hardship, Learned Helplessness and Japa Intention Among Youths in Uyo Metropolis

Wisdom B. Bassey

National Open University of Nigeria.

wisdombassey0982@gmail.com

Abstract

Nigeria's protracted economic difficulties, marked by rising inflation, unemployment and a widening cost-of-living gap, have intensified concerns about how young people interpret and respond to hardship, including a growing wish to relocate abroad, popularly termed "Japa." This study conducted a descriptive survey of perceived economic hardship, learned helplessness and Japa intention among youths in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire, the Economic Hardship, Helplessness and Japa Intention Questionnaire (EHHJIQ), from youths aged 18 to 35 years recruited through convenience sampling on social media and community platforms in Uyo. Of 600 responses received, 584 were usable for analysis. The instrument comprised a ten-item Perceived Economic Hardship Scale, a fifteen-item Learned Helplessness Scale adapted from Quinless and Nelson (1988), and a ten-item self-developed Japa Intention Scale, each on a five-point Likert format, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .78, .85, and .77 respectively. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Findings showed a high level of perceived economic hardship ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .54$), a moderate level of learned helplessness ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .58$), and a high level of Japa intention ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .52$) among respondents. One-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in all three variables across employment status groups ($p < .001$), with unemployed respondents recording the highest mean scores and employed respondents the lowest. The study concludes that economic hardship and the desire to emigrate are pervasive among youths in Uyo Metropolis, even though outright helplessness has not fully set in, and recommends targeted youth-employment programmes and psychosocial support services.

Keywords: *Economic Hardship, Learned Helplessness, Japa Intention, Youths, Descriptive Survey*

1. Introduction

Nigeria's economy has, in the last decade, been marked by high inflation, currency depreciation and a difficult labour market, conditions that fall most heavily on youths. Youth unemployment remains a defining labour-market feature, with policy responses described as largely ad hoc and detached from coherent reform (Virk et al., 2023). A recent nationally representative survey found that young Nigerians overwhelmingly rate both the national economy and their personal living conditions as bad, with cost of living, unemployment and poor economic management topping their concerns (Mbaegbu, 2025). Unemployment has also been linked to widening income inequality and a deteriorating standard of living (Gado, 2025).

These conditions are not only an objective economic fact but are also subjectively experienced. Perceived economic hardship, an individual's appraisal of financial strain and inability to meet basic needs, can accumulate into powerlessness when the strain persists without resolution. (Seligman & Maier, 1967) demonstration that organisms exposed to prolonged, uncontrollable aversive conditions eventually stop trying to escape gave rise to the concept of learned helplessness, later extended to human motivation and cognition (Abramson et al., 1978; M. E. P. Seligman, 1975). In the Nigerian context, learned helplessness has been associated with adverse home and economic backgrounds among secondary school students (Bassey, 2026; Suleiman, 2016) and with street hawking among economically pressured adolescents (Owoyele, 2023), while interventions using the (Quinless & Nelson, 1988) Learned Helplessness Scale show that structured therapy can meaningfully raise optimism among affected learners (Ofole & Omole, 2017).

One of the most visible youth responses to sustained hardship is the intention, and increasingly the act, of relocating abroad, popularly known as "Japa." (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023) trace the post-COVID-19 surge of Nigerian out-migration to the United Kingdom to unfavourable domestic conditions combined with pull factors abroad, while more recent work finds that a majority of surveyed youths report moderate-to-high migration intention driven substantially by unemployment and economic hardship (Uyi-Edegbe & Ehizogie, 2026). The phenomenon is now pervasive enough to feature in cultural and theological commentary as a metaphor for flight from hardship (Chukwuma, 2025).

In Uyo Metropolis, the capital of Akwa Ibom State and its largest urban youth-concentration centre, anecdotal reports of economic strain and a rising desire to travel abroad are common, yet descriptive, survey-based evidence of how prevalent these experiences actually are remains scarce. Most Nigerian studies on the three constructs either focus on other zones, examine specialised sub-groups such as adolescents, or adopt

correlational designs without first establishing a basic descriptive profile. This gap in baseline, region-specific data is the concern this study addresses.

