

Full Length Research Paper

Methodological pathways to kinship networks and international return migration

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Accepted 09 July, 2017

Although international migration has received significant attention in the literature, this is usually in respect of development and remittances. Methodological issues on the subject are very scarce more so relative to the interface of kinship and international return migration. Yet methodological issues remain crucial to useful understanding of the processes and dynamics of the problem. This article thus fills the gap by concentrating on methodological lacuna in the literature on this all important subject. The paper relied on the authors' methodological experiences while undertaking research among international returnees and their kin in Nigeria and concludes that it is impossible to successfully research international migration, especially return, within kinship frameworks, for sustainable development in developing nations without deploying original, innovative nuanced and context specific research methodology like the one adopted in this article.

Key words: Research, methodology, return migration, kinship networks, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Researches into migrants' issues often confront peculiar methodological constraints necessitating innovative research designs (Takenada, 2007; Talwar, 2007). These methodological constraints however have not been sufficiently appreciated and prioritized as research areas by many researchers on international migrations as they are usually more concerned with the interface of remittance and development as important trajectories of migrations rather than specific engagements with methodological issues. Methodological studies are thus lacking in the literature. In fact, a careful search of the literature on methodological studies on this subject revealed paucity of materials especially in scholarly journals. Methodological studies in the area of kinship and international return migration are nearly non-existent in the literature. Yet, this is an important and emerging area of scholarship that needs urgent scholarly attention as many works available on international migration and development suffer huge methodological deficiencies.

Generally, methodological issues and constraints remain missing links in studies and discourses on

international migration and development especially within kinship and return. Hence the objective of this research is to demonstrate a methodological option and possibility for researches targeting migration and remittances for development in Africa.

Even though remittances continue to increase, more than Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), it has remained impossible for remittances to jump start and sustain development. The time to shed methodological light has thus arrived. This article fills the gap and concentrated on methodological lacuna in the literature on this all important subject. The article relied on the authors' methodological experiences while undertaking research among international returnees and their kin in Nigeria. To sufficiently, validly and reliably explore methodological dynamics which are the major concerns of this article, primary data were collected from international returnees through in-depth interviews (IDIs). Life histories (LHs) were also organized with the international returnees while focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with kin of the international returnees. Common destination countries returnees live in before returning to Nigeria were; United States of America, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Malaysia, Canada, United Arab Emirates, Sweden, Ireland, France, Finland and Norway.

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Qualitative methods were adopted to unravel what Blackman (2007) termed the „Hidden Ethnography“ (Blackman, 2007) especially as the issue at stake was a sensitive one intricately woven within the unique social relations of kin and returnees in the age of globalization yet moderated by local micro-social traditional systems of Nigeria.

Research on return international migration in an area

Contemporary migrations studies now pay considerable attention to people rather than location. This is because twenty-first century migrants are believed to keep multiple households and are usually transient in sojourning in their quest to traverse time and space. This article however contends that while this has some merits, it is dangerous and liable to provision of partial information/understanding and lead to vacuous conclusions. Therefore, there is still the need to appreciate the environment of current households of migrants especially when they have returned and are being studied within kinship undercurrents. Current household environments of returnees and migrants in general, become particularly important because they affect important related decision-making processes (Togunde and Osagie, 2009). Such particularly relevant decision making processes may include what type of support to give, what type of support to accept, who to support and from whom to accept support and so on.

This thus still necessitates physical and context specific studies. Lagos was selected as the primary setting for data collection in our own study. The choice of Lagos was based purely on our conviction that Lagos has the needed socio-cultural, economic and demographic elements relevant to the research. Although Lagos is the smallest state in Nigeria, it is the most economically vibrant, the most populous and more importantly, is the most cosmopolitan as many people in the state were migrants internally. Internationally, most international returnees in Nigeria settle in Lagos due to more availability of social infrastructures, security and economic boom (Uduku, 2002). Although individuality in common in Lagos, kinship forces are presented as people still rally round one another in times of need in the order of *African Kinship as social welfare and security*. Lagos is also the most economically vibrant state in the country. It is even commonly regarded as the economic nerve centre and capital of Nigeria while the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja is only considered political capital. The economic and industrial vibrancy of Lagos thus make it a destination of choice to many returnees upon home coming. Hence, most companies in Nigeria either have a functional branch or headquarters in Lagos. Most of the remittances from migrants abroad of Nigerian origin come to Lagos only distantly followed by Abuja. These context characteristics of Lagos made it the most suitable location for our research and this is what

