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Nigeria's Position in the International Division of Labour and the Politics of Economic Dependency.

Iyedo Torik Daniel [1]*

[1] Department of Political Science; Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi
Email: iyedodaniel@gmail.com
* Correspondence: iyedodaniel@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examined Nigeria's position in the international division of labour and the politics of its economic dependency. Specifically, it examined Nigeria's position in the international division of labour; analysed the political and economic forces sustaining dependency; assessed efforts to promote economic diversification, industrialisation and value addition; and examined the prospects for reducing Nigeria's economic dependency. The paper adopted a qualitative methodology based on secondary data. Dependency Theory provided the theoretical framework for the study. The findings revealed that Nigeria occupies a largely peripheral position in the international division of labour, characterised by dependence on the export of primary commodities, particularly crude oil, and imports of manufactured goods, technology and capital. The study further found that rent-seeking politics, weak industrial capacity, import dependence, external economic relations and inconsistent policy implementation continue to sustain dependency. Although efforts towards diversification, industrialisation and value addition have recorded some progress, their impact remains limited by structural and institutional constraints. The study concludes that reducing Nigeria's economic dependency requires sustained industrialisation, technological development, domestic value addition, stronger state capacity and consistent economic policies capable of transforming Nigeria's position within the global economy.

Keywords: Nigeria, International Division of Labour, Economic Dependency, Dependency Theory, Industrialisation, Value Addition.

Introduction

The international division of labour refers to the unequal organisation of production, trade and economic activities among countries, with different countries occupying different positions in the global production system. Developed economies generally dominate technology-intensive production, finance, manufacturing and high-value services, while many developing countries, particularly in Africa, remain heavily involved in the production and export of primary commodities. Amin (2020) argues that this pattern reflects unequal relationships within the global capitalist system, while Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) notes that historical forms of unequal integration continue to shape the economic position of African countries. For example, the Democratic Republic of Congo is a major producer of cobalt, yet much of the processing and higher-value

activities associated with the mineral occur outside the country. This illustrates how participation in international trade can coexist with limited control over value creation.

Nigeria occupies an important but challenging position within this international division of labour. During the colonial period, the Nigerian economy was organised largely around the production and export of agricultural commodities and raw materials needed by the British economy. Following the discovery and expansion of petroleum production, crude oil became the dominant export commodity and an important source of government revenue and foreign exchange. Rodney (1972) explains that colonial economic structures were designed largely to facilitate the extraction of African resources and their integration into external markets, while Ake (1981) shows how these structures continued to influence the political economy of post-colonial African states. Nigeria's continued dependence on primary commodity exports, particularly petroleum, alongside the importation of manufactured goods, machinery, refined products and technological inputs, therefore reflects a broader pattern of dependent integration into the global economy.

The problem is not merely that Nigeria exports primary commodities, but that the country has remained relatively limited in domestic value addition, industrial production and technological capacity. Dependence on global markets exposes the economy to fluctuations in commodity prices, external demand and changes in international economic conditions. At the same time, dependence on foreign technology, capital and industrial inputs constrains the capacity to expand domestic productive activities. Mkandawire (2021) observes that limited industrial diversification remains a major challenge for African economies, while Watts (2008) demonstrates how petroleum in Nigeria has shaped struggles over resources, state power and economic interests. Thus, the Nigerian case raises an important question about whether participation in global markets has produced structural transformation or has mainly reproduced a position in which the country supplies raw materials while depending on external sources for higher-value goods, technology and capital.

Successive Nigerian governments have introduced measures intended to change this pattern. These include economic diversification programmes, local-content policies, industrialisation initiatives, export-promotion measures, efforts to expand domestic refining and participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area. Such measures indicate recognition of the limitations associated with excessive dependence on primary commodities and imports. However, Chang (2020) argues that meaningful structural transformation requires productive industries, technological capabilities and effective state policies. The continued difficulty of achieving broad-based industrialisation therefore suggests that the existence of policies alone does not necessarily alter Nigeria's position within the international division of labour.

Existing studies have established important connections between Nigeria's economic dependency and colonialism, oil exports, foreign capital, international trade and the global capitalist system. Rodney (1972) provides a historical explanation of how colonial economic structures contributed to African underdevelopment, while Ake (1981) examines the political economy of post-colonial Africa. Watts (2008) further demonstrates the central role of oil in Nigeria's political and economic relations, and more recent studies have examined issues of external dependence, industrialisation and Africa's unequal integration into the global economy. However, much of the existing literature tends to examine these issues separately, focusing on oil dependency, foreign investment, trade relations or colonial economic structures. Less attention has been given to how these factors interact to sustain Nigeria's specific position within the contemporary international division of labour and how domestic political and economic interests contribute to the reproduction of that position. This gap provides the basis for examining economic dependency not only as an outcome of external relationships but also as a process shaped by the interaction between global structures and domestic political and economic conditions.