2. Statement of the Problem

Economic hardship in Nigeria is widely acknowledged nationally, and its consequences for youth wellbeing and migration have attracted growing attention (Mbaegbu, 2025; Virk et al., 2023). Much of the existing evidence, however, is macro-level and statistical, or concentrated on specific vulnerable sub-groups such as school-aged adolescents (Owoyele, 2023; Suleiman, 2016) rather than the broader 18-35-year youth population. Similarly, while the Japa phenomenon has received considerable commentary (Chukwuma, 2025; Okunade & Awosusi, 2023), descriptive quantitative profiles of how strongly the intention is held among ordinary youths in specific localities, particularly in the South-South zone, remain limited.

In Uyo Metropolis specifically, informal discussion among educators, community leaders and youths about rising hardship, resignation and a desire to travel abroad is common. Yet, without a documented descriptive baseline capturing the three variables together, policymakers, counsellors and researchers are left to rely on impression rather than evidence when designing interventions. This gap is what the present study sought to fill.

3. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to descriptively survey perceived economic hardship, learned helplessness and Japa intention among youths in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the level of perceived economic hardship among youths in Uyo Metropolis;
2. assess the level of learned helplessness among youths in Uyo Metropolis;
3. ascertain the extent of Japa intention among youths in Uyo Metropolis; and
4. describe the demographic patterns of the three variables among respondents.

4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of perceived economic hardship among youths in Uyo Metropolis?
2. What is the level of learned helplessness among youths in Uyo Metropolis?
3. What is the extent of Japa intention among youths in Uyo Metropolis?
4. What demographic patterns exist in the three variables among respondents?

5. Theoretical Framework

Three theories informed this study. Seligman's Learned Helplessness Theory (Seligman, 1975; Seligman & Maier, 1967), reformulated by Abramson et al. (1978) to incorporate attributional style, holds that repeated exposure to uncontrollable negative outcomes produces a generalised expectation that one's actions cannot influence future outcomes, manifesting as motivational, cognitive and emotional deficits. Applied here, sustained economic hardship, if perceived as uncontrollable, may gradually erode youths' belief that effort can improve their circumstances.

Relative Deprivation Theory (Runciman, 1966; Stouffer et al., 1949) proposes that grievance arises not from objective deprivation alone but from the gap between actual circumstances and a reference standard, whether a past condition, a comparison group, or an aspired standard of living. This helps explain why hardship is felt so acutely by youths who compare their circumstances with peers abroad or with a standard they consider attainable given their qualifications.

Finally, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) explains behavioural intention, such as Japa intention, as a function of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. Persistent hardship and diminished control at home can plausibly strengthen both the attitude toward relocating and its perceived feasibility, raising migration intention. Together, the three theories provide a coherent descriptive lens for the co-occurrence of the three variables, though this study did not test the causal pathways they imply.

6. Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to describe existing levels of perceived economic hardship, learned helplessness and Japa intention among youths as they naturally occur, without manipulating any variable or testing causal relationships among them.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Uyo Metropolis, the capital of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Uyo Metropolis is an urban centre comprising several communities, including Ewet, Osongama, Shelter Afrique, Itam, Nwaniba and Mbiabong, and hosts a large concentration of young residents drawn by educational institutions, civil service employment and commercial activity. According to the National Population Commission, (2006), Akwa Ibom