researches on identical issues need to consider in getting useful data and findings that will benefit policy, practice and scholarship.

Sampling in return international migration and kinship research

Migration issues are cases, location and time sensitive depending on a host of factors in the migration life cycle. Particularly as discovered in the course of our research, some returnees may have past experiences they do not want to share based on their current survival, emigration, and return. Relatives may also be predisposed to secrecy about their kin due to security implications in a state like Lagos, and nation like Nigeria, with security issues as primary concern. Other primordial belief systems that favour secrecy as best practice in the protection of „successful“ relatives, especially in relation to outsiders, are further challenges. Against this backdrop, studies must pay close attention to local survival and experiential concerns that may colour data from sample population if wrong ones are selected. In appreciation to this, we adopted relevant research design that enabled earth-worm views and immersions into the social processes, social relations and methodological issues of interest.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this research purely qualitative technique was adopted. The essence of this was to allow appreciable understanding of kin social relations that inform international migrations, return and associated behavior of support. Concentration on qualitative design provided the opportunity for probing underlying issues as well as obtaining and understanding the relevant issues. Qualitative method allowed us deep insight into norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and influential socio-cultural ethos that could be probed and teased out in as much depth as possible as against what is achievable in quantitative techniques (Taylor, 2005). Qualitative research design also enabled and allowed us interactive process between the research and those being researched.

Hence, a non-probabilistic sampling method was used in selecting people. Snowballing technique was employed in the final selection of respondents. This method consisted of identifying and contacting respondents who were then used to refer to as other respondents who were relevant, available and willing to participate in the study. Inclusion however depended on respondents' consents to be interviewed. The snowballing sampling technique was particularly useful for us because a lot of the potential respondents were skeptical of our original intention. One cannot blame them for this as returned migrants are usually sure targets for criminals like kidnappers and armed robbers in the country. Initial respondents and contacts that we have been able to build relationships with and have come to trust us were thus relied upon for recommendations to further respondents. Hence, as a form of advantage of this technique, we found the snowballing technique very suitable as the respondents were involved in some kind of networks of relationships with other potential respondents who shared the characteristics of interest. The sampling process therefore guaranteed the inclusion of the right people in the sample especially as we further conducted background checks on the respondents in form of study's due diligence to ensure validity and

Table 1. Categories of discussants and allocations.

FGD Categories	Locality		No of FGDs
	Urban	Rural	
Non-literate women (31 and above)	Mushin	Ikorodu	2
Non-literate men (31 and above)	Apapa	Badagry	2
Literate women (31 and above)	Somolu	Ikorodu	2
Literate men (31 and above)	Ojo	Epe	2
Non-literate youths (18-30 years)	Lagos Mainland (male)	Ibeju-Lekki (female)	2
Literate youths (18-30 years)	Surulere (Female)	Badagry (male)	2
Affluent kins ⁵	Apapa (male)	Ibeju-Lekki (female)	2
Total No of FGDs	7	7	14

⁵This group was particularly separated in follow-up sessions and targeted to deeply capture a phenomenon that emerged in the course of the study. As would be shown later in this thesis in the result and discussion session, while the respondents have support orientations and experiences, the „affluent group“ returnees have unique world views and experiences in terms of supports in their social relations with kins compared to the other group that emerged in the study. This pointed to a phenomenon that was worth exploring from their kins in separate sessions from the general ones to avoid vacuous conclusions.

reliability. The orientation of our sampling was largely theoretical sampling. This established a better connectedness between the qualitative research design and the sampling technique adopted and this must be noted by future researches for them to get the right people for their study and get useful data.

