Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.9 No.2 June, 2026; pg. 333 – 339; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

NEO-COLONIALISM AND THE PRESENT-DAY NIGERIA

Okoli, Gladys Chinwe
Department of Public Administration
Federal Polytechnic Oko
Anambra State, Nigeria
Email: elizabethchinezend@gmail.com
Phone: 07068139504
&
Okonkwo, Nkiru Anna
Department of Public Administration
Federal Polytechnic Oko
Anambra State, Nigeria
nskiruanna007@gmail.com
Phone: 08037296585

Abstract

This paper examines the enduring impact of neo-colonialism on contemporary Nigeria focusing on its economic, political, cultural and technological dimensions. Despite attaining formal independence, the country remains influenced by foreign powers, multinational corporations and global institutions which limit policy autonomy, hinder sustainable development and perpetuate structural dependency. The paper also looked into the manifestations of neo-colonialism vis-a-vis reliance on oil exports, externally influenced governance and technological dependence. It further analyzed its effects on public administration, economic growth, social cohesion and national development. Strategies to mitigate these influences, such as economic diversification, local content promotion, regional trade integration and institutional reforms were proposed to strengthen national autonomy and sustainable development. The study further reiterated the importance of specific policies and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems in reclaiming Nigeria's development agenda.

Keywords: Neo-colonialism, Governance, Economic Dependency, Policy Autonomy, Sustainable Development.

1. Introduction

Nigeria gained political independence from Britain in 1960 marking the end of formal colonial rule. However, this political sovereignty did not automatically translate into full autonomy or development free from external influence. Despite independence, many of her economic, social and administrative structures established during colonialism have persisted, evolving into what is now referred to as neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism is characterized by indirect control through economic dependency, foreign investment, policy influence and cultural dominance rather than direct political rule (Adalikwu-Obisike & Obisike, 2019).

The country's reliance on oil exports exemplifies this dynamic. While the oil sector replaced the agricultural export model of the colonial era, it entrenched Nigeria's dependence on foreign markets, technology and multinational corporations. Consequently, true economic sovereignty

remains limited and Nigeria continues to navigate global financial structures that influence her domestic policy decisions (Omoera & Obekpa, 2019).

From a public administration perspective, neo-colonialism presents significant challenges. Governance, policy-making and administrative reforms are often shaped by external pressures or giving of conditions which limit the capacity of Nigerian administrators to design and implement policies fully aligned with national priorities. The purpose of this paper then is to explore the manifestations of neo-colonialism in contemporary Nigeria, examine its impacts on governance and national development and discusses strategies to strengthen policy autonomy and sustainable development.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Neo-Colonialism

Neo-colonialism is a modern form of control in which formerly colonized countries maintain political independence but remain economically, politically and culturally subordinate to more powerful nations or global institutions.

Difference between Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism

Colonialism refers to the direct political and territorial domination of one country over another often characterized by military conquest, administration by foreign officials and extraction of resources for the benefit of the colonizing power. Neo-colonialism by contrast is more subtle and operates under the guise of independence, relying on economic, political and cultural pressures rather than direct rule. While colonialism imposed overt control, neo-colonialism functions through structural dependency and external influence which can be just as restrictive to the sovereignty and development of the affected country (Adalikwu-Obisike & Obisike, 2019).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Dependency Theory

Dependency Theory, first articulated by scholars such as Andre Gunder Frank posits that the underdevelopment of certain nations results from their economic dependence on wealthier countries. In this framework, the global economy is divided into a "core" of developed nations and a "periphery" of developing nations whose resources, labour and markets are exploited to maintain the prosperity of the core. In the Nigerian context, Dependency Theory helps explain how the country remains economically reliant on export-oriented raw materials and foreign capital thereby perpetuating structural inequalities.

3.2 World Systems Theory

World Systems Theory, developed by Immanuel Wallerstein, complements Dependency Theory by emphasizing the historical and systemic nature of global inequality. The world is conceptualized as an interconnected system in which economic and political power is concentrated in a few core nations. Peripheral nations like Nigeria occupy subordinate positions, providing raw materials and labour while importing manufactured goods and technology. This structural positioning limits policy autonomy and reinforces the patterns of neo-colonial dependence (Ogar, Nwoye & Bassey, 2019).

