

Assessing the Feasibility of High-Skilled Bahamian Migrants Returning and Contributing to Bahamian National Development: Continuation of Brain Drain Research

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Abstract

Research on migration has primarily focused on the factors that motivate individuals to leave their countries of origin, with considerably less attention given to the factors influencing return migration. Despite the long history of migration to The Bahamas and throughout the Caribbean region, limited research has examined the feasibility of return migration among highly skilled Bahamians. This study explores the feasibility of return migration among highly educated Bahamians and assesses their interest in contributing to national development. Using an anonymous survey, the study analyzes responses from more than 100 native Bahamians residing in multiple countries. Findings indicate that higher education, career advancement and quality-of-life considerations remain the primary drivers of emigration. However, respondents also reported strong cultural ties to The Bahamas, sustained relationships with family and community and a continued commitment to supporting the nation's development. Participants demonstrated a transnational orientation, maintaining meaningful connections to their homeland while building lives abroad. The findings suggest that strengthening diaspora engagement, expanding opportunities for skilled return migration and developing policies that facilitate the transfer of knowledge, expertise and professional networks could advance national development. This study contributes to the limited scholarship on Bahamian skilled migration by highlighting the diaspora as a strategic resource for economic and social development.

Introduction

For decades, The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism has promoted the slogan “It’s Better in The Bahamas” to attract international visitors to the archipelago (Nassau Paradise Island, 2022). Although successful as a tourism brand, the slogan has also taken on symbolic meaning within local discourse. Bowe (2017) observed that some highly educated Bahamian professionals use the phrase sarcastically to suggest that

professional, academic and economic opportunities are often more favorable for expatriates than for Bahamian citizens. Similarly, Hartnell (2017) suggested that considerable investments in educating Bahamians frequently yields limited national returns as many highly skilled individuals encounter insufficient opportunities within the domestic labor market.

These perspectives reflect the broader challenge of brain drain, where highly

educated citizens emigrate in search of educational, professional and economic opportunities unavailable at home. Small island developing states, including The Bahamas, experience some of the world's highest rates of skilled emigration (Docquier et al., 2014). Galanis (2019) attributed this trend to the limited diversity within the Bahamian economy, which affects career opportunities in specialized fields and encourages professionals to pursue employment abroad. As a result, The Bahamas continues to lose highly educated citizens whose knowledge and expertise could contribute to national development.

Addressing brain drain requires more than understanding why skilled Bahamians leave; it also requires examining the conditions under which they may return. Although migration scholars have emphasized the importance of reengaging highly skilled migrants, little empirical research has examined the feasibility of return migration among highly educated Bahamians. This gap is particularly significant as diaspora communities have long been recognized as valuable contributors to the social and economic development of their countries of origin through investment, knowledge exchange, entrepreneurship and professional networks (Newland & Plaza, 2013). Relatively few regional governments have developed sustained strategies to engage their overseas citizens or leverage these resources effectively. Understanding the perspectives of the Bahamian diaspora is therefore essential for informing policies that may strengthen connections between skilled migrants and national development priorities.

Research on Caribbean migration confirms successive waves of migration for centuries (Roberts-Kasmally, 2005; Potter et al., 2005) with most of the emigrant data derived from census or administrative policies in destination countries. Remaining

data is typically either outdated, limited in scope or narrowly focused on one country or profession, such as nurses in Jamaica (Rolle-Sands et al., 2020). As Zavala (2023) noted, additional research is needed to better understand the migration experiences of underrepresented Caribbean populations, including Bahamians.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the perspectives of highly educated Bahamians living abroad regarding return migration and diaspora engagement. Specifically, it explores their willingness to return, the conditions that may facilitate return migration and their interest in contributing to national development. By providing empirical evidence on an understudied population, this research expands the literature on Caribbean skilled migration while offering practical insights for policymakers, educators and organizational leaders seeking to strengthen The Bahamas through engaging the diaspora. Accordingly, this study highlights the importance of understanding the Bahamian diaspora to inform the development of intentional workforce retention and reintegration strategies within The Bahamas. Such opportunities are particularly critical in sectors including education, healthcare, information technology, agriculture, construction and entrepreneurship. By providing empirical data on diasporic Bahamians' willingness to return and their interests in contributing to national development, this study addresses the significant gap in the literature on Caribbean migration and diaspora engagement.

