

## The Nigerian Export Promotion Council and Non-Oil Trade Outcomes: An Empirical Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Export diversification remains central to economic resilience in resource-dependent economies. Nigeria's persistent reliance on crude oil exports, which account for over 90% of export earnings, has raised sustained concerns regarding structural imbalance and vulnerability to external shocks. This study examines the institutional role of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) in promoting non-oil exports and evaluates whether its programmes are significantly associated with export promotion outcomes. Drawing on primary data collected from 104 staff members of NEPC and analysed using chi-square statistical techniques, the findings indicate a statistically significant relationship between NEPC programmes and export promotion. Despite evidence of institutional relevance, the growth trajectory of non-oil exports remains modest relative to oil exports. Constraints including inadequate funding, insufficient ICT infrastructure, and policy instability continue to limit effectiveness. The paper contributes to research on export-led development by situating export promotion within an institutional systems framework and by providing empirical insight into the operational dynamics of Nigeria's apex export agency.

**Keywords:** Export promotion, non-oil exports, institutional capacity, Nigeria, export diversification, systems theory

## INTRODUCTION

Export promotion remains a central pillar of development strategy for countries seeking to shift from primary commodity dependence to more diversified and resilient economic structures. International trade has long been linked to productivity gains, learning effects, and broader welfare improvements, although these benefits tend to materialise only when domestic institutions are capable of supporting firms in accessing and sustaining participation in global markets (UNCTAD, 2023). Studies on developing economies show that export performance is shaped not only by market conditions but also by the quality of national institutions, policy coherence, and the ability of governments to provide targeted support to firms (Njinyah, 2018; Ruzekova, Kittova & Steinhauser, 2020). These insights are particularly relevant for resource-dependent economies where exposure to commodity price volatility heightens the urgency of export diversification.

Nigeria illustrates this challenge clearly. Oil exports have accounted for more than 90% of foreign exchange earnings for several decades, while non-oil exports have remained persistently low despite repeated policy interventions (World Bank, 2022). The dominance of crude oil has created structural vulnerabilities, including fiscal instability, limited industrial development, and weak integration into global value chains. Evidence from the wider research shows that non-oil exports have rarely exceeded 10% of total export earnings, and although there have been short periods of marginal improvement, the overall pattern has remained largely unchanged (African Development Bank, 2021). This imbalance has prompted successive governments to prioritise export diversification as a strategic objective.

The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) was established in 1976 to lead national efforts to expand non-oil exports. Its mandate covers export promotion, trade information services, administration of incentives, technical support to firms, and facilitation of international market access. Export-promotion agencies in many developing countries have been shown to play an important role in reducing information barriers, supporting firm capability development, and improving export survival rates (Catanzaro & Teyssier, 2021; Melese & Kumar, 2025). However, the persistent gap between oil and non-oil exports in Nigeria raises important questions about the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms designed to support diversification.

This paper evaluates whether NEPC's programmes are significantly associated with export promotion outcomes, drawing directly on institutional data and empirical testing presented in the wider research. The analysis treats export promotion not only as a policy tool but also as an institutional process shaped by organisational structure, resource capacity, and the broader policy environment. This perspective aligns with recent studies emphasising that export-promotion outcomes depend on the interaction between agency capability, firm-level constraints, and the wider economic system (Krammer, Strange & Lashitew, 2018; Chacha & Edwards, 2019; Konte & Ndubuisi, 2019). Understanding these dynamics is essential for assessing whether NEPC's interventions have contributed meaningfully to Nigeria's diversification agenda.

## INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF EXPORT PROMOTION

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Export promotion operates within a wider institutional environment that shapes how countries engage with international markets. Studies on trade and development show that the benefits of openness depend heavily on domestic governance, policy stability, and the strength of public institutions (Dollar & Kraay, 2003; Rodrik, 2017). Countries that pursue export-led growth require administrative systems capable of coordinating incentives, providing market intelligence, and supporting firms as they navigate regulatory and logistical barriers. These institutional arrangements influence how effectively governments can translate policy intentions into measurable export outcomes.