We adopted systems and process sampling and data collection and this is important for multi-method (triangulation) researches on migration. The sampling and data collection procedures were thus systematically in stages. The first stage was the identification of returnees through snowballing for IDIs. In the second phase, we isolated those returnees who met the criteria of ten years abroad and five years return for life history. The first and second phase prepared the ground for the third-FGDs. The process of selecting IDIs and life histories interviewees enabled us to gather information on relatives who would be suitable for FGDs and rapport with returnees provided a good leverage for the FGDs. In selecting people for the FGDs, gender, age, education, locality and economic categories were considered. All discussants were sampled within their communities at a time and place convenient for potential discussants. Given fast and busy urban lifestyles prevalent in Lagos, repeated visits were necessary and made due to unavailability of some discussants thereby making it impossible to form suitable discussion groups.

Two categories of respondents were used in this study to capture the objective. The first group consisted of individuals who have lived outside Nigeria, at least on one occasion, for a minimum of five years and have returned to the country for a minimum of two years. This category of people was referred to as returnees in this study. Returnees were adopted because they hold key prospects for the exploration of the issues at stake since they have gone; they have lived abroad and have returned to the country. They are, therefore, certain to have clear and comprehensive views of the „two worlds“-before departure, upon departure, sojourn and return-making their worldviews a viable approach to capturing, holistically, the research questions.

Data collection technique

For a robust study on international migration, different sources of data collection are necessary. For our study, data were generated from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected directly from the field using IDIs, life history methods and FGDs. Secondary data were collected through archival records, scholarly journals, textbooks, newspapers and reliable Internet materials. The

methodological triangulation was for complementarities and to cover the research questions in detail. In-depth Interviews (IDIs) was utilized to collect information from returnees to enable us to deeply comprehend the nuanced elements of kinship appropriation. IDIs were conducted in locations preferred by the interviewees in as much as they were within the research setting. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were thus utilized to collect data from kin of returnees. At least half the numbers of Local Government Areas¹ in the three senatorial districts were selected. Table 1 shows the breakdown of discussion categories.

Categories of discussants and allocations²

FGDs can easily become boring, tiresome and fatiguing especially if it is too long and monotonous. FGD sessions must therefore be very participatory, engaging, varied, made interesting and handled by professionals especially when engaging international migrants and kin in busy places like Lagos. International migrants and kin are usually very busy people and are bound to lose interest and doubt the intention and capabilities of researchers once the sessions are becoming too long and burdensome. FGD guides must be simple, straight forward and short yet reliable and valid. Our FGD sessions and guides encouraged smooth interactions and uninhibited views projections. Our FGD sessions were isolated based on age because age can influence how kin members perceive returnees, and support to them and from them. Different age categories could also have different needs and world view which could influence their needs and expectations of returnees. Age composition was however varied by sex, literacy and locality. Level of education of discussants could also affect their dispositions to return and migrations generally and supports in many ways just as locality (rural and urban) could determine kin relations with returnees.

We separated respondents because urban people may dominate discussions if grouped together with their rural counterparts and it could be the other way round. Literate ones could also dominate discussions if grouped with non-literate. In a society that values gerontocracy, the older ones could „silence“ the youth in discussions just as the youths could see the older ones as „old

¹ There are 20 official Local Government Areas in Lagos State

² Please see also Akanle, O. 2012. Kinship Support Orientations and Class Dynamics of Nigerian International Migrants. *International Review of Modern Sociology* 38. 1. Pp. 131-157 for earlier discussion on this matrix.

schools" and these dynamics could color findings if grouped together in sessions. Although Lagos is predominantly urban³, there are, regardless, few remaining rural localities and local governments. These were targeted to explore research issues perhaps rural kinship ethos could influence research outcomes even in a predominantly urban setting. A major consideration however was that the people involved in FGDs were relatives of returnees. The average duration for FGDs was forty-five minutes and this was found suitable as the issues important to the study were captured in detail without boring our discussants. Language of conduct was varied depending on the characteristics of the discussants. Notwithstanding, attention was also paid to the language discussants that they were most comfortable with.