The Complexity of Migration

The Bahamas has a rich history of people moving into, away from and around the archipelago. Bahamian migration has been shaped by the country's geography, relative economic prosperity within the region and

the desire for opportunities not available in The Bahamas. More broadly, the Caribbean has experienced multiple waves of migration throughout its history (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Over the past five decades, more than five million people have emigrated from the Caribbean, primarily to North America (International Organization for Migration, 2017).

Recent migration trends across the Caribbean region have been influenced by environmental and climate-related factors, the emigration of highly skilled professionals to developed countries and increasing levels of both voluntary and involuntary return migration (International Organization for Migration, 2017). Although data on regional migration remains limited, available evidence indicates that approximately half of all international migrants within the Caribbean originate from other Caribbean countries and are disproportionately young and well educated (International Organization for Migration, 2017). Research on return migration in the Caribbean suggests that returnees often contribute to economic and social development by establishing small businesses and introducing new skills and innovations (Gmelch, 1987); they may often return later in life for retirement (Thomas-Hope, 2002). While existing scholarship has largely focused on the causes and impact of highly skilled migration in the Caribbean, less attention has been given to understanding the experiences, motivations and return intentions of Bahamian migrants specifically.

Impact of Migration

Despite the considerable diversity among Caribbean nations, the region shares common challenges associated with the loss of skilled labor contributing to regional constraints on economic and social development (Mukasa, 2020). Confirming

the impact of regional migration, Salmon et al. (2007) reported that Caribbean countries were experiencing severe nursing shortages, with an average vacancy rate of 42 percent. Similar concerns have emerged within the Caribbean education sector, where schools in The Bahamas, the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands have faced staffing challenges as teachers increasingly consider opportunities abroad (Wilkinson, 2023). In The Bahamas, teacher shortages have become a growing concern within the public education system. Munnings (2026a) reported that Bahamas Union of Teachers President Belinda Wilson called on newly appointed Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Chester Cooper to address staffing shortages across the nation's 164 public schools serving communities on 24 islands and cays.

While the full impact of migration is only partially understood, evidence suggests that the continued outflow of highly educated professionals makes it much harder for economic growth and national development (Organization for Responsible Governance, 2022). Galanis (2019) warned that continued emigration among young, highly educated professionals from The Bahamas could diminish skills, knowledge and capabilities, weakening its long-term capacity for national development.

The Motivation of Return Migration

The Caribbean diaspora represents a significant global population, with millions of individuals of Caribbean origin residing outside their countries of birth. The International Organization for Migration (2020) defines return migration as the movement of international migrants back to their country of origin through voluntary return or forced repatriation. The decision to return is shaped by multiple personal, social and structural factors. Return factors can include the length of time spent abroad,

migrants' original intended length of stay or the strength of family and social ties maintained in the country of origin (International Organization for Migration, 2026).

Additional factors that can motivate return migration include the degree of integration within the host country, in contrast with the availability of housing, employment and other reintegration opportunities in the home country upon return (International Organization for Migration, 2026). Within the Caribbean, additional motivations include increased demand for skilled labor, a desire to reconnect with cultural heritage and the opportunity to reunite with family and community. Conversely, regional return migration has also been influenced by immigration enforcement and deportation policies in destination countries, particularly the United States (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Understanding the factors of return migration is essential for developing policies and programs that support successful reintegration and to leverage the developmental contributions of returning migrants (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Previous research indicates that many returnees to the Commonwealth Caribbean from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom have returned through deportation rather than by voluntary migration (International Organization for Migration, 2017). This study focuses exclusively on the feasibility of voluntary return migration among highly educated Bahamians. It does not examine undocumented migration, forced repatriation or deportation policies, as these processes are governed by distinct legal, social and policy considerations.

Return Migration Decisions

Historically migrants would return to their countries of origin when they ceased to

contribute to the productive capacity of the destination (Castles & Kosacks, 1973) or when they had reaped the economic and social mobility purpose of working abroad (Thomas-Hope, 2002, p. 184). Return migration decisions are multidimensional, including the pursuit of viable life and livelihood opportunities (Czaika et al., 2021, p. 16) and connections to home (Carling & Petterson, 2014).