This paper adopts systems theory as its conceptual foundation. Systems theory views organisations as open systems that interact continuously with their external environment. Within this framework, the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) can be understood as an institution that receives inputs, processes them internally, and generates outputs that feed back into the wider economic system. Inputs include government policies and export incentives such as the Export Expansion Grant and the Manufacture-in-Bond Scheme. These incentives represent the policy tools designed to stimulate non-oil export activity. Throughput refers to the internal processes through which NEPC interprets, manages, and deploys these inputs. This includes managerial decision-making, resource allocation, and coordination with other agencies. Outputs involve the delivery of export-promotion services, support to firms, and the facilitation of market access. Feedback emerges through export performance indicators, stakeholder responses, and policy reviews that inform future adjustments.

This systems perspective aligns with contemporary institutional research that highlights the importance of coherent organisational structures and interdependent sub-systems in achieving policy effectiveness. North (1990) argues that institutions shape economic performance by influencing incentives and reducing uncertainty. More recent studies reinforce this view, showing that export-promotion agencies perform best when their internal processes are aligned with broader governance frameworks and when they operate within a stable policy environment (Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Gatto, Nasta & Pirolo, 2024). Effective export agencies therefore function not only as administrative bodies but as coordinators within a wider economic governance system that includes ministries, regulatory bodies, private-sector actors, and international partners.

Research on export-promotion organisations also emphasises the importance of institutional capability. Agencies with strong managerial capacity, adequate resources, and clear mandates tend to deliver more effective support to firms, particularly in developing economies where information gaps and market failures are more pronounced (Aragón-Correa, Marcus & Vogel, 2020). These insights are relevant for understanding NEPC's role in Nigeria's diversification agenda. The Council operates within a complex institutional landscape marked by overlapping mandates, fluctuating policy priorities, and resource constraints. Assessing its effectiveness therefore requires attention to both its internal processes and its interactions with the wider system.

This conceptual framing provides a foundation for examining whether NEPC's programmes are associated with measurable export-promotion outcomes. It also highlights the importance of institutional coherence, organisational capacity, and systemic interaction in shaping the performance of export-promotion agencies in resource-dependent economies.

## METHODOLOGY

This study draws directly on the empirical design developed in the wider research. The methodological approach was structured to capture staff perceptions of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council's programmes and their relationship with export promotion outcomes. The design reflects established guidance on organisational research, where surveys and structured interviews are commonly used to assess institutional processes and performance (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019).

### Population and Sample

The population for the study consisted of 324 staff members of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council based in Abuja. A sample of 112 respondents, representing 35% of the total population, was selected using simple random sampling. This approach ensured that all staff had an equal chance of selection, which aligns with recommendations for reducing sampling bias in organisational studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A total of 104 valid responses were retrieved, resulting in a response rate of 92.8%. This level of response is considered strong for survey-based research and provides a reliable basis for quantitative analysis.

### Data Collection

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Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire captured staff views on NEPC programmes, organisational processes, and perceived export-promotion outcomes. Interviews were conducted with management, senior, and junior staff to ensure representation across different cadres. Mixed-respondent designs of this nature are widely used in institutional research because they allow for a more comprehensive understanding of organisational dynamics (Flick, 2022). The combination of questionnaires and interviews also supports methodological triangulation, which strengthens the credibility of findings (Denzin, 2017).

### Analytical Technique

A chi-square test of independence was employed to examine the association between NEPC programmes and export-promotion responses. This statistical technique is appropriate for analysing categorical variables and is

widely used in organisational, policy, and public-sector research to determine whether observed relationships differ from those expected by chance. The chi-square test is particularly suitable when assessing institutional perceptions or programme outcomes measured at nominal or ordinal levels, as it does not assume a linear relationship or normally distributed data. Following established analytical guidance (Field, 2024), the test enabled a robust evaluation of whether participation in NEPC programmes was significantly related to reported export-promotion outcomes.