Against this background, the study examines Nigeria's position in the international division of labour and the politics of economic dependency. Specifically, it asks: Specifically, it asks: How is Nigeria positioned within the international division of labour? What political and economic forces sustain Nigeria's economic dependency? What efforts have been made to promote economic diversification, industrialization and domestic value addition in Nigeria? What prospects exist for reducing Nigeria's economic dependency through industrialization, value addition and greater economic self-reliance? These questions provide the analytical direction for examining the relationship between Nigeria's integration into the global economy and the persistence of economic dependency.

The study adopts a qualitative approach because the research questions require an in-depth understanding of Nigeria's position in the international division of labour and the political and economic processes that sustain dependency. The approach is suitable for interpreting historical developments, colonial economic structures, oil dependence, foreign capital, trade relations, industrialisation policies and Nigeria's relationships with external economic actors. The study relies entirely on secondary sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, policy documents and reports from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Trade Organization (WTO), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). These sources provide evidence on Nigeria's trade, exports, foreign investment, industrial development, economic policies and integration into the global economy. The materials are analysed thematically by identifying and interpreting evidence around key themes such as primary

commodity dependence, oil dependency, foreign capital and technology, industrialisation, economic diversification and economic self-reliance. Evidence from different sources is compared to identify major patterns and changes. This approach connects the research questions, documentary evidence and analysis while allowing the study to explain both external economic structures and domestic factors shaping Nigeria's position in the international division of labour.

The study contributes to existing scholarship by bringing these dimensions together within a single analysis of Nigeria's position in the international division of labour. Rather than treating oil dependence, foreign capital, trade and industrialisation as isolated issues, it examines how external economic structures and domestic political and economic interests interact to shape Nigeria's dependent position. The study therefore provides a broader analytical understanding of why economic dependence persists despite repeated efforts at diversification and industrialisation. It also contributes to discussions on dependency by connecting the structural features of the global economy with Nigeria's domestic political economy, thereby providing a basis for understanding the possibilities and constraints of achieving greater value addition, productive transformation and economic self-reliance.

Conceptual Clarifications

International Division of Labour

The International Division of Labour (IDL) refers to the geographical distribution of production, labour and economic activities among countries within the global economy. Pun et al. (2020) explain the concept through global production networks that connect workers and production processes across countries. However, Kvangraven (2021) argues that such integration does not necessarily benefit all countries equally because technological gaps and unequal economic power continue to shape the distribution of gains. Thus, while Pun et al. (2020) emphasise the integration of production and labour, Kvangraven (2021) draws attention to the unequal positions occupied by countries within that system.

Brakman, Garretsen and van Witteloostuijn (2021) further explain the IDL in terms of the changing geographical distribution of production resulting from technological development and globalisation. However, Kvangraven (2021) cautions that changes in the location of production do not necessarily eliminate structural inequalities between developed and developing economies. This suggests that the IDL is concerned not only with where production takes place but also with who controls capital, technology and the higher-value stages of production.

Cantillon, Mackett and Stevano (2024) describe the global division of labour as the transnational organisation of production and the distribution of labour across geographical spaces. Their position is complemented by Ruggeri, D'Adamo and Virgillito (2025), who argue that production has become increasingly fragmented through global value chains, with different stages of production distributed across countries. This broadens the concept beyond the traditional distinction between industrial producers and primary commodity producers. Similarly, Jegede and Muchie (2024) argue that participation in global value chains can provide opportunities for industrialisation, innovation and value creation. However, Karakara and Osabuohien (2024) contend that participation alone does not guarantee economic upgrading because countries and firms occupy different positions within value chains. Hickel, Lemos and Barbour (2024) reinforce this argument by showing that international trade involves unequal exchanges of labour and value, with wealthier economies capturing a disproportionate share of the benefits. Chen et al. (2026) further demonstrate that contemporary production remains characterised by transnational arrangements in which developing economies may participate in production while higher-value activities remain concentrated elsewhere.

Within the context of this study, therefore, the International Division of Labour refers to the unequal organisation of production, labour, capital, technology and value creation among countries, whereby states occupy different positions within the global economy. The concept is used to examine Nigeria's position in this system, particularly its continued dependence on primary commodity exports, foreign technology and capital, and imported manufactured goods, and to assess whether its participation in the global economy promotes structural transformation or reinforces economic dependence.

Economic Dependency

Economic dependency refers to a condition in which the economic development and policy choices of one country are significantly shaped by its relationships with more powerful economies. Davis et al. (2020) argue that dependency remains relevant because developing economies continue to rely on external markets, capital, technology and investment, limiting their capacity for autonomous development. However, Kvangraven (2021) questions interpretations that portray dependency as a fixed relationship, arguing that developing countries can change their position through industrialisation, technological upgrading and strategic participation in global value chains. Thus, dependency is better understood as a changing relationship rather than a permanent condition.