While the impact of high-skilled emigration remains a concern in The Bahamas and the wider Caribbean region, a closer examination of migration decisions can inform strategies that support return migration and reintegration programs. Addressing the impact of the brain drain requires forward-looking strategies that are urgent and deliberate (Acheampong, 2024; International Organization for Migration, 2026). Such measures may persuade members of the Bahamian diaspora to return, while encouraging professionals considering emigrating to stay within the Commonwealth and contribute to national development.

Igniting the Return

The decision to return to one's country of origin is often highly complex. Whether the decision is self-initiated, influenced by familial expectations or prompted by broader societal changes, the process of returning home is rarely straightforward. Returning frequently involves surrendering a migration trajectory and the life project established abroad, while simultaneously confronting significant uncertainties regarding reintegration into the home country (Jaupart, 2023). Jaupart (2023) further observed that although return migration represents a critical phenomenon for the Caribbean region, comprehensive data and systematic monitoring of return flows are limited. Mechanisms such as the Regional Migration Policy or the

CARICOM Single Market and Economy (Caribbean Community, 2023; 2026) have yet to provide robust tracking of these movements. While data on return migration flows varies, a sizable proportion of Caribbean migrants tend to return to their countries of origin (International Organization for Migration, 2017).

Literature reviewed confirms that Bahamian and other Caribbean leaders are aware that the brain drain creates workforce shortages, impacting the delivery of healthcare, education, and other services. The literature reviewed further confirms the need for intentional domestic workforce retention and reintegration strategies within The Bahamas. This study presents actionable strategies, if implemented, that can ignite return migration in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Methods

I am a native Bahamian who completed elementary and secondary education in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas before migrating to the United States to pursue higher education. This personal experience informed an interest in understanding the factors influencing the return migration of highly educated Bahamians. The study was motivated by Saloma's (2019) assertion that the challenges associated with brain drain are not insurmountable if policymakers better understand their underlying causes. This study also responds to a recommendation for future research suggesting that strengthening Bahamian national identity may help mitigate the effects of skilled emigration (see Rencher, 2022, 2025).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, survey procedures were designed to promote accuracy and participant autonomy. More than 100 anonymous participants were given the opportunity to review and revise their

responses before submitting the survey, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented. The use of anonymous responses further encouraged candid participation while reducing the potential for social desirability bias. Upon completion of the survey, participants were thanked for their voluntary participation.

An extensive review of the literature on global migration, return migration and diaspora engagement provided the conceptual foundation for the study. Data was collected and analysed using an online survey software to examine the feasibility of return migration among highly educated Bahamians and identify their willingness to contribute to national development. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns across participant responses, providing a rich description of the lived experiences, perceptions and motivations that characterized the phenomenon under investigation.

One limitation of this study was the limited availability of empirical research on Bahamian return migration, which forced comparison with existing literature. Additionally, the findings are based on responses from more than 100 anonymous participants recruited through convenience sampling, and therefore, may not be generalizable to the broader population of diasporic Bahamians. The survey link was developed in a software platform and disseminated through my professional and social networks, including Bahamian WhatsApp groups, on LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram.

Respondents

All respondents self-identified as native Bahamians and reported migrating after completing secondary education in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas. Participants indicated that their decisions to migrate were primarily motivated by

opportunities for higher education, career advancement and improved quality of life that they perceived to be unavailable within The Bahamas. Each participant was invited to anonymously share their lived experiences and perspectives regarding the factors contributing to the Bahamian brain drain and the feasibility of return migration. Although the respondents represent only a small subset of the total population of Bahamian international migrants, their perspectives provide valuable insight into the experiences and perceptions of highly educated members of the Bahamian diaspora. Tables 1 through 4 summarize the demographic characteristics of the anonymous survey respondents.