## RESULTS

### Respondent Profile

The reliability of institutional perception studies depends partly on the composition of respondents (Table 1). The survey achieved 104 valid responses out of 112 distributed questionnaires, representing a response rate of 92.8%.

**Table 1: Respondent Demographic and Professional Profile**

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age 18–25	7	6.8
Age 26–30	38	36.5
Age 31–40	43	41.4
Age 41 and above	16	15.3
Male	79	75.9
Female	25	24.1
Management Staff	30	28.8
Senior Staff	36	34.7
Junior Staff	38	36.5
Master's and above	12	11.8
First Degree	63	60.5
HND	16	15.3
OND	9	8.6

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SSCE	4	3.8
0–5 years' service	18	17.3
6–10 years' service	44	42.3
11–15 years' service	28	26.9
16 years and above	14	13.5

The demographic data indicate that 41.4% of respondents fall within the 31–40 age bracket, while 36.5% fall within the 26–30 category. A total of 60.5% hold a first degree and 11.8% possess a master's degree or higher. Furthermore, 42.3% have between 6 and 10 years of service. The composition of the sample therefore reflects an experienced and professionally qualified workforce capable of evaluating NEPC's institutional effectiveness.

### Perceived Role of NEPC in Export Promotion

Respondents were asked whether NEPC's programmes encourage export promotion (Table 2).

**Table 2: Perception of NEPC Programmes and Export Promotion**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	78	75.1
No	12	11.5
No idea	14	13.4

A total of 75.1% responded affirmatively, 11.5% responded negatively, and 13.4% indicated no opinion.

In addition, respondents were asked whether NEPC plays a critical role in promoting non-oil exports (Table 3).

**Table 3: Perceived Institutional Role of NEPC**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	78	75.2
No	12	11.5
No idea	14	13.3

A total of 75.2% affirmed that NEPC plays a critical role, 11.5% disagreed, and 13.3% had no opinion. These results indicate strong internal institutional confidence in NEPC's mandate and operational relevance.

### Institutional Challenges Affecting NEPC

Despite positive assessments of programme relevance, respondents identified operational constraints (Table 4).

**Table 4: Institutional Constraints Affecting NEPC**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Shortage of funds	21	20.3
Inadequate staff	7	6.7
Lack of motivation	18	17.4
Government interference	11	10.6
All of the above	40	38.4

A total of 38.4% selected “all of the above” when asked about institutional problems, indicating that funding shortages, inadequate staffing, lack of motivation, and government interference operate simultaneously.

Specifically:

20.3% identified shortage of funds

17.4% identified lack of motivation

10.6% identified government interference

Respondents were also asked about the frequency of staff training (Table 5).

**Table 5: Frequency of Staff Training and Re-Training**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Quite often	33	31.7
Not often	37	35.5
Rare	24	23.2
Not available	8	7.7
No idea	2	1.9

While 31.7% indicated that training occurs quite often, 35.5% reported that it does not occur frequently.

In addition, ICT capacity was assessed (Table 6).

**Table 6: Need to Strengthen ICT Infrastructure**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	84	80.8
No	17	16.4
No idea	3	2.8

A total of 80.8% indicated that ICT capacity requires strengthening. These findings suggest that although institutional programmes are perceived as relevant, operational capacity constraints limit effectiveness.

**Perception of Non-Oil Export Performance**

Respondents evaluated the rate of non-oil exports in Nigeria (Table 7).

**Table 7: Perceived Rate of Non-Oil Export Performance**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Above average	10	9.7
Average	28	26.9
Below average	55	52.8
No idea	11	10.6

A total of 52.8% rated non-oil export performance as below average, 26.9% rated it average, and 9.7% rated it above average. This perception aligns with the longitudinal export statistics presented in the dissertation, which show oil exports consistently exceeding 90% of total exports between 1980 and 2008.