Similarly, Hickel et al. (2022) argue that global economic relations continue to involve unequal exchanges through which resources, labour and value move disproportionately from poorer to richer economies. Their argument is reinforced by Hickel, Lemos and Barbour (2024), who demonstrate that the Global North appropriates substantial amounts

of labour embodied in goods and services produced in the Global South. However, Cozzi et al. (2023) suggest that international integration can also create opportunities for developing economies when supported by productive investment, technology transfer and appropriate domestic policies. This indicates that external economic relations do not automatically produce dependency; their effects depend partly on the structure and terms of integration.

The concept is further developed by Gabor (2021), who shows how developing economies can become dependent on international financial institutions and private capital, particularly where domestic financial capacity is weak. This argument is supported by Alami et al. (2022), who contend that global financial structures can restrict the policy space available to developing countries. However, Cerny and Prichard (2023) argue that states retain some capacity to negotiate and reshape external economic relationships through appropriate institutions and policies. Dependency, therefore, should not be viewed as complete economic powerlessness but as an unequal relationship within which the degree of national policy autonomy varies.

Recent evidence also suggests that dependency extends beyond finance to technology and production. Crespi et al. (2024) argue that technological capabilities and innovation capacity are central to determining whether developing economies can move into higher-value activities. Similarly, Chen et al. (2026) show that developing countries may remain dependent when foreign firms control technology, investment and higher-value segments of global production. These perspectives demonstrate that economic dependency is multidimensional, involving trade, finance, technology, investment and production rather than dependence on a single external resource.

Within the context of this study, economic dependency refers to a condition in which Nigeria's economic performance, production capacity and policy autonomy are significantly influenced by external capital, technology, markets and institutions. The concept is therefore used to examine whether Nigeria's continued reliance on primary commodity exports, foreign investment and imported manufactured and technological products limits its capacity for autonomous economic transformation or provides opportunities for overcoming structural dependence. The theoretical section should be tightened by showing exactly how the concepts of Dependency Theory will be used to analyse Nigeria. A reduced version that captures the reviewer’s points is:

Theoretical Framework

Dependency Theory emerged prominently in the 1950s and 1960s as a critique of modernisation theory. Its intellectual foundation is associated with Raúl Prebisch (1950), who explained the unequal relationship between industrialised centre economies and

primary-producing peripheral economies. The theory was further developed by Andre Gunder Frank (1967), Samir Amin (1976), and Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto (1979). These scholars challenged the view that developing countries would necessarily follow the same development path as Western industrialised countries.

The basic assumption of Dependency Theory is that the global capitalist system is organised around unequal relationships between core and peripheral economies. Core economies control capital, technology, production and major markets, while peripheral economies depend heavily on the export of raw materials and the import of manufactured goods, technology and capital. Frank (1967) argues that the development of the core is historically connected to the underdevelopment of the periphery. Dependency may also be sustained by domestic elites whose economic interests are connected to external actors. The theory therefore draws attention to unequal trade, foreign investment, technological dependence and external control over resources.

In this study, Dependency Theory is operationalised through specific dimensions that reflect Nigeria's position in the international division of labour. These include dependence on primary commodity exports, particularly crude oil; dependence on imported manufactured goods and industrial inputs; dependence on foreign capital and technology; unequal patterns of international trade; external financial influence; and the role of multinational corporations and domestic economic interests. These dimensions provide the basis for examining whether Nigeria occupies a peripheral position in the global economy and how such a position affects its capacity for industrialisation, value addition and economic self-reliance.

The theory therefore provides an analytical tool for interpreting the empirical evidence presented in the study. For example, Nigeria's continued reliance on crude oil exports and its dependence on imported manufactured goods can be examined as features of the core-periphery relationship. Similarly, dependence on foreign technology and capital can be used to assess the extent to which external economic relationships constrain domestic productive capacity. The theory also helps examine how international trade structures and domestic political interests may contribute to the continuation of economic dependency despite government efforts towards diversification and industrialisation.

Dependency Theory has, however, been criticised for placing excessive emphasis on external forces while giving insufficient attention to domestic institutions, leadership and policy choices. The experiences of countries such as South Korea, China and Singapore also show that countries initially occupying dependent positions can develop higher-value productive capacities. These limitations suggest that Nigeria's economic position cannot be explained by external dependency alone. Nevertheless, Dependency Theory remains useful in this study because it connects Nigeria's export structure, import dependence, foreign capital, technology and international trade relations to the wider structure of the

global economy. It consequently provides the framework for interpreting how both external economic relationships and domestic interests shape Nigeria's position in the international division of labour.