Life history method and the participatory rapid appraisal (pra) tool: Towards qualitative data gathering enhancement

We used Life history method of data collection based on its capacity to compress time to collect history of people, events and vital experiences to construct current realities. Life history method explored processes as against structure of occurrences. Single cases were explored as unique to address necessary research issues. Through single cases we captured reflections, decisions and actions of the people comprehensively. Life history method documented patterns of individuals and groups and allowed us to explore peoples' micro historical experiences (individual) within macro-historical (history of the time and group) framework (Hager-Master, 2006). Life history gave us historical context to comprehend contemporary manifestations of our research issues. Hence, life history information challenged us to understand individual current attitudes and behaviors and how they may have been influenced by initial decisions made at another time and in another place as earlier discovered by Hager-Master (2006). Through Life histories we conducted therefore, we generated rich data since the life histories allowed us various analyses and participatory data generation processes because the interviewees had the opportunity of being deeply involved in the data generation activities and processes.

It is important for studies on international migrations, especially return, to conduct participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) to enrich methodology. This is more so within qualitative research design. Qualitative data gathering could be an onerous task. This is because it could generate massive data that needed rigor and systematic processes to be useful. Therefore, to enhance the quality of data to be gathered through qualitative techniques in this study, we employed participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) tools. These included profiling/free listing, transect walk, matrix and „but why" tools. It is customary for issues to be freely expressed in discussions and interviews, which could be unpremeditated. It was then incumbent upon us as the trained researchers to systematically filter the emergent issues based on the need to determine relevance among the mass. FGDs could particularly be problematic with this approach. This is not to say that IDIs and life histories are immune to this challenge especially when respondents were free and willing to bare their minds on the issues under investigation.

Issues like reasons for initial emigration, support, purpose of return and kinship constructions benefited particularly from matrixing which was particularly necessary in aggregating factors and in establishing group consensus. Profiling/free listing allowed the discussants/interviewees to express all their ideas, conceptions,

mis-conceptions, assumptions and preconceptions as they were related to the research issues. These made sessions very participatory as all opinions were accommodated only to be filtered and analyzed later. The „but why" tool was employed as probes and prompts necessary to generate subliminal issues that discussants and interviewees may not readily expressed but were important to the research questions. Most often, such issues were not at the fore front of the interviews/discussions but they were strategic and many studies on international migration, return and kinship for development have missed the point in this case.

Respondents were sometimes caught unaware as issues often generated through the „but why" were usually issues people and communities take for granted. These are social issues that are important, yet, taken for granted. Examples of issues thrown up through the „but why" were significance of kinship in return migration and nature and social significance of supports and pay back mechanisms particularly within informal systems. It was common during the field work to hear respondents say „I never really thought of that before but it was really important" or „that is interesting, I have never seen it that way before". The field work was able to capture the social motives and social relations strategic to the research. This is why it is very important for researchers to manage data by themselves, as the best data collector and analyst in all researches is the researcher him/herself. This is because the researcher is the only one who is able to sufficiently and correctly comprehend the fractal process of the research and tease out responses that would benefit the research ultimately. In this case, we analysed and managed our data ourselves and it was found the best approach in this research.

Transect walk is a tool for describing and showing the location and distribution of resources, features, main land uses and social forces along given transects or given communities. It helps identify and explain possible relationships among environmental conditions like topography, cultivation and other production activities and human settlement and relationship patterns. Transect walk is particularly useful for identifying major problems and possibilities by different groups and their relevance to the research problems. These enable one to learn local practices and dynamics prior to actual data collection. Transect walk has the strength of easy adoption and replicability particularly at community levels and involves outdoors activities, on-field observation, discussions and note taking. Transect walk is therefore an important entry point for data collection and in-depth analysis. Given the usefulness, relevance and importance of this tool (transect walk), we adopted transect walk to socially map the research settings. This was necessary to understand the social, cultural and geographical environments of the field work which could have far reaching implications for the data collection process and the actual quality of data. The transect walk ensured familiarization with the general community and the community leaders. Depending on the efficiency of the community entry behavior, this could determine approval and/or disapproval. Ultimately, the transect walk prepared the ground for the real field work and made the data collection hitch-free. Transect information from Kinship Networks and International Return Migration in Lagos, Nigeria is as shown in Table 2 (Akanle, 2012).