Application of these theories to Nigeria's Current Situation

Both Dependency Theory and World Systems Theory are highly applicable to contemporary Nigeria. The country's heavy reliance on oil exports, managed largely by foreign corporations, illustrates economic dependency while the influence of international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank reflects the systemic power imbalances described by World Systems Theory. Furthermore, these theories help explain why policy decisions in Nigeria ranging from privatization efforts to educational reforms often align with external interests rather than domestic priorities (Omoera & Obekpa, 2019). Understanding these theoretical perspectives is important for public administrators seeking to design policies that reduce dependency and enhance national autonomy.

4. Historical Context: From Colonialism to Neo-Colonialism

According to Musa, Awudu & Elijah (2025), Nigeria's colonial experience under Britain shaped the country's political and economic structures in ways that continue to influence governance today. During colonial rule, administrative systems were designed primarily to facilitate resource extraction and maintain control rather than promote local development. This left a legacy of centralized authority, regional inequalities and institutional arrangements tailored to external interests. Infrastructure such as railways, ports and administrative centers were primarily built to serve export-oriented activities thereby reinforcing economic dependency.

Following her independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited these colonial structures which shaped post-independence policies and development strategies. Efforts to diversify the economy were constrained by reliance on foreign capital, technology and expertise, particularly in the oil sector which became the dominant source of revenue. This economic dependence reinforced external influence over domestic policy and development priorities exemplifying early forms of neo-colonial control (Omoera & Obekpa, 2019).

Over time, the nature of external influence evolved. Direct colonial control gave way to more subtle mechanisms, including multinational corporate dominance, conditional loans from international financial institutions and policy recommendations guided by foreign interests. While Nigeria is politically independent, these forms of neo-colonialism perpetuate structural dependency, limiting the country's ability to pursue autonomous development strategies (Musa, Awudu & Elijah, 2025).

5. Manifestations of Neo-colonialism in Nigeria

Although Nigeria achieved political independence in 1960, the country continues to face significant forms of external influence across economic, political, cultural and technological domains. Neo-colonialism is therefore not only historical but ongoing, shaping the country's development strides and constraining the capacity for autonomous governance. These manifestations are interrelated, creating a system of structural dependency that affects public administration, policy formulation and national development.

5.1 Economic Dependence: Oil Sector, Multinational Corporations and Trade Imbalances

Nigeria's economic dependence on the oil sector remains the most visible form of neo-colonial influence. Oil accounts for the majority of government revenue and foreign exchange earnings leaving the country vulnerable to global price fluctuations (Yange, 2024). Multinational

corporations dominate extraction, refining and export operations while local communities in oil-producing regions often experience environmental degradation, poor infrastructure and minimal social investment. This pattern limits domestic control over critical economic resources and sustains unequal development across regions.

According to Emmanuel (2024), trade imbalances further reinforce economic dependency. Nigeria continues to export crude oil and raw materials while importing refined petroleum and manufactured goods which demonstrate the persistence of a colonial-style trade model. Economists argue that this peripheral role in the global economy restricts the country's industrialization efforts and limits domestic value addition. Additionally, reliance on foreign loans and investment exposes Nigeria to external pressures that can influence domestic fiscal and economic policy often compelling policymakers to prioritize global expectations over local development needs.

5.2 Political Influence: External Conditions: IMF/World Bank Involvement

Neo-colonialism also manifests in the political domain particularly through the influence of international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. Nigeria's engagement with these institutions often comes with conditions that shape domestic policies, including fiscal reforms, subsidy removal, currency adjustments and structural liberalization. These external requirements can limit the autonomy of national policymakers thereby effectively constraining the country's ability to pursue policies tailored to local contexts (Emmanuel, 2024).

For example, the implementation of structural adjustment programs in the past decades has been widely condemned for reinforcing dependency and prioritizing external economic stability over domestic development. Contemporary IMF agreements continue this pattern as loans and aid packages are tied to policy prescriptions that influence budgeting, taxation and public expenditure priorities. This external political influence demonstrates how neo-colonialism persists not through overt rule but through systemic pressure on governance structures.