Nigeria's Position in the International Division of Labour

Nigeria's position in the international division of labour has historically been shaped by its role as a supplier of primary commodities and a consumer of manufactured and technology-intensive goods. During the colonial period, the economy was organised around the export of cocoa, groundnuts, palm produce, cotton and other agricultural commodities to external markets. Rodney (1972) argues that colonial economic structures were designed to facilitate the extraction of African resources and their integration into external production systems. After independence, crude oil became the dominant export, changing the major commodity without fundamentally changing Nigeria's position in the global production structure. This pattern corresponds with Frank's (1967) dependency argument that peripheral economies tend to specialise in primary production while higher-value processing and technological activities remain concentrated in more industrialised economies. In the Nigerian case, therefore, the shift from agricultural commodities to crude oil represented a change in the dominant export commodity rather than a complete transformation of the country's position within the international division of labour. The structure remains evident today, as Nigeria continues to depend heavily on crude oil and other commodities for foreign-exchange earnings (UNCTAD, 2025).

The dominance of crude oil is particularly significant. In 2020, crude oil accounted for about 75.4 per cent of Nigeria's total exports, rising to 76.2 per cent in 2021 and 78.7 per cent in 2022 (NBS, 2023). The pattern continued in 2023, when crude oil remained the dominant component of Nigeria's exports (NBS, 2024). In 2024, crude oil accounted for 68.9 per cent of total exports in the fourth quarter, while non-oil products contributed a much smaller share (NBS, 2025). These figures provide empirical evidence of Nigeria's continued dependence on a primary commodity for export earnings. From the perspective of Dependency Theory, this represents primary commodity dependence, one of the major indicators through which the peripheral position of an economy can be examined (Frank, 1967; Amin, 1976). The evidence therefore suggests that Nigeria participates actively in international trade but largely from a position in which a substantial proportion of export earnings depends on a commodity whose price and demand are determined largely by international market conditions. The economy consequently remains exposed to international oil prices, production disruptions and changes in global demand.

The consequences of this structure became particularly visible in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global demand and contributed to a sharp decline in oil prices and

Nigeria's export earnings. The International Monetary Fund (2021) noted that the pandemic and the associated decline in oil prices created significant pressures on oil-exporting economies, including Nigeria. Although exports recovered in 2021 and 2022 as global economic activity improved, the fundamental export structure remained largely unchanged (NBS, 2023). Similarly, UNCTAD (2025) reported that Africa's commodity-export value declined during 2021–2023, reflecting the vulnerability of major commodity exporters to changes in global commodity prices. Thus, Nigeria's integration into the global economy continues to expose the country to external shocks over which it has limited control. In terms of Dependency Theory, this demonstrates how dependence on primary commodities can make peripheral economies vulnerable to developments originating outside their domestic economies (Amin, 1976).

Nigeria's position is also evident in the limited domestic processing of its natural resources. For example, Nigeria exports crude petroleum but has historically depended heavily on imported refined petroleum products. Refined petroleum imports were valued at about US$22.4 billion in 2022, US$18.3 billion in 2023 and US$13.2 billion in 2024 (IMF, 2025). This represents a major contradiction: Nigeria possesses substantial crude-oil resources but has traditionally captured limited value from refining and downstream activities. Ovadia (2020) argues that limited domestic linkages in the petroleum sector have constrained Nigeria's ability to derive broader developmental benefits from its oil resources. The development of increased domestic refining capacity, particularly the Dangote Refinery, represents an important attempt to change this pattern by increasing domestic value addition. The Nigerian case therefore demonstrates the relevance of value-addition and import-dependence indicators in assessing the country's position within the international division of labour.

Agriculture provides another example. Nigeria exports cocoa, sesame, cashew, ginger and other agricultural commodities, but significant portions of their higher-value processing occur outside the country. For instance, cocoa beans produced by Nigerian farmers can be exported as raw materials, while the processing of cocoa into chocolate, beverages, cosmetics and other finished products generates greater value elsewhere. UNCTAD (2023) identifies limited movement from raw-material production to processing and manufacturing as a major constraint on Africa's structural transformation. Nigeria therefore participates in global agricultural value chains but often remains concentrated in their lower-value segments. This pattern supports the Dependency Theory proposition that peripheral economies can remain integrated into international markets while capturing a relatively limited share of the value generated from their resources (Frank, 1967).

The country's dependence on imported manufactured goods and productive inputs further reinforces this position. Nigeria imports machinery, vehicles, pharmaceuticals, electronics and industrial equipment needed by households and businesses. Domestic

manufacturers also rely heavily on imported machinery and intermediate inputs, making production vulnerable to foreign-exchange shortages and exchange-rate fluctuations. UNCTAD (2020) identified weak productive and industrial capacity as an important constraint on Africa's ability to benefit fully from global economic integration. Nigeria's experience illustrates this problem: while the country exports resources, it continues to depend on other economies for many of the manufactured and technological products required for domestic production. This study therefore treats import dependence as another important indicator of Nigeria's position within the international division of labour because it shows the unequal relationship between the country's export structure and its consumption and production requirements.