Table 1
Bahamian Diaspora Age Ranges

Respondent age range	% of study
Over 16 under 18	0
Over 18 under 30	7.5
Over 30 under 40	21.7
Over 40 under 50	31.1
Over 60	51.9

Table 4
Interview Respondents Location & Recent Profession

Education Location	%	Current or Recent Profession	%
Caribbean region	1.5	Advertising / Marketing / Media & News / Telecommunications	3.8
Bahamas	18.9	Agriculture / Environmental Science & Sustainability	0
Caribbean region	1.9	Aerospace, Energy & Industrial Resources	2.9
Canada	6.6	Business / Banking / Finance / Economics / Insurance	13.3
United Kingdom	3.8	Architecture / Construction / Skilled trades	4.8
United States	66	Education (Pre-K–12, Higher Ed., Administration, Research)	15.2
Central South America	0	Engineering / Science / Computer / Technology	8.6
Asia	0.9	Entertainment / Sports / Creative (Music, Fashion, Beauty, Film & TV)	1
African Continent	0	Government & Public Service (Politics, Public Policy, Federal-City-State)	8.6
		Healthcare / Pharmaceutical / Social Services	19
		Hospitality / Food/ Travel	8.6
Middle East	0.9	Ministry/ Faith-based Leadership	1
		Military / Protective Services / Law Enforcement	1
		Manufacturing / Textiles / Welding / Carpentry	1
		Non-Profit / Volunteer	1.9
Europe	0.9	Retail / Sales	1.9
		Entrepreneur / Self-Employment	7.6

Table 2
Current Diaspora Location

Respondent Current location	% of study
Bahamas	0
Caribbean region	4.90
Canada	8.60
United Kingdom	3.80
United States	72
Central South America	3
Asia	2.50
African Continent	3
Middle East	1.20
Europe	1.70

Table 3
Highest Level of Education

Education Level	% of study
High School	8.4
Associate degree	4.7
Trade or Professional Certification	5.6
Bachelor degree	22.4
Graduate degree	40.2
Doctorate degree	18.7

Results

Analysis of survey responses from more than 100 Bahamian emigrants provides important insights into the characteristics, motivations, and perspectives of highly educated members of the Bahamian diaspora. Nearly half of respondents (49%) had resided abroad for more than 20 years, suggesting that migration often resulted in long-term or permanent settlement rather than temporary relocation. The sample was also highly educated, with 91.6% having completed postsecondary education, including associate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees, or trade or professional qualifications. These findings reinforce the role of higher education as a primary pathway for international migration among Bahamians.

Consistent with previous research, respondents identified career advancement, professional development and improved quality of life as the principal factors influencing their decision to remain abroad. Access to leadership opportunities (71%), competitive compensation (68.9%) and opportunities for continued academic and professional growth (62.3%) were cited most frequently. Counter to this, respondents identified a range of factors influencing decisions about returning, including ongoing employment opportunities, professional advancement, family relationships, quality of life and the broader social and political environment of The Bahamas (International Organization for Migration, 2026). Additional motivations included merit-based employment environments, access to healthcare, family formation and broader opportunities for personal development. These findings align with Bowe (2017) and Galanis (2019), who similarly concluded that highly skilled Caribbean migrants are motivated by opportunities unavailable within their home

countries.

The findings also support the view that migration decisions are multidimensional rather than exclusively economic. As former Bahamian Governor General C. A. Smith observed, Bahamian migrants should not be viewed simply as human capital but as individuals whose skills and decisions reflect diverse aspirations, values and life experiences ("Caribbean diplomats discuss brain drain", 2019). The present study extends this perspective, demonstrating that highly educated Bahamians are diverse in their global perspectives and can contribute to national development through professional expertise, financial investment, entrepreneurship and knowledge transfer.

Despite residing abroad, respondents maintained strong emotional, cultural and social connections to The Bahamas. Most reported frequent communication with family and friends, regular visits, continued engagement with Bahamian media and current affairs and active participation in cultural traditions. More than 93% indicated that maintaining Bahamian identity remained important, while 86.4% continued to identify themselves as "true Bahamians." Although respondents expressed strong national pride, relatively few (13.8%) indicated a willingness to return permanently to The Bahamas. Participants frequently cited limited career opportunities, concerns regarding governance, political favoritism, perceived inequities in hiring and promotion and the rising living costs as barriers to return migration. These findings reinforce the International Organization for Migration's (2020) characterization of return migration as a complex process influenced by economic, professional, social and institutional conditions rather than emotional attachment alone.

Importantly, respondents distinguished

between returning permanently and contributing from abroad. While relatively few anticipated repatriating to The Bahamas, nearly 90% expressed a willingness to participate in mentorship, knowledge-sharing, professional partnerships and other forms of engagement while remaining overseas. This finding suggests that transnational engagement may be more a realistic and sustainable strategy for leveraging the expertise of the Bahamian diaspora than policies focused exclusively on their permanent return.