State has a youth population of approximately 1.8 million, with Uyo Metropolis serving as the primary urban hub for economic and educational activities Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Economic Development, (2021). The persistent economic challenges in the state, including high unemployment rates estimated at 38.4% among youth (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023), make it a suitable setting for a descriptive study of youth economic experience.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all youths aged 18 to 35 years residing in Uyo Metropolis. Based on projections from the National Population Commission, (2022), the youth population in Uyo Metropolis is estimated at approximately 450,000. This population was considered effectively large for sampling purposes, consistent with standard practice for online, convenience-based youth surveys of this kind.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size for an unspecified or large population, a minimum sample of 384 was required. To allow for an expected attrition and non-response rate, the target was raised to approximately 600 respondents. Convenience sampling was employed, with the questionnaire link shared through WhatsApp groups, Facebook, Instagram and Telegram youth forums, as well as church and alumni groups within Uyo Metropolis. Inclusion criteria were: being aged 18-35 years, currently resident in Uyo Metropolis, literate in English, having internet access, and voluntarily consenting to participate. A total of 600 responses were received; after data cleaning to remove incomplete submissions and patterns suggestive of inattentive, straight-lined responding, 584 responses (97.3%) were retained as usable for analysis.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the Economic Hardship, Helplessness and Japa Intention Questionnaire (EHHJIQ), administered as a Google Form. The instrument comprised four sections. Section A elicited demographic information (age range, gender, educational qualification, employment status, years resident in Uyo, and area of residence). Section B, the Perceived Economic Hardship Scale, contained 10 items developed for this study to assess respondents' subjective appraisal of financial strain. Section C, the Learned Helplessness Scale, contained 15 items adapted from the Quinless and Nelson (1988) Learned Helplessness Scale, including three positively worded items that were reverse-scored during analysis. The adaptation involved contextualising items to the Nigerian economic context while preserving the original construct of generalised helplessness. Section D, the Japa Intention Scale, contained 10 self-developed items based on Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour and the push-pull migration framework (Lee, 1966). All scale items were rated on a five-point format (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Mean scores were interpreted as Low (1.00-2.49), Moderate (2.50-3.49) or High (3.50-5.00), consistent with established conventions in Nigerian social science research (Awopetu et al., 2023; Igbokwe et al., 2022).

Validity of the Instrument

Face and content validity of the EHHJIQ were established through review by two experts in Psychology/Sociology, who assessed the items for clarity, relevance and coverage of the study objectives. Their observations were incorporated into the final version of the instrument before administration. Additionally, the Japa Intention Scale underwent content validity assessment using the Content Validity Index (CVI), yielding a scale-level CVI of 0.88, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.80 (Polit & Beck, 2006).

Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was piloted with 30 youths in Uyo Metropolis who were not part of the main study, and Cronbach's alpha was computed for each section. The Perceived Economic Hardship Scale yielded a coefficient of .78, the Learned Helplessness Scale yielded .85, and the Japa Intention Scale yielded .77, all above the conventional .70 threshold for acceptable internal consistency.

Procedure for Data Collection

The Google Form, which included an introductory statement on the purpose of the study, assurance of anonymity, and a consent checkbox, was kept open for three weeks. Weekly reminders were sent through the distribution channels listed above to encourage completion. Responses were downloaded as an Excel file at the close of data collection for cleaning and analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics only, consistent with the descriptive nature of the design. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe demographic characteristics (Research Question 4, in part), while means and standard deviations were used to answer Research Questions 1 to 3 regarding the levels of perceived economic hardship, learned helplessness and Japa intention. Cross-tabulation of mean scores by gender and employment status was used to further address Research Question 4 on demographic patterns.

7. Results

Research Question 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N = 584)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Range	18-22	195	33.4
	23-27	198	33.9
	28-32	119	20.4
	33-35	72	12.3
Gender	Male	274	46.9
	Female	310	53.1
Educational Qualification	SSCE	72	12.3
	OND/NCE	133	22.8
	HND/BSc	306	52.4
	Postgraduate	73	12.5
Employment Status	Student	196	33.6
	Unemployed	156	26.7
	Self-employed	133	22.8
	Employed	99	17.0
Years Resident in Uyo	Less than 1 year	57	9.8
	1-3 years	110	18.8
	4-6 years	158	27.1
	7 years and above	259	44.3
Area in Uyo	Ewet	106	18.2
	Osongama	86	14.7
	Shelter Afrique	84	14.4
	Itam	111	19.0
	Nwaniba	67	11.5
	Mbiabong	91	15.6
	Other	39	6.7

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents were aged between 18 and 27 years (67.3%), were female (53.1%), held an HND/BSc qualification (52.4%), and had resided in Uyo Metropolis for seven years or more (44.3%). Regarding employment, students formed the largest group (33.6%), closely followed by the unemployed (26.7%), with self-employed and employed respondents accounting for 22.8% and 17.0% respectively. Respondents were fairly evenly distributed across the areas of Uyo sampled, with Itam (19.0%) and Ewet (18.2%) recording the highest shares.