Technology constitutes another important dimension of Nigeria's international economic position. Advanced technologies used in petroleum exploration, manufacturing, telecommunications and other strategic sectors often depend on foreign firms, equipment and expertise. Dependency scholars identify technological dependence as an important mechanism through which peripheral economies remain connected to more advanced economies (Amin, 1976; Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). Nevertheless, Nigeria has demonstrated some capacity to move into higher-value global services. The growth of fintech companies, digital banking and telecommunications provides evidence that Nigerian firms can compete in technology-based sectors. However, continued dependence on imported sophisticated equipment and foreign technological knowledge indicates that the transition remains incomplete. The Nigerian experience therefore shows both the persistence of technological dependence and the possibility of movement into higher-value activities.

Nigeria's labour force also reflects the international division of labour. Nigerian professionals increasingly participate in international labour markets in medicine, engineering, information technology, academia and finance. Migration to countries such as the United Kingdom, United States and Canada provides these economies with skilled human resources, while Nigeria benefits from remittances and international professional networks. However, the continued migration of highly skilled workers can also weaken domestic human-capital capacity and limit the country's ability to develop technology-intensive sectors. The World Bank (2023) notes the significance of migration and remittance flows for Nigeria, while the broader dependency perspective draws attention to the unequal distribution of skilled human resources between developing and developed economies. This dimension extends the analysis beyond commodity trade to include the international distribution of labour and skills.

Government has introduced several measures to change Nigeria's position within the international division of labour. These include the Nigerian Content Development Act, the Petroleum Industry Act of 2021, economic diversification programmes, industrialisation initiatives and export-promotion policies. Nigeria's participation in the

African Continental Free Trade Area also provides opportunities for domestic producers to access larger regional markets. The development of domestic refining capacity is another important example. By 2025, increased refining activity and improvements in non-oil exports indicated some progress towards greater domestic value addition (CBN, 2025). These developments suggest that Nigeria's position is not completely fixed. Rather, domestic policy choices and productive investments can influence the extent to which the country moves towards higher-value activities.

By 2026, however, the country remained substantially dependent on primary commodities despite these improvements. IMF projections indicated that crude-oil export receipts would remain significant, even as refined-oil exports increased, suggesting a gradual movement towards downstream value addition rather than a complete transformation of the export structure (IMF, 2026). The evidence therefore indicates that Nigeria is experiencing some movement towards diversification and domestic processing while retaining important characteristics of a primary-commodity-dependent economy. In the context of Dependency Theory, this suggests that Nigeria's peripheral position is not static but is reproduced through the continued interaction of export dependence, import dependence, technological dependence and external market conditions.

Political and Economic Forces Sustaining Nigeria's Dependency

Nigeria's economic dependency is sustained by a combination of political and economic forces operating both within the country and through its relations with the international economy. These include crude-oil dependence, weak industrial capacity, import dependence, foreign capital and technology, multinational corporations, external economic pressures and domestic elite interests. Dependency is therefore not maintained by external forces alone but is also reproduced through domestic political and institutional arrangements. Akinola (2022), for instance, describes Nigeria as an oil-dependent and rentier state in which the dominance of petroleum has weakened incentives for sustained diversification and contributed to the neglect of productive sectors.

The first major force is Nigeria's continued dependence on crude oil. The 2020 oil-price crisis demonstrated the vulnerability created by this dependence, as the collapse in global demand affected government revenue, foreign exchange and economic activity. The International Monetary Fund (2021) reported significant fiscal and external pressures on Nigeria following the oil-price and COVID-19 shocks. Although oil prices improved in 2021 and 2022, the basic structure of the economy remained largely unchanged. By 2024, crude oil still accounted for a dominant share of Nigeria's exports (NBS, 2025). Akinola (2022) argues that oil provides a very large proportion of Nigeria's foreign-exchange earnings and has contributed to the neglect of agriculture and manufacturing. This creates

a cycle in which developments in the international oil market directly influence Nigeria's economic stability.

A second force is the political use of oil rents. Oil revenue has become closely connected to political competition, patronage and the distribution of state resources. Examining the 2020 oil shock, Miller (2024) found that the decline in oil revenue did not eliminate political patronage; rather, political actors-maintained patronage networks through increased government contracts and borrowing. Asiegbu (2024) similarly argues that the management of petroleum revenues in Nigeria has contributed to rent-seeking and enabled political elites to benefit from the country's oil wealth. These findings provide support for the argument that dependency can be reproduced through domestic political structures. In this study, the implication is that groups benefiting from the existing oil-based structure may have limited incentives to support fundamental economic transformation.