Participant narratives within this study further illustrate the complexity of migration decisions. Many reflected positively on the educational foundation they received in The Bahamas expressing gratitude toward teachers, parents and communities. Others described frustration with limited professional advancement opportunities, political favoritism, delayed public-sector employment posting and economic stagnation. Nevertheless, even respondents who expressed reservations about returning also indicated a desire to contribute to national development.

These findings contribute to the limited body of scholarship on Bahamian migration by providing empirical evidence that highly educated Bahamians maintain strong national identities and sustained transnational relationships despite long-term residence abroad.

Consistent with regional migration scholarship (Roberts-Kasmally, 2005; Lacarte et al., 2023), the findings suggest that the Bahamian diaspora represents a valuable strategic resource whose expertise, professional networks and lived experiences can support national development. Rather than viewing brain drain solely as a permanent loss of human capital, Bahamian policymakers may benefit from diaspora engagement, creating a dynamic that can

ignite return and support national development.

Discussion

Calls for Bahamians abroad to “come back home” (“Fresh warning about brain drain,” 2019) confirm that migration presents both significant challenges and opportunities for the long-term socioeconomic development (Jaupart, 2023). Although Gibson and McKenzie (2012) reported relatively high rates of return migration among small island states, only 13.8% of respondents in the present study indicated a willingness to return permanently to The Bahamas. Many participants identified a range of factors influencing their decisions to remain abroad, including ongoing employment and family relationships. As Bahamian leaders consider strategies to ignite engagement and return migration, it is important to consider the offspring of diasporic Bahamians in efforts to spur Bahamian return migration. Supporting this approach, Reynolds (2008) confirmed that second-generation migrants accumulate human, economic and social capital in their host country, which can also support their origin country. Additionally, Jaupart (2023) challenged regional leaders to identify incentives that could be offered for migrants and their descendants to return to their countries of origin.

These findings suggest that emotional and cultural attachment to one’s homeland alone is insufficient to motivate Bahamian return migration but that targeted strategies can be effective. They also reinforce Galanis’ (2019) argument that attracting highly skilled Bahamians requires deliberate public policies that create favorable conditions for reintegration rather than relying solely on appeals to patriotism. Increasingly, scholars have argued that governments should move beyond viewing migration as a permanent loss of human capital and instead embrace the concept of brain circulation. Brain

circulation occurs when students or workers who studied or were employed abroad return after acquiring advanced learning and skills and contribute to the motherland through various networks they built while living abroad (Teney, 2021). Confirming the importance of brain circulation, Rencher's (2022) research referenced a comment by participant 13, who shared: "Many of my team members had studied in the United States, the United Kingdom and The Caribbean region. Since they had a job when they returned, they provided in-house professional training to those who did not study overseas."

The CARICOM Single Market and Economy (Caribbean Community, 2026) seeks to facilitate regional integration through the free movement of skilled labor, services, capital and businesses. Although these provisions have the potential to encourage labor mobility and return migration, The Bahamas has elected not to participate fully in the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (Dames, 2024) due to immigration security concerns and the need to prioritize the employment of Bahamian nationals in its labor market (Aragón & El-Assar, 2018). Consequently, Bahamian professionals do not benefit from the same regional labor mobility arrangements available to citizens of participating member states. Given respondents' emphasis on career advancement, professional mobility and equitable employment opportunities, this policy context warrants consideration when examining strategies to retain and reengage highly skilled Bahamians.

The findings of this study further suggest that return migration policies should extend beyond permanent repatriation to include sustained engagement with the Bahamian diaspora, promoting brain circulation. Although relatively few respondents intended to return permanently, the overwhelming majority expressed interest in

contributing through mentoring, professional collaboration, knowledge sharing, entrepreneurship and other forms of transnational engagement. These findings support Roberts-Kasmally (2005) who argued that Caribbean governments should leverage the intellectual capacity of their diaspora to transform brain drain into brain circulation. Similarly, Dodani and LaPorte (2005) emphasized that effective diaspora policies should facilitate collaborative knowledge production, innovation and research partnerships that benefit both migrants and their countries of origin.