Field experiences and important methodological lessons learnt

We confronted some challenges in the study particularly at the data collection stage. Some of these challenges were associated with qualitative study while others were research issues specific. We decided to share these challenges in this article because we are convinced they will be useful in shaping methodological design of future researches. First, we noticed that conducting FGDs with relatives of returnees was particularly challenging. Gathering minimum of eight relatives of returnees was very difficult particularly

³ Based on the new reclassifications of Lagos communities, there are no rural areas any more in Lagos. Places usually regarded as rural are now considered as *semi-urban* based on their new developments that made them identical to the urban settings.

Table 2. Transect information from Kinship Networks and International Return Migration in Lagos, Nigeria.

Issues	Transect	
	Urban centers	Rural areas
Categorization	Emerging mega city	Suburbs
Social life	Fast/transient	Relatively slow and stable
Security	A major concern	Relatively low
Spatial environment	Congested	Scattered/spacious
Major means of transportation	Road	Road with recent introduction of waterways for urban connections
Traffic (transport)	Heavy vehicular traffic	Light traffic condition
Major land use	Business/industrial and residential	Agriculture, petty trading and residential
Economy	Heavy industrial presence	Agriculture and trading but there is dwindling fortune of agriculture
Employment profile	Relatively high unemployment	Low unemployment condition relative to the population and environment ⁴
Religious presence	Large and open presence of Christianity and Islam	Presence of Christianity and Islam but with large, open and appreciable practice of traditional religions. Religious orientations depict folklorization and syncretism ⁵ .
Political systems	Democratic with recognized presence of traditional institutions	Traditional political institutions but with substantial recognition of democratic political institutions.
Internal migrations pattern	Substantially rural-urban but there is emerging urban-rural migrations largely due to expensive rent and space challenges as a result of recent aggressive infrastructural development and reclamation of the Lagos Master plan embarked upon by the state government at the city centers/Central Business Districts (CBDs).	Predominantly rural-urban but with emerging urban-rural.
International migrations ⁶ physical infrastructure/enabler	Busiest international airport in the country	None

⁴It could be curious and controversial against popular positions in the literatures that usually report very high(er) unemployment rates at the rural areas. Why this report described the rural unemployment as low was due to the fact that when transect walks were undertaken in the rural communities, the people were largely engaged in productive activities. For instance, transect walks at Bankole Alatisè village at Ibeju-Lekki local government, Badagry, Gberigbe and Agura villages at Ikorodu and Ejinrin at Epe local government showed people that were either in their trading post, gone to the farm or have gone to work at the city centers. It was therefore difficult to categorize these groups of people as unemployed. It was particularly difficult to find people wandering unengaged productively in these rural communities.

⁵It was common to find shrines in these rural communities. A lot of them even have these shrines at the entrance of their towns/villages different from those in individual family compounds sometimes.

Table 2. contd.

Returnees' settlement bias	Choice destination	Not of choice
Information communications technologies (ICT) facilities i.e internet access and mobile telephony.	Relatively developed by national standards.	Comparatively undeveloped and disconnected except for mobile telephony which has substantial rural penetrations.

Source: Primary data by the researchers.

as they kept different and tight schedules. Getting them to honor appointments was a difficult task. In most instances, discussion sessions were postponed due to inability to form quorum. Getting the youths to participate in FGDs was also difficult, as they claimed to be „too busy for any research that would not bring money" as typified by one⁶. In certain instances, in rural areas, getting sufficient number of youths who met research bench marks was very difficult as such people mostly resided in urban centers.