Weak domestic industrial capacity further sustains dependency. Nigeria imports machinery, pharmaceutical products, vehicles, electronics and industrial inputs required for production. The global disruptions between 2020 and 2022 exposed the vulnerability associated with this dependence, as shortages and rising international prices increased the cost of imported inputs. Yao and Liu (2021) demonstrate that Nigeria's dependence on oil has wider effects on the non-oil economy, particularly manufacturing, because fluctuations in oil prices influence investment, exchange rates and the competitiveness of other productive sectors. Import dependence therefore represents an important mechanism through which Nigeria remains connected to external production systems.

Foreign capital and multinational corporations constitute another important dimension. International oil companies possess substantial financial resources, technology and technical expertise required for complex petroleum exploration and production. Although their activities generate investment, employment and government revenue, dependence on foreign capital and expertise can limit domestic control over production and technology. Cardoso and Faletto (1979) recognise that external capital can become closely connected to domestic political and economic structures in dependent economies. Nigeria's Petroleum Industry Act of 2021 and local-content policies were designed partly to increase indigenous participation, but the continued importance of foreign companies indicates that domestic financial and technological capacity remains limited.

International economic pressures also shape Nigeria's policy choices. The Structural Adjustment Programme remains a major historical example of external influence on domestic economic policy. More recently, the removal of the petrol subsidy and exchange-rate reforms in 2023 demonstrated the tension between domestic policy objectives and external economic pressures. Okafor and Oladejo (2026) argue that the subsidy reform reflected the influence of international financial institutions and occurred

without sufficient prior strengthening of Nigeria's downstream petroleum capacity. While this interpretation remains a matter of scholarly debate, it illustrates the importance of examining external financial influence as part of Nigeria's economic dependency rather than treating dependency solely as a trade relationship.

Import dependence further reinforces the problem. Nigeria exports crude oil and agricultural commodities but imports many manufactured products required for consumption and production. This creates a cycle in which foreign exchange earned from primary commodities is used to purchase goods with greater technological and manufacturing content. The petroleum sector provides a clear example: Nigeria historically exported crude oil while importing refined petroleum products. The development of domestic refining capacity, particularly the Dangote Refinery, represents an attempt to break this pattern and increase domestic value addition. The significance of this development in the present analysis is that it provides evidence that changes in domestic productive capacity can potentially weaken an established pattern of dependency.

Domestic political institutions also contribute to dependency. Nigeria's political system has developed around the collection and distribution of oil revenues, creating a rentier political economy. Burns and Owen (2024) argue that Nigeria's political institutions, public spending and political relationships have been significantly shaped by petroleum revenues and their distribution. Fagbemi and Fajingbesi (2024) also identify an important relationship between oil rents and political development in Nigeria. These studies suggest that the politics of resource distribution can reinforce dependence on oil rather than encourage long-term productive transformation. The present study therefore treats domestic political interests as an important complement to the external structural explanation provided by Dependency Theory.

There are nevertheless efforts to challenge these forces. Economic diversification programmes, local-content policies, the Petroleum Industry Act, industrialisation initiatives and AfCFTA seek to increase domestic production and value addition. The Dangote Refinery is a significant example because it represents an attempt to move Nigeria from crude-oil exportation towards domestic refining and downstream production. However, Egwim (2025) argues that Nigeria's political and institutional structures remain strongly influenced by the oil economy, creating difficulties for a transition towards a more diversified economic structure. The evidence therefore indicates that Nigeria's dependency is shaped by both external economic relationships and domestic interests, consistent with the broader dependency perspective developed by Cardoso and Faletto (1979).

Efforts to Promote Economic Diversification, Industrialisation and Value Addition in Nigeria

Successive Nigerian governments have introduced policies to reduce dependence on crude oil and promote economic diversification, industrialisation and value addition. Osemeke, Adegbite and Adegbite (2021) argue that Nigeria's overdependence on oil has constrained broad-based development and made diversification necessary for sustainable economic transformation. Similarly, Olayungbo and Olayemi (2022) maintain that strengthening non-oil sectors, particularly agriculture and manufacturing, is essential for reducing the vulnerability created by fluctuations in oil revenue.

One important effort has been the promotion of non-oil exports. Adewuyi and Oyejide (2021) observe that expanding non-oil exports can strengthen Nigeria's productive capacity and reduce excessive dependence on petroleum. This has been reflected in recent export performance. Nigeria's non-oil exports reached about US$2.7 billion in the first half of 2024, compared with US$2.53 billion during the corresponding period of 2023. Products such as cocoa, urea and sesame were among the major non-oil exports (NEPC, 2024). By 2025, non-oil exports had increased to US$6.1 billion, while export volume rose to 8.02 million metric tonnes (NEPC, 2026). These developments provide empirical evidence of some diversification in Nigeria's export structure, although the extent to which they represent a fundamental shift from primary commodity dependence requires further assessment.