Applying the recommendations of the International Organization for Migration (2020), The Bahamas could strengthen its own approach to skilled return migration by developing a comprehensive diaspora engagement strategy. Such a strategy should include the systematic collection and maintenance of current data on diaspora members' educational qualifications, professional expertise and geographic distribution. Promoting brain circulation among Bahamian nationals also requires the establishment of formal partnerships among government agencies, higher education institutions and the private sector. Furthermore, strengthening connections between the Bahamian diaspora and the wider Commonwealth diaspora should involve the development of workforce training initiatives and collaborative partnerships with regional and international organizations to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration, as well as voluntary return migration.

These recommendations align with broader regional calls for renewed economic cooperation and workforce development. As regional leaders continue to address the challenges associated with skilled migration, evidence-based policies that strengthen relationships with overseas nationals may provide a more sustainable approach that

can initiate and sustain permanent return. Rather than viewing migration negatively, policymakers should recognize the Bahamian diaspora as an asset capable of contributing to national development regardless of geographic location.

The findings also reinforce previous scholarship that diaspora communities contribute through investment, entrepreneurship, professional expertise and transnational networks (Newland & Plaza, 2013). Additional efforts should include dedicating agency and investment channels to promote the diaspora's engagement in development efforts (Jaupart, 2023). Accordingly, policies and programs designed to maintain regular communication, map diaspora expertise and create structured opportunities for participation may increase both diaspora engagement and the long-term feasibility of voluntary return migration.

Recommendations to Retain & Regain Talent

Discussing regional skilled migration, Remy (2025) challenged that markets must be recalibrated to align with the specific needs of individual Caribbean countries. Similarly, Acheampong (2024) and Cakir and Demirag (2025) emphasize the importance of governments implementing policies that improve working conditions and promote reverse migration. Additionally, Reynolds (2008) challenged Caribbean governments to develop programs and policy framework that encourages the engagement of second and third generations overseas.

Countries successful in reducing brain drain typically implement comprehensive strategies and offer high living standards, according to Cakir and Demirag (2025). While the brain drain impact has been felt throughout The Bahamas and the Caribbean, it is imperative to protect qualified human resources by discouraging skilled workers

from moving abroad (Cakir & Demirag, 2025). Expanding on this, Remy (2025) recommended regional governments develop policies and small-scale projects that tailor education systems and foster regional collaboration in support of retaining local talent and reduce migration. Encouraging the retention of and regaining Bahamians starts with viewing these individuals as 'talent' whose skills and decisions reflect diverse aspirations, values and life experiences ("Caribbean diplomats discuss brain drain", 2019).

Strengthening the domestic workforce remains essential to retaining and regaining Bahamian talent. Reinforcing the value of domestic human capital, the Bahamian Departments of Labour and Public Service drafted amendments to the Employment Act, the Industrial Relations Act, and General Orders expanding maternity beyond the current 12 weeks to at least 14 weeks and introducing paid paternity leave (Munnings, 2026b). Minister Pia Glover Rolle of the Bahamian Ministry of Labour, Public Service and National Insurance confirmed that The Bahamas's commitment to occupational safety and health "was essential to strengthening the country's social and economic fabric" (Munnings, 2026b). As 29.2 % of the respondents of this study were within typical child-bearing years, this decision demonstrates the nation's commitment to align with global talent standards. These perspectives are consistent with the findings of the present study, in which respondents underscored the importance of targeted strategies to create environments that retain and potentially encourage the repatriation of skilled Bahamian professionals before retirement, so that they can actively participate in national development.

Based on the findings of this study, several policy recommendations may strengthen the Bahamian labour market for both existing

professionals and prospective returnees. These include establishing centralized employment platforms to improve awareness of public sector career opportunities; expanding local and regional scholarship programs; fostering a culture of continuous professional development through on-the-job training, job-shadowing initiatives, and lifelong learning opportunities; strengthening regional professional exchange programs; enhancing apprenticeship and mentorship initiatives across multiple sectors; addressing salary and compensation disparities to improve workforce competitiveness; and expanding employee recognition and retention initiatives.