5.3 Cultural Dependence: Western Education, Media and Lifestyle Influence

According to Ogar, Nwoye & Bassey (2019), the cultural dimension of neo-colonialism in Nigeria is subtler but equally significant. Educational curricula, media content and administrative practices are often modeled on Western systems which may undermine the development of locally grounded governance and public administration strategies. This cultural influence is reinforced by global media, digital platforms and educational partnerships that emphasize foreign norms and frameworks over indigenous knowledge.

For instance, public sector reforms and leadership training programs in Nigeria frequently adopt international best practices without sufficient adaptation to the local context thereby creating a problem between policy design and implementation capacity. Furthermore, the dominance of foreign languages, communication styles and cultural values in education and media can marginalize local identities and weaken social cohesion. Such cultural dependency ultimately affects administrative efficiency and the relevance of public policies to Nigeria's unique social and political environment.

5.4 Technological/Educational Dependence: Imported Technology, Knowledge Transfer and Brain Drain

Technological and educational dependencies are critical areas where neo-colonialism is evident. Nigeria continues to rely heavily on imported technology, foreign expertise and donor-driven research initiatives. Local research institutions and universities often face underfunding, lack of infrastructure and limited capacity to produce innovations that meet national needs (Yange, 2024).

Additionally, the migration of skilled professionals, known as brain drain, exacerbates this dependency. Talented engineers, medical professionals and academics leave Nigeria for better opportunities abroad leaving critical gaps in knowledge and technical capacity. This cycle limits the development of local expertise and maintains reliance on foreign inputs for technological and scientific progress. Without robust indigenous innovation, Nigeria remains constrained in its ability to independently pursue sustainable development thereby reinforcing the structural aspects of neo-colonialism.

6. Impact of Neo-colonialism on Governance and National Development

Neo-colonialism continues to influence Nigeria's development strides thereby affecting governance, policy autonomy, economic performance, social cohesion and sustainable development. Its impacts are multi-dimensional, reflecting structural dependency and the influence of foreign actors on domestic institutions.

6.1 Effects on Public Administration and Policy Autonomy

Public administration in Nigeria is constrained by external pressures and global policy frameworks. Policy decisions in areas such as fiscal management, governance reforms and economic planning are often influenced by international financial institutions and foreign development agencies limiting domestic autonomy (Oladipo, 2021). Policymakers frequently face competing demands: responding to local needs while satisfying the expectations of donors and global financial actors.

6.2 Economic Performance

Nigeria's economic dependence is most apparent in its reliance on oil exports and foreign capital. The dominance of multinational corporations in the oil sector means that while the country generates significant revenue, local industries and communities often see limited benefits (Chukwuemeka, 2022). This dependency restricts economic diversification, stifles local entrepreneurship and leaves the country vulnerable to global oil price shocks.

6.3 Social cohesion

Neo-colonial influence extends to Nigeria's social and cultural spheres. Western education models, media and lifestyles have become dominant sometimes at the expense of indigenous knowledge and governance practices (Eze & Nnamani, 2020). Policies shaped under these influences may fail to resonate with local needs thereby reducing their effectiveness and the legitimacy of governance institutions.

6.4 Implications for Sustainable Development

According to Ibrahim (2021), structural dependency resulting from neo-colonialism poses significant challenges for sustainable development. Dependence on foreign technology, expertise and policy frameworks limits Nigeria's capacity for innovation and self-directed growth. To achieve sustainable development, the country must prioritize local capacity-

building, strengthen institutional autonomy and integrate indigenous knowledge into public policy.

7. Strategies to Reduce Neo-Colonial Influence

Reducing neo-colonial influence in Nigeria requires a multi-dimensional approach. Strategies must be sustainable, locally-driven and adaptable to the country's unique socio-political context.

7.1 Economic Diversification and Industrialization

One of the primary strategies is to reduce reliance on oil exports by diversifying the economy and promoting industrialization. Encouraging investment in agriculture, manufacturing and renewable energy can reduce vulnerability to global market fluctuations and strengthen local value chains (Okafor & Nwosu, 2022). By fostering domestic production, Nigeria can retain more value locally, create employment opportunities and reduce dependence on foreign imports.