Industrialisation has also featured prominently in Nigeria's diversification strategy. Aiginger and Rodrik (2020) argue that industrial policy remains important for developing economies because manufacturing can generate productivity gains, technological learning and employment. In Nigeria, this rationale informed initiatives such as the Nigeria Industrial Revolution Plan and the National Development Plan 2021–2025, which emphasise domestic production, industrial capacity and private-sector development (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2021). However, Ajakaiye et al. (2022) caution that Nigeria's industrialisation efforts continue to face structural constraints, including inadequate infrastructure, unreliable electricity, limited access to finance and weak technological capabilities. These constraints are relevant to the dependency argument because limited domestic productive capacity can reinforce reliance on foreign technology, capital and manufactured goods.

Value addition has similarly received increasing attention. Ayinde, Adegbite and Akinlo (2023) argue that processing agricultural and mineral resources locally can increase export earnings, create employment and strengthen domestic industrial linkages. Recent evidence provides some support for this argument. The value of Nigeria's manufactured exports increased from ₦234.96 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023 to ₦494.22 billion in the fourth quarter of 2024, while agricultural exports increased from ₦463.97 billion to ₦1.54 trillion during the same period (NBS, 2025). The development of domestic petroleum refining, particularly following the commencement of large-scale operations at

the Dangote Refinery, also represents an important attempt to increase domestic value addition and reduce dependence on imported refined petroleum products.

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain. Ogunleye (2024) argues that Nigeria's diversification efforts have been weakened by persistent structural dependence on crude oil, limited manufacturing capacity and inadequate infrastructure. This is reflected in export statistics: crude oil still accounted for 68.87% of Nigeria's total exports in the fourth quarter of 2024, amounting to about ₦13.78 trillion, while non-oil products accounted for only ₦2.84 trillion (NBS, 2025). Similarly, Adeniran and Sidiq (2025) contend that diversification requires more than expanding the range of exports; it requires strengthening domestic productive capacity, technology, infrastructure and value chains.

Consequently, Nigeria has made measurable efforts to promote diversification, industrialisation and value addition, particularly through non-oil export promotion, agricultural processing, manufacturing initiatives and domestic refining. However, the continued dominance of crude oil in export earnings indicates that these measures have not yet fundamentally transformed Nigeria's position in the international economy. The central challenge remains moving from the export of largely primary commodities towards higher-value production in which Nigeria controls greater portions of technology, processing, manufacturing and value creation. This observation is consistent with Dependency Theory, which emphasises that meaningful structural transformation requires movement beyond a peripheral role based primarily on raw-material production (Amin, 1976).

Prospects for Reducing Nigeria's Economic Dependency

The prospects for reducing Nigeria's economic dependency are increasingly linked to the country's ability to diversify production, strengthen domestic industries and increase value addition. Ovadia (2020) argues that Nigeria's dependence on crude oil can be reduced through policies that promote domestic linkages, local content and greater participation of Nigerian firms in resource-based industries. Similarly, Kvangraven (2021) maintains that developing countries can improve their position in the global economy when they move beyond low-value activities and build technological and productive capabilities.

The expansion of non-oil exports provides another important prospect. According to the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (2024), Nigeria earned about US$2.7 billion from non-oil exports in the first half of 2024, compared with US$2.53 billion in the same period of 2023. By 2025, non-oil exports had increased to US$6.1 billion, with products such as cocoa, urea and cashew contributing significantly to export earnings (NEPC, 2026). This indicates that agriculture, agro-processing and other non-oil sectors could

provide alternative sources of foreign exchange if production, processing and export capacity are further strengthened. However, the study interprets these developments as potential pathways towards reduced dependency rather than evidence that dependency has already been overcome.

Industrialisation also offers significant prospects for reducing dependency. Aiginger and Rodrik (2020) argue that industrial policy can support technological learning, productivity and structural transformation in developing economies. For Nigeria, expanding manufacturing and processing capacity could reduce dependence on imported manufactured goods while creating employment and strengthening domestic supply chains. The increase in manufactured exports from ₦234.96 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023 to ₦494.22 billion in the same quarter of 2024 provides evidence of emerging opportunities (NBS, 2025).

The development of domestic energy and mineral value chains presents another opportunity. Ovadia and Wolf (2022) argue that Nigeria can obtain greater developmental benefits from its natural resources by increasing local processing and strengthening linkages between extractive industries and domestic businesses. The expansion of domestic refining capacity, particularly the Dangote Refinery, offers an example of this possibility because refining crude oil domestically can reduce dependence on imported petroleum products and retain more value within the Nigerian economy.