The findings of the present study further underscore the importance of brain circulation for national development priorities. Nearly 90% of respondents expressed a willingness to participate in mentorship and various partnerships. Existing scholarship emphasizes that sustained engagement between a nation and its diaspora depends on deliberate investments in human capital and the implementation of policies that reduce the long-term loss of skilled professionals (Joshua et al., 2014). Conducting a systematic assessment of the skills, qualifications and expertise within the Bahamian diaspora would enable policymakers to more accurately evaluate national workforce capacity, align diaspora talent with domestic labor market needs, strengthen institutional processes and expand regional and international partnerships that enhance public service delivery. Collectively, these strategies have the potential to strengthen the nation's human capital, improve workforce competitiveness and promote sustainable economic growth and social development.

Expanding Access to Higher Education and Career Development

The Organization for Responsible Governance (2022) reported that the persistent emigration of highly educated Bahamians significantly constrains the nation's economic growth and recovery. The findings of this study support those concerns, as participants reported substantial educational attainment, including associate degrees (4.7%), trade or professional certifications (5.6%), bachelor's degrees (22.4%), master's degrees (40.2%), and doctoral degrees (18.7%). Given the considerable investment in human capital represented by these qualifications, the Government of The Bahamas should consider expanding national degree and professional certification programs while simultaneously implementing policies designed to retain skilled graduates and professionals (Rencher, 2025).

Although the Scholarship and Educational Loan Division of The Bahamas Ministry of Education (2026) offers numerous scholarship opportunities for Bahamian students, there appears to be limited mechanisms to encourage or require scholarship recipients to return to The Bahamas upon completion of their studies. While scholarships increase access to higher education, policymakers should consider implementing skills-development bonding programs like those adopted in Jamaica in 2009 and Trinidad and Tobago in 2013 (Zavala, 2023). Zavala (2023) argued that bonding programs should account not only for the financial costs of higher education but also for the broader effects of migration on local economic growth through the loss of skilled labor. Such programs can help ensure that investments in education ultimately contribute to national development rather than strengthening labor markets abroad.

Celebrate Bahamian Pride

This study's participants unanimously shared a strong sense of national identity and a desire to contribute to The Commonwealth of The Bahamas. Building on this perspective, Carling and Petterson (2014) confirmed the mechanisms the diaspora uses to maintain enduring connections to home countries were established before migration and sustained through periodic return visits and ongoing communication. Additionally, Jaupart (2023) suggested that regardless of whether migration is voluntary or involuntary, diaspora populations will continue to influence the economic development of their countries of origin.

The findings of the present study support the enduring strength of Bahamian identity among members of the diaspora. Participants consistently demonstrated a strong sense of national identity while thoughtfully evaluating social and economic conditions and offering constructive recommendations to support national development. Although respondents expressed appreciation for Bahamian culture, they more frequently emphasized values they associated with being Bahamian, including friendliness, humility, resourcefulness, resilience and a commitment to supporting family and community. These findings suggest that attachment to the homeland extends beyond geographic boundaries and remains a relevant component in the identity of the highly educated Bahamians living abroad. Participants also described maintaining meaningful relationships with family and community members at home, reinforcing the transnational nature of their social and cultural connections.

Confirming their continued connection to Bahamians of the Commonwealth, respondents of this study remain engaged

through a variety of methods. Many confirmed they currently participate in activities and remain open to engaging with Bahamians at home, including providing financial support to parents and/or siblings when able, sharing information via WhatsApp or via email, regularly viewing church, sports and other cultural events. Consistent with this perspective, participants in the present study reported diverse experiences regarding their relationship with The Bahamas while living abroad. Some indicated that they felt "like a true Bahamian, regardless of where I live," whereas others described the social distance, limited opportunities for meaningful engagement or perceptions of judgment from family and community members. Despite these varied experiences, respondents generally maintained a strong emotional attachment to their homeland and expressed a desire to remain engaged in Bahamian affairs.

Notably, participants welcomed opportunities to share their perspectives and encouraged additional research and programming designed to strengthen the Bahamian diaspora. This finding suggests that the diaspora represents an underutilized strategic resource for national development. Similarly, Jaupart (2023) asserted that diaspora populations continue to shape the economic trajectories of their countries of origin. The findings further indicate that Bahamian policymakers should consider strategies that strengthen relationships with citizens living abroad. These strategies should include leveraging diaspora knowledge, professional expertise, global networks, financial resources and patriotism to support return migration (International Organization for Migration, 2017). Collectively, these approaches could strengthen relationships between The Bahamas and its global diaspora while maximizing transnational engagement.

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