Generally, getting relatives of returnees in rural areas was challenging as they regularly move to the urban areas due to work and compromised infrastructures in the rural areas. A lot of returnees themselves were not willing to partake. Many claimed not to be interested and security concerns were suspect. Many did not just wish to take to an outsider" on such issues like personal and intergenerational migration histories and supports even after referrals. A major challenge was the fact that while there are few returnees in Nigeria, lots of the few available for the study did not fit the survey specifications as they either did not live up to five years abroad or have not lived up to two years in Nigeria. A lot also only returned consequent upon the recent global financial crises that affected their jobs, businesses and operations up north. These therefore affected the available number of people for research. With tenacity and expertise however, we turned these challenges and experiences to strengths and important lessons learnt.

DATA ANALYSIS

The nature of data must determine the data analysis techniques to be adopted in scientific

⁶ This is understandable as the youths hustle to make ends meet in poverty invested state like Lagos and nation like Nigeria.

studies. Hence, systematic data collection must be married with a systematic data analysis to make research worthwhile. This is particularly true in qualitative studies which usually generate massive data in text form making it more difficult to categories. The generation of massive data in textual form makes qualitative data analysis challenging. Data analysis for taped data begins with transcriptions of tapes recorded during interviews and discussions. This was also the order in our study. Transcriptions were done immediately after interviews to guarantee completeness which could be lost if transcriptions were delayed. Transcriptions were verbatim as this protects originality and reliability of data collected which could not be possible through summaries and implied meanings attachments. Non-verbal communications were transcribed and presented in parenthesis in the thesis. Such meaning laden responses were pauses, smiles, laughter, hisses, compliments and abuses.

Although local languages were not encouraged when avoidable, where unavoidable, we held discussions in local languages and were later translated with priority for details" retention. Even though most of the sessions were in English, argots were encouraged, transcribed as such and used in the final analysis. Argots are important weapons in quality researches on cultural issues and socio-anthropological issues like social relations and kinship. We therefore accommodated argots and code-language switching across

data collection methods and data analyses catered for this. Argots are usually meaning-laden and enrich data quality and reliability. They must therefore be better appreciated by researches. We found argots useful in this research and we specially recommend them for other future researches. Examples of argots captured on the field and used in this thesis were *atapata dide* and *fone* (Slang for well spoken English/foreign language. It was actually from phonetics). Purely qualitative data analysis techniques were adopted to accommodate all aspects of data generated.

Data presentation from this kind of study must be systematically presented in coherent manners. Researchers" data manipulation and management capacities are however very important and will directly impact quality of data analysis and presentation. Hence, all data generated from the methods of data collection must be produced into a single coherent report and this is what we did. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, life histories were analyzed through qualitative data analysis. Data were grouped thematically to establish similarities, differences, regularities and irregularities to make reliable analysis. Different data presentation styles were used. These include; ethnographic summaries and content analysis, matrixes and figures to present lucid details of the findings. Generally, the two basic approaches to interpreting and reporting qualitative data were complementarily adopted. These were ethnographic summaries

and systematic coding for content and pattern explorations. These brought out a good blend of thematic views through critical evaluations and verbatim quotations. The research report ultimately provided a comprehensive balance in reporting responses from in-depth interviews, life histories, focus group discussions and the transect walk.

Conclusions

Relative to the objective of this article, attempts have been made to unfold methodological issues associated with researches on international return migration and kinship networks. Pathways have also been projected giving our own research as example and case study. Efforts were particularly made to demonstrate how studies can generate robust findings within the methodological frameworks used in our own research. This methodological approach is therefore recommended for future and further research as it was found useful in this case. It may however be important for future research to moderate the methodology depending on their particular social context. We therefore do not suggest a cur-all and one size fits all methodology. Thus, our methodology is not sacrosanct and is amenable to adaptation depending on prevailing field and research circumstances of the research and researcher in question. Innovativeness within research problem and core expertise is thus required.

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