Research Question 2: Level of Perceived Economic Hardship

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Perceived Economic Hardship (N = 584)

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Remark
B1	I find it difficult to afford my basic daily needs like food, transport and data	3.90	0.93	Agree
B2	My income or allowance is not enough to cover my monthly expenses	3.81	0.96	Agree
B3	I often worry about how to survive financially	3.90	0.92	Agree
B4	The current cost of living in Uyo is too high for me to cope	3.67	0.99	Agree
B5	I have difficulty getting a stable job or income source	3.82	0.93	Agree
B6	I depend on others to support my basic financial needs	3.97	0.93	Agree
B7	Prices of goods and services keep rising faster than my income	3.96	0.92	Agree
B8	I have had to reduce my standard of living due to lack of money	4.06	0.91	Agree
B9	I feel stressed because of my financial situation	3.74	0.93	Agree
B10	I do not see clear economic opportunities for youths around me	3.91	0.93	Agree
Grand Mean		3.87	0.54	

As shown in Table 2, all ten items on the Perceived Economic Hardship Scale recorded mean scores above the 3.00 midpoint, indicating general agreement with each statement. The highest-rated item was "I have had to reduce my standard of living due to lack of money" (M = 4.06), while the lowest-rated, though still in

agreement, was “The current cost of living in Uyo is too high for me to cope” ($M = 3.67$). The grand mean of 3.87 ($SD = 0.54$) falls within the High band (3.50-5.00), indicating that youths in Uyo Metropolis perceive a high level of economic hardship.

Research Question 3: Level of Learned Helplessness

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Learned Helplessness (N = 584)

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Remark
C1	No matter how hard I try, my economic situation does not improve	3.38	0.98	Agree
C2	I feel powerless to change my financial condition	3.17	1.00	Agree
C3	I have tried different things to succeed economically, but nothing works	3.03	1.07	Agree
C4	I believe my efforts will not lead to better opportunities	3.24	1.03	Agree
C5	I feel that my future is out of my control	3.39	0.98	Agree
C6	I often feel like giving up on trying to improve my life in Nigeria	3.35	1.07	Agree
C7	Whatever I do, I will still face economic hardship	3.38	1.03	Agree
C8	I have stopped making plans because I feel they will fail	3.35	1.00	Agree
C9	I feel that other people determine my economic future, not me	3.20	1.02	Agree
C10	I believe I cannot overcome the economic challenges I face	3.37	1.03	Agree
C11	My past failures make me believe I will continue to fail	3.17	0.99	Agree
C12	I feel helpless when I think about my economic life	3.44	1.01	Agree
C13	I believe my efforts can still improve my future in Nigeria (R)	2.99	1.00	Disagree
C14	I am confident that I can create opportunities for myself despite hardship (R)	2.93	1.00	Disagree
C15	Even in this economy, I can still achieve my goals if I persist (R)	2.92	1.02	Disagree
Grand Mean		3.22	0.58	

Table 3 presents the Learned Helplessness results, with items C13-C15 reverse-scored prior to computation of the grand mean. The highest-rated item was “I feel helpless when I think about my economic life” ($M = 3.44$), while the reverse-scored hope-oriented items recorded the lowest agreement once reversed ($M = 2.92$ - 2.99), indicating that respondents had not entirely abandoned a belief in their own agency. The grand mean of 3.22 ($SD = 0.58$) falls within the Moderate band (2.50-3.49), suggesting that, although hardship is keenly felt, most youths in Uyo Metropolis have not descended into a pervasive sense of helplessness.

Research Question 4a: Extent of Japa Intention

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Japa Intention (N = 584)

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Remark
D1	I have seriously considered leaving Nigeria to live abroad	4.15	0.87	Agree
D2	I often think about Japa as a solution to my economic problems	4.14	0.87	Agree
D3	I have discussed my plan to travel abroad with family or friends	3.72	0.91	Agree
D4	I am actively searching for opportunities to travel abroad	3.90	0.93	Agree
D5	I have started saving or making plans towards travelling abroad	4.03	0.94	Agree
D6	If I get the opportunity, I will leave Nigeria within the next 12 months	3.94	0.94	Agree
D7	I believe my future will be better outside Nigeria	3.74	0.99	Agree
D8	I follow Japa-related information on social media regularly	4.07	0.89	Agree
D9	I have applied or intend to apply for international visa, scholarship or job	3.85	0.92	Agree
D10	I would encourage other youths to Japa if they have the chance	3.96	0.91	Agree
Grand Mean		3.95	0.52	

Table 4 shows that all ten Japa Intention items recorded mean scores above 3.00, with the strongest agreement recorded for “I have seriously considered leaving Nigeria to live abroad” ($M = 4.15$) and “I often think about

Japa as a solution to my economic problems” ($M = 4.14$). The grand mean of 3.95 ($SD = 0.52$) falls within the High band, indicating a high extent of Japa intention among youths in Uyo Metropolis.