7.2 Strengthening Regional Trade and Cooperation (ECOWAS, AFCFTA)

Regional integration can help Nigeria overcome structural dependency by creating larger, self-reliant markets. Active participation in regional organizations like ECOWAS and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) facilitates trade, harmonizes standards and reduces reliance on former colonial powers (Abiola, 2021).

7.3 Local Content Policies and Indigenous Knowledge Promotion

According to Adeleke (2020), promoting local content in industries such as oil, gas and technology ensures that economic benefits remain within the country. Policies mandating the use of Nigerian labour, services and materials can reduce the dominance of foreign corporations (Similarly, integrating indigenous knowledge systems into education, research and public policy can reinforce cultural autonomy, support context-specific solutions and reduce over-reliance on foreign frameworks.

7.4 Administrative Reforms to Enhance Policy Independence

Strengthening institutional and administrative capacity is critical for reducing neo-colonial influence. Reforms should focus on improving public sector efficiency, enhancing transparency and ensuring evidence-based policy-making that prioritizes national interests (Oladipo, 2021). By building resilient governance structures and reducing susceptibility to external pressures, Nigeria can reclaim greater control over its policy agenda. Others are; investment in technology and research & development, strengthening civic education and cultural awareness among others.

Conclusion

Neo-colonialism remains a significant barrier to Nigeria's development, influencing its economic, political, cultural and technological spheres. Despite formal independence, structural dependencies on foreign powers, multinational corporations and international institutions continue to limit policy autonomy, economic diversification and sustainable development. These influences manifest through economic reliance on oil, externally dictated policy reforms and technological dependency. Addressing neo-colonial influence requires integrated strategies that promote economic self-reliance, strengthen institutional capacity, harness

indigenous knowledge and enhance regional cooperation. Only through these targeted interventions can Nigeria reclaim herself over her governance and developmental strides.

References

Abiola, T. (2021). Regional Integration and Economic Self-Reliance in Africa: Implications for Nigeria. *Journal of African Development Studies, 7*(2), 45–62.

Adalikwu-Obisike, J & Obisike, E. E. (2019). The Legacy of Imperialism in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal (ESJ), 15*(16), 229. https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2019.v15n16p229

Adeleke, O. (2020). Local Content Policies and Sustainable Development in Nigeria's Oil and Gas Sector. *African Journal of Economic Policy, 4*(1), 88–102.

Chukwuemeka, A. (2022). Economic Dependence and Structural Constraints in Nigeria's Oil Sector. *Journal of African Economic Studies, 8*(3), 112–130.

Emmanuel, O. O. (2024). Dependency and Underdevelopment in the Third World Countries: A Nigeria Experience. *Journal of Governance and Accountability Studies, 3*(2), 137–155.

Eze, C & Nnamani, P. (2020). Cultural Globalization and Neo-Colonial Influence in Africa. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 5*(2), 77–91.

Ibrahim, S. (2021). Technological Dependence and Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Development Studies, 9*(4), 203–219.

Musa, A. A, Awudu, A. D & Elijah, E. (2025). Neo-Colonialism and Dependent Development in African Countries: A Critical Analysis of Nigeria's Neo-Colonial Status. *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations, 3*(1), 283–295.

Ogar, J. N., Nwoye, L & Bassey, S. A. (2019). Archetype of Globalization: Illusory Comfort of Neo-Colonialism in Africa. *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI), 2*(3), 90–95.

Okafor, E & Nwosu, L. (2022). Economic Diversification and Industrialization in Nigeria: Pathways to Reduce Dependency. *Journal of African Economic Policy, 8*(3), 134–150.

Oladipo, T. (2021). Policy Autonomy and External Influence in Nigerian Governance. *Journal of Governance and Policy Analysis, 6*(1), 89–105.

Omoera, O. S & Obekpa, E. E. (2019). Neo-colonial Dependence and Dualistic Development Models: An Exploration of the Development Communication Trajectory in Nigeria. *The Journal of Society and Media, 3*(2), 178–195.

Yange, E. (2024). Multinational Corporations as Mechanisms of Imperialism in the Third World Countries: A Study of Oil Multinationals in Nigeria. International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI). https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2024.1107069