

The Push-Pull Effect of Literature on Human Migration: A Reflection

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Abstract

Migration involves the movement of humans or animals from one place to another. This movement could be on temporary or permanent bases. Migration could happen when people go in search of better source of income, higher standard of living, more secured society, presence of infrastructure and so on. However, sometimes the reason people move from and to a place is not certain. This study was carried out to ascertain if literature has any role to play in people's decisions to move from their current abode and to their destinations. The theory adopted for the study was the Push-Pull Theory of Migration. The study revealed that literature can be used to expose a society's positive and negative way of life, propagate or negate a philosophy, affect a reader's psychology, and so on. As a result, the researcher concludes that literature is a factor that influences migration.

Keywords: *Migration, literature, culture, causes of migration*

1.0 Introduction

The movement of people from one place to another is as old as man himself. Human beings move from one location to another for reasons which range from search of

better lives to satisfaction of curiosity. According to [5], causes of migration include lack of employment opportunities as well as fears of disorder and racial, political, and religious persecution that may occur in certain

communities. Other factors, according to them, are availability of favorable employment opportunities, good and working facilities for health and educational, public order and freedom, and then a favorable climate.

The causes of migration have long attracted the attentions of several scholars and researchers. However, little or no attention has been paid to the underlying factors that influence people's decisions on whether to move or not, and on their choice of destination. This study will look into what influences or manipulates people's decision to migrate from the place of origin to their host community. The paper will specifically study the effect literature can have on its reader's decision making, especially pertaining to migration. It is hoped that the result of the study can help literary writers to be aware of the effects of their works on their audience and to make amendments, if need be, on their literary style. It will also help prospective migrants in their decision making about their migration process.

2.1 Literature: Meaning and Characteristics

The term 'literature' has been defined by different authors in different ways, each seeing it from a different perspective. As [8] explains, it is challenging to understand exactly what literature is because it defining the concept has proved to be quite difficult. [10] discloses that there is no real consensus or an all-embracing definition of literature because some of the existing definitions of literature were given by scholars according to their wealth of life experience within their locations.

However, [10] defines literature as the "permanent expressions in words (written or spoken), specially arranged in pleasing accepted patterns or forms" (p. 16). He further states that literature is used to express thoughts, ideas, feelings, or other special aspects of human experiences. This definition of literature points out a lot of its characteristics. The definition shows that literature uses words (in other words, languages) and that it has patterns in which they have to be in order to be accepted. This is to say that different types of literature have their pattern of presentation. [10] definition also shows that literature does not include only fictional works, as some authors might suggest. This is because expressions in words can be both fictional and non-fictional. In

other words, any form of writings that is creative is a literature.

Other characteristics of literature include:

a. Literature Is neither Time-Bound nor Place-Bound: [10] definition of literature sees literature as “permanent expressions”. This means that literary works can withstand the passage of time and can be appreciated in different geographical locations. A literary work written in one location may appeal to an audience in another location. On the same hand, a literary text can appeal to audience in different era. [9] agrees with this when he states:

It is an uncontroversial question that masterpieces need not be restricted to either time or place. They quite often transcend them ... They are timeless and placeless because they are mainly concerned with essential values such as those people constantly take interest in at any time or place. Besides, they particularly handle the human themes that always appeal to people wherever they live such as love, death, suffering,

happiness, torment and worry. (p. 45)

b. Literature Uses Special Language: It is often said that the language used in literature is different from the conventional language used in ordinary conversations. According to [9], the language of literature is special and different because of the way it uses words and sentence structures and patterns in ways that may create emotional, psychological, mental, imagery and even dream-like states, which ordinary languages could not achieve. The language of literature is usually intense and allusive.

c. Literature Has Written and Spoken Forms: Unlike some authors, who opine that literature is only in the written form, [10] holds that literature can be in spoken or written form. According to him, the spoken form of literature is commonly found in the Third World and developing countries of Africa, where many citizens are not literate. The spoken form of literature is transmitted from generation to generation orally. A good example of oral literature is the folklore. However, the written form of literature, as [10] posits, has been reduced to writing and is common among literate culture. Written literature is more permanent than oral

literature because it can hardly be altered nor forgotten.

d. Literature Is Expressive: [10] states that literature expresses “thoughts, feelings, ideas or other special aspects of human experiences” (p. 16). [3] agrees with this because he states that literature is “a social art, a means of exposure and self-expression” (p. 92). [9] strongly holds that literature portrays the writer’s conceptions, attitudes and images towards his surroundings.

e. Literature Is Culture Based: According to [6] when we study a literary work, we become deeply involved in the study of the culture of a given people. This is to say that literature does not exist in a vacuum; it must be based on the culture of a particular society or school of thought.

2.2. Functions of Literature

Literature, as an art, performs entertainment function. By so doing, it allows its readers to relax, enjoy the work and be in good mood while it lasts. However, literature has been discovered to perform some functions other than entertainment. It has become the pathway through which mankind seeks

knowledge of the world he lives in. As [3] puts it, literature has, over time, become a crucial aspect of human life as they embark on the mission to adapt and understand their mysterious world better. He further states that literature helps man to evaluate the values of his past and his present as well as articulate his future.