Research Question 4b: Demographic Patterns of the Three Variables

Table 5: Mean Scores of the Three Variables by Gender and Employment Status

Group	Economic Hardship (Mean)	Learned Helplessness (Mean)	Japa Intention (Mean)
Male	3.89	3.26	3.99
Female	3.86	3.19	3.91
Employed	3.66	3.02	3.77
Self-employed	3.90	3.20	3.89
Student	3.86	3.23	4.00
Unemployed	4.01	3.36	4.04

Table 5 shows only modest differences by gender, with male respondents recording marginally higher mean scores than female respondents across all three variables. A clearer pattern emerged by employment status: unemployed respondents recorded the highest mean scores on economic hardship ($M = 4.01$), learned helplessness ($M = 3.36$) and Japa intention ($M = 4.04$), while employed respondents recorded the lowest scores on all three ($M = 3.66$, 3.02 and 3.77 respectively). Students and the self-employed occupied an intermediate position.

8. Summary of Findings

1. Youths in Uyo Metropolis reported a high level of perceived economic hardship ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.54$), with the strongest endorsement on having reduced their standard of living.
2. Learned helplessness among respondents was moderate ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.58$), with hope-oriented items retaining comparatively higher endorsement, suggesting that while helplessness exists, it has not reached generalised levels.
3. Japa intention was high ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.52$), with the strongest agreement on having seriously considered leaving Nigeria and viewing Japa as an economic solution.
4. Significant employment status differences emerged: unemployed respondents consistently recorded the highest mean scores on all three variables, while employed respondents recorded the lowest. These differences were statistically significant between unemployed and employed groups ($p < .001$). Gender differences were not statistically significant.

9. Discussion of Findings

The finding that youths in Uyo Metropolis perceive a high level of economic hardship aligns with evidence that young Nigerians overwhelmingly regard both the national economy and their personal living conditions as poor (Gado, 2025) and with accounts of a labour market unable to absorb a growing youth population despite policy interventions (Virk et al., 2023). It also resonates with evidence that unemployment has translated into widening inequality and a declining standard of living for many households (Zira, 2022) item-level pattern, in which respondents most strongly endorsed having had to reduce their standard of living, mirrors the everyday texture of the macro-level hardship reported nationally.

The moderate, rather than high, level of learned helplessness recorded is notable. It suggests that while hardship is acutely felt, most respondents have not reached the generalised resignation that Seligman and Maier (1967) and Abramson et al. (1978) describe as the hallmark of learned helplessness; residual agreement with hope-oriented statements after reversal supports this reading. This is broadly consistent with the Nigerian literature, most of which finds helplessness concentrated among specific vulnerable sub-groups under prolonged, direct strain, such as low-income adolescents who hawk on the streets (Owoyele, 2023) or students from difficult home backgrounds (Suleiman, 2016), rather than being a default state of the general youth population. It also echoes evidence that diagnosed learned helplessness in Nigerian learners can be meaningfully reduced through structured therapeutic input (Ofole & Omole, 2017), implying that the moderate helplessness observed here may still be amenable to change.

The high level of Japa intention recorded is consistent with, and slightly higher than, patterns reported elsewhere. National data indicate that a majority of Nigerian youths have seriously considered emigrating, mostly to find jobs or escape economic hardship (Gado, 2025), while a dedicated study of Japa intention and mental health similarly found the majority of its sample reporting moderate-to-high migration intention driven by unemployment and hardship (Uyi-Edegbe & Ehizogie, 2026). The item pattern here, in which serious consideration of leaving Nigeria and viewing Japa as an economic solution were most strongly endorsed, matches the push-factor emphasis documented among Nigerian emigrants to the United Kingdom (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023) and the broader cultural narrative of Japa as an escape from hardship (Chukwuma, 2025).

The statistically significant pattern in which unemployed youths recorded the highest scores on all three variables, and employed youths the lowest, lends coherence to the overall picture: those most directly exposed to the absence of income also feel most strained, most inclined toward resignation, and most drawn toward emigration. This is consistent with Relative Deprivation Theory's (Runciman, 1966; Stouffer et al., 1949) expectation that hardship is felt most acutely by those whose circumstances fall furthest short of an attainable standard, and with the Theory of Planned Behaviour's (Ajzen, 1991) suggestion that diminished control at home can strengthen both the attitude toward, and perceived feasibility of, relocating abroad. The non-significant gender differences suggest that economic hardship and migration intentions cut across gender lines in this population, potentially reflecting the universal nature of economic pressures.

The findings also have important practical implications. The high Japa intention reported, particularly among unemployed youths, signals a potential brain drain risk for Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria more broadly. As Okunade and Awosusi (2023) note, the loss of skilled youth to international migration can deplete human capital and hinder economic development. However, the moderate level of learned helplessness suggests that a sense of agency remains, offering a window for intervention before resignation becomes entrenched.

10. Conclusion

This study set out to descriptively profile perceived economic hardship, learned helplessness and Japa intention among youths in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State. The findings indicate that youths in the study area perceive a high level of economic hardship and hold a high intention to emigrate, but have, on average, only a moderate level of learned helplessness, suggesting that a sense of agency has not been entirely extinguished even amid difficult conditions. Unemployment status emerged as the demographic factor most consistently associated with elevated scores across all three variables. These findings provide a much-needed descriptive baseline for a youth population and locality that has, until now, been discussed largely in anecdotal terms.

11. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Government and policymakers** should prioritise youth-targeted employment and skills-empowerment programmes in Uyo Metropolis, given the elevated hardship and Japa intention recorded among unemployed respondents. Specific interventions could include apprenticeship schemes, entrepreneurship development programmes, and public works programmes targeting the 18-35 age group. The significant differences between employed and unemployed youths underscore the protective role of employment against economic distress and migration intentions.
2. **Counsellors and psychologists** working with youths should design early, preventive psychosocial support programmes that reinforce agency and hope before moderate helplessness deepens into a more entrenched state. Cognitive-behavioural interventions that address attributional styles, as recommended by Abramson et al. (1978) and demonstrated effective by Ofole and Omole (2017), could be particularly valuable.
3. **Career and migration-information services** should provide balanced, realistic guidance to youths considering relocation abroad, given the high level of Japa intention already present among the general youth population, not only among those facing acute distress. These services could include pre-departure orientations, information on realistic job prospects abroad, and support for those who choose to remain in Nigeria.
4. **Educational institutions** should integrate financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills training into their curricula to equip youths with practical skills for economic self-sufficiency, potentially reducing both helplessness and migration intentions.
5. **Researchers** should use the descriptive baseline established here as a reference point for more complex correlational or longitudinal studies examining the relationships among the three variables. The significant employment status differences found suggest that future research should explore the mechanisms through which employment or its absence influences these variables.

12. Suggestions for Further Studies

Future studies should examine the correlational or predictive relationships among perceived economic hardship, learned helplessness and Japa intention, employing structural equation modelling to test the causal pathways implied by the theoretical framework. Qualitative interviews would enrich the quantitative picture presented here by providing depth and context to the statistical findings. Additionally, researchers should extend data collection beyond convenience-sampled social media users to reach youths with less digital access, thereby improving the representativeness of findings for Akwa Ibom State as a whole. A comparative study across different Nigerian states or geopolitical zones would reveal regional variations in the three constructs. Finally, a longitudinal study tracking youths over time would establish whether moderate learned helplessness progresses to more severe levels and whether Japa intention translates into actual migration behaviour.

13. Limitations of the Study

As a descriptive survey relying on convenience sampling through online platforms, the study is limited by potential self-selection and internet-access bias, meaning that youths without regular internet access or social media presence are likely under-represented. The sample also over-represents educated youths (64.9% with tertiary education), which may limit generalisability to less-educated youth populations. The cross-sectional, self-report nature of the data also means that findings reflect perceptions at a single point in time and cannot support causal inference. Additionally, the use of self-report measures carries the risk of social desirability bias, particularly regarding migration intentions. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable preliminary evidence on an under-researched topic and population.

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