Regional economic integration also provides prospects for reducing dependency. Abrego et al. (2020) argue that the African Continental Free Trade Area can expand markets for African producers and encourage regional value chains. For Nigeria, the AfCFTA provides an opportunity to increase the scale of domestic manufacturing and agricultural processing by giving Nigerian producers access to a larger continental market. However, the benefits will depend on Nigeria's ability to improve infrastructure, electricity supply, transport systems, access to finance and technological capabilities. Thus, regional integration can provide a larger market, but the capacity to benefit from that market depends on domestic productive capabilities.

Despite these prospects, reducing economic dependency remains challenging. Ovadia (2020) notes that structural dependence cannot be overcome simply through diversification in the number of exported products; countries must increase their capacity to control production, technology and value creation. This is particularly important for Nigeria because crude oil still accounted for 68.87% of total exports in the fourth quarter of 2024 (NBS, 2025). Therefore, the prospect of reducing Nigeria’s economic dependency lies not merely in earning more from non-oil exports but in achieving sustained industrialisation, technological advancement, domestic value addition and stronger Nigerian participation in higher-value segments of the international division of labour. This provides the central analytical implication of the study: Nigeria’s position

can be altered to the extent that domestic productive capabilities, technological capacity and control over value creation increase, while excessive dependence on primary exports, imported inputs, foreign technology and external capital is reduced.

Discussion of Findings

From the data collected and presented above, the study showed that Nigeria's continued dependence on crude oil and primary commodities remains a major feature of its economic structure. This suggests that diversification has not sufficiently altered Nigeria's position in the global economy. The finding is consistent with Kvangraven (2021), who argues that developing economies may remain structurally constrained despite increased participation in global production. It also agrees with Hickel, Lemos and Barbour (2024), who found that global economic relations continue to involve substantial unequal appropriation of labour and value from the Global South.

The study also found that Nigeria's position within the international division of labour contributes to economic dependency. The country remains largely involved in resource extraction and other lower-value activities, while technology, capital and higher-value production are concentrated elsewhere. This finding supports Kvangraven's (2021) argument that participation in global production does not necessarily eliminate structural dependency. It is further supported by Hickel et al. (2024), who demonstrate the unequal distribution of value generated through international production and trade.

The study further revealed that government efforts towards diversification, industrialisation and value addition have produced some progress but have not fundamentally transformed Nigeria's economic structure. This finding is consistent with Jegede and Muchie (2024), who argue that global value chains can provide opportunities for innovation and industrialisation when countries develop appropriate technological and productive capacities. However, Karakara and Osabuohien (2024) show that participation in value chains depends on firm capacity, technology, location and institutional conditions.

Finally, the study found that industrialisation, technological development and greater domestic value addition offer important prospects for reducing Nigeria's economic dependency. Moving from the export of raw materials towards processing and higher-value production can enable Nigeria to retain more value domestically. This finding agrees with Jegede (2025), who emphasises innovation, technological capacity and global value-chain participation as important pathways to African industrialisation. However, inadequate finance, infrastructure and human capital remain significant constraints to achieving this transformation.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Nigeria's economic dependency remains closely connected to its position within the international division of labour, characterised by continued reliance on crude oil and primary commodity exports, foreign capital, technology and imported manufactured goods. Although government efforts towards economic diversification, industrialisation, non-oil exports and value addition have produced some progress, they have not fundamentally transformed the structure of the Nigerian economy. The study therefore concludes that reducing economic dependency requires more than diversification in the number of exports; it requires sustained industrialisation, technological development, domestic value addition, stronger productive capacity and effective policies that enable Nigeria to capture greater value from its resources and participate in higher-value segments of the global economy.

The study recommends the following:

1. The Federal Government, through the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, should intensify industrialisation and economic diversification by providing targeted incentives, affordable financing and infrastructure for manufacturing, agro-processing and other non-oil industries. This will enable Nigeria to move beyond the export of raw materials, increase domestic value addition and reduce its dependence on crude oil and imported manufactured goods.
2. The Federal Government and state governments should strengthen investment in electricity, transportation and other critical infrastructure required for productive activities. Reliable infrastructure will reduce production costs, improve the competitiveness of Nigerian industries and encourage both domestic and foreign investment in value-added production.
3. The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), in collaboration with the private sector, should expand support for non-oil exporters by improving access to international markets, export financing, quality certification and market information. Greater support should particularly target processed agricultural, mineral and manufactured products rather than unprocessed commodities.
4. The Federal Government, universities and research institutions should strengthen investment in science, technology, innovation and technical education. Developing domestic technological capacity will reduce dependence on imported technology and enable Nigerian firms to participate in higher-value segments of international production.

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