Other functions of literature include:

a. The Culture Transmitter: [6] hold that literature can project and transmit culture because studying a literary work brings about the studying of the culture portrayed in the work. Literature is able to transmit culture through its use of a special language known as literary language, which uses literary devices such as proverbs, imageries, symbols, allusions and figures of speech [1]. In other words, the language of literary work has the power to project a culture. [2] holds that literary artists are custodians of culture because literature can transmit people’s way of life. He believes that good habits and customs can be transmitted to the young ones through literary works.

b. Window to Self-Expression

[10], in his definition of literature, shows that literature is an avenue through which human experiences can be expressed. [2] states that literature is a powerful tool of human expression, which is different from other forms of communication. [9] opines that literature provides writers with an outlet to express what is in their minds concerning their environments.

c. Philosophical Functions:

[7] hold that philosophy can be pursued through literary works because literature has a strong impact on the ethical outlook of its consumers. According to them, some philosophers have undertaken to project their philosophies through fictional works such as novels and short stories. They also explain that some philosophers use literary works to negate certain philosophies they disagree with. A good example is the use of literature to propagate feminism and negate racism.

d. Psychological Functions

[4] holds that literary writers are naturally gifted to create and develop characters. This gift, according to him, gives these writers the “natural gifts of becoming psychologists

who understand and appreciate the ever-changing tides and dynamism of the human personalities and complexities” (p. 133). He further explains that writers use the abilities as psychologists to proffer solutions to the psychological problems of their characters, which can invariably assist readers by enlarging their knowledge and understanding of human lives. Put differently, the psychological solutions proffered by a writer for the psychological challenges of his characters can help the readers of the literary work in tackling their own psychological challenges.

[6] state that psychology in literature helps literary artists and critics to focus on the mental processes of a creative writer, the mental processes of the characters in his work as well as the effect of his work on the readers. They conclude that literature provides the right avenue “to purge one’s feelings, thoughts, ideas, fears, agitations, and philosophical inclinations towards persons, cultural beliefs and practices, and aberrations often found amongst tribes, ethnic groups and nations” (p. 117).

e. The Conscience of a Nation

Literature can perform the function of the conscience of the nation through exposing, battling and, indirectly, correcting societal vices. Many literary writers expose their perceived ills in the society through their works. [3] agrees with this by stating that literature is a “social art, a means of exposure ... through which the societal values, dreams and aspirations are brought to limelight for a thorough and patriotic appraisal” (p. 93). He further states that literature presents the unrealized and hidden value of the society and makes the reader see the neglected and unrealized aspects of his dreams, which, it hopes, can help and guide the society in realizing.

[2] holds that literature has the power to create awareness and national consciousness in people, especially those who see the need to come together to fight social vices such as corruption, injustice, oppression and so on. In other words, literature can contribute towards national development through political education and orientation. It can provide a deep insight and information on how societies can move towards achieving peace and unity. This is in line with what [3] states:

Literature has over time proven to be a formidable way through which writers and scholars express their nationalist consciousness and beliefs in the future development of the nation when all the vices and many other hydra-headed evils, which militate against the development of society, may have been reduced to the barest minimal level. (p. 91)

3.0. Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on the Push and Pull Theory of Migration. This theory was first postulated by Ernest Ravenstein in the 19th century but further developed by Everette Lee in 1966. This theory holds that migration is ruled by push-pull factors, where unfavorable conditions push people out of their original place while favorable conditions pull the migrants into their destinations. Push factors include negative experiences such as unemployment, political instability, bad climate, threats to life, injustice, poor medical facility, poverty and so on. On the hand, pull factors are positive experiences such as greater job opportunities, availability of basic infrastructure, religious freedom, good

medical facilities, stable political system and so on.

This theory also postulates the presence of intervening obstacles, which lies between the push factors and the pull factors. These obstacles are factors such as distance, transportation, funds and so on, which discourage migration process.

The Push-Pull Theory shows that experiences can act as the push or pull factors. Sometimes these factors could be the experiences of the migrant or other people. Prospective migrants can have access to the experiences of others through their stories, which they recounted orally or in writing. These experiences have the power of creating pictures in the minds of these prospective migrants, making them see what they stand to encounter or enjoy for making some decisions. It is also possible that information, ideas and opinions given by someone else (especially by those accorded much respect in the society) could affect the decision making of the hearers or readers. One of the easiest, most efficient and most effective way of passing on such information, ideas, opinions and experiences is through literature.

Literature is effective in influencing the decisions of people because it can transmit culture, express emotions, propagate or negate philosophies, proffer solutions to psychological challenges and act as the conscience of the nation. A literary artist, while employing literature to perform any or all of these functions may only succeed in encouraging or discouraging migration. In other words, literature can be a push and/or pull factor, as well as an intervening obstacle.