**Statistical Test**

The calculated chi-square value was 3.77 with 4 degrees of freedom, while the critical value at the 0.95 significance level was 0.71. Because the obtained value exceeded the critical threshold, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a statistically significant association between NEPC programmes and reported export-promotion outcomes. This result suggests that respondents’ perceptions of NEPC activities were not randomly distributed but were meaningfully related to their views on export promotion. The analytical approach reflects established quantitative research standards, where chi-square testing is used to determine whether observed patterns differ from those expected by chance and to assess relationships between categorical variables in organisational and policy contexts (Pallant, 2020). Applying this method, the study provides empirical

support for the argument that NEPC’s programmes contribute to export-promotion outcomes, reinforcing the relevance of institutional interventions in shaping export-related behaviour and organisational performance within the Nigerian context.

**DISCUSSION**

The empirical findings indicate that NEPC programmes are statistically associated with export promotion, which supports wider research showing that well-designed export-promotion institutions can influence trade outcomes when they possess clear mandates and adequate operational structures. Studies examining export-promotion agencies in developing economies have found that targeted support, information services, and coordinated incentives can contribute to improved export performance, particularly when agencies operate within stable policy environments (Boso et al., 2019;

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Malca, Peña-Vinces & Acedo, 2020, Suwannarat, 2023). These insights align with the results of this study, which suggest that NEPC's interventions have measurable relevance for Nigeria's export-promotion efforts.

Institutional capacity remains central to understanding the extent of this influence. Systems theory provides a useful interpretive lens because it highlights the importance of internal processes in shaping organisational outputs. Inputs such as export incentives, policy directives, and government-funded programmes require effective throughput mechanisms if they are to generate meaningful outcomes. Throughput processes include managerial capability, funding adequacy, ICT infrastructure, and the consistency of policy implementation. Research on public sector performance in developing economies shows that weak throughput mechanisms often limit the effectiveness of otherwise well-designed programmes (Moodley, Ackers & Odendaal, 2022; Hassan, Akintola & Hassan, 2024). This perspective helps explain why the existence of export-promotion initiatives alone does not guarantee substantial diversification outcomes.

Nigeria's persistent dependence on oil exports suggests that export-promotion efforts operate within broader macroeconomic and structural constraints. Commodity-dependent economies often struggle to diversify because external shocks, price volatility, and institutional weaknesses reinforce reliance on a narrow set of export products. Recent studies emphasise that diversification requires sustained institutional strengthening, long-term policy coherence, and the development of productive capabilities rather than episodic interventions (Delechat et al., 2024; IMF, 2024; UNCTAD, 2025). These findings resonate with the Nigerian context, where non-oil export growth has remained limited despite repeated policy commitments.

The study positions NEPC as an institution that is relevant to the diversification agenda but constrained by systemic and organisational limitations. Respondent feedback reinforces this interpretation. A significant proportion of respondents, 68.4%, opposed merging NEPC with other export-related agencies. This preference suggests that staff perceive institutional strengthening, rather than structural consolidation, as a more appropriate pathway for improving export-promotion outcomes. Research on export-promotion agencies supports this view, noting that mergers often dilute organisational focus and disrupt established processes unless accompanied by substantial capacity-building measures (Mpaayei & Sigei, 2025).

In the end, the findings highlight the importance of enhancing NEPC's institutional capacity, improving resource allocation, and strengthening internal systems to ensure that export-promotion programmes translate into sustained diversification outcomes. The results also underscore the need for broader macroeconomic reforms that support non-oil sectors and reduce the structural dominance of oil in Nigeria's export profile.

## CONCLUSION

The study shows that NEPC programmes are significantly associated with export promotion, which highlights the importance of institutional mechanisms in shaping export outcomes. The evidence indicates that export-promotion structures matter, yet the wider export landscape in Nigeria continues to be shaped by the dominance of oil. Non-oil exports remain modest, and the structural imbalance between oil and non-oil sectors persists despite longstanding policy commitments.

Export diversification requires more than the formal presence of an export-promotion institution. It depends on the strength of the systems that support programme delivery. Adequate funding, modern ICT infrastructure