3.1 The Effect of Literature on Migration: The Push-Pull Factor

The Push-Pull Theory of Migration has shown that for migration to take place there must be a push factor and/ or a pull factor. These factor(s) should be strong enough to influence the decision-making of the migrants. The characteristics of literature have shown that it has the power to affect and manipulate its readers, or listeners. Literature can work on the psychology of its audience by proffering solutions to whatever psychological challenges they are facing; it can propagate or negate an existing philosophy; and above all, it can expose both the good and the bad side of a society. Literature can make great use of literary devices such as imagery and symbols

to paint a desired picture in the minds of its audience.

If many literary writers of a community pay more attention to exposing the ills of their community rather than to projecting its good values, they will only succeed in pushing out many members of that community. A good example of this is the case of most Nigerian literary writers who, in their bid to correct some social vices, concentrate more on exposing and announcing the corrupt practices in the country and less time on bringing out Nigerian good values and beauty. These writers end up planting the seed of frustration and depression in the minds of their readers. This style of writing is not limited to Nigeria alone; most African writers have adopted that. A lot of African literatures today fail to point out the beauty of African culture but only concentrate on exposing the underdevelopment of African political, educational, social and religious systems. They write works that show that the easiest way an African can be successful is by leaving his or her country. The effect of works such as these is that the readers start dreaming and envisaging when they will leave their countries, which they believe has nothing to offer them. Of course, they

will not stop there, they will also spread this ‘message of doom’ planted by the writers.

On the other hand, when literary writers use their works to paint beautiful pictures of a place, that place will start attracting migrants. This could answer for the reasons Nigerians are more attracted to United Kingdom, United States of America and Canada. These countries are not the only English speaking developed countries of the world, but a lot of literary works in Nigerian markets today are either from foreign authors who wrote about the exciting and civilized lives of the inhabitants of these countries, or from African writers who expressed how their African characters became successful because they migrated to these countries. Hardly do you see a work of literature in Nigeria that spoke ills of them. The lives of the occupants of these countries are usually laid out in positive light. Little or nothing is said about their social vices. The social vices that managed to find their ways into literature are treated with much subtlety. These are ways African authors encourage migration of Africans to the Western world. Should these literary writers change their modus operandi and expose or paint a ‘doom image’ of these countries, the

rate of migration of Africans there will greatly reduce.

3.2 The Effect of Literature on Migration: The Intervening Obstacle

Literature does not only perform the function of a push-pull factor in migration. It has proved itself to be the fastest means of discouraging migration, especially to unfavorable destinations. This function comes up when a person is discouraged from migrating (either from leaving his original home or moving to his desired destination) because of the influence of a literary work he read. This influence could be from the writer's call for a patriotic action or a message of hope for the members of the community. It could also be because of the writer's exposure of the bad practices or unfavorable conditions that exist in the reader's Utopia.

A good example of how Nigerian literature acts as an intervening factor is its use in the campaign against human-trafficking, child-labor, organ-harvesting, sex-slavery, forced-labor and so on. Most writers create formidable stories around these vices thereby using their works to create

awareness of the presence of these vices within the society, especially in the so-called developed areas and countries. Most of the literary works with messages woven around these vices have been approved by different education bodies for use in primary and secondary schools in the country, thereby encouraging the widespread of the message. The effect of this is that those who had hitherto dreamt of and planned on how and when to migrate to the affected places have become weary of migration offers coming from their 'well-meaning-relatives'.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

Literature is not just a piece of writing or a story for entertainment. It does not just teach moral values and pass on the culture of the people. It is not just a window for the expression of the writer's feelings and the exposition of the ills of the country. Literature is more than all these because it can seep into the minds of its readers and manipulate their decisions. It has the power to encourage or discourage national development as well as attract or dissipate inventors. Finally, literature has the power of encouraging or discouraging migration as a result of how it captures a given

society. Hence, literature can have positive or negative effects on the minds of readers.

To reduce the negative effects of some literary works, the researcher recommends that the following:

1. As literary writers make efforts to express what they feel about their surroundings, they should bring out both the good and the bad. Writers should remember that they are more than artists; they are also philosophers, psychologists, culture custodians and the conscience of the nation. Their writings can build or destroy a nation. They owe their readers the duty of stating things as they truly are, not just as they feel it ought to be. They should desist from giving wrong images and impressions about their communities as these do not only send out the community members, but also discourage prospective members from coming in. They should allow their works to be at the equilibrium.

2. Prospective migrants should also carry out a proper investigation of their prospective destination. They should not rely on information gotten from literary

works alone, as this might be misleading. After all, literature is all about creativity.

3. The Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) should create opportunities for sensitizing its members on the effect of literary works on the readers. This will eradicate or reduce the rate Nigerian authors write negative things about the country.

4. Literary artists should concentrate more on teaching moral and cultural values to their readers and listeners and not on the ill practices in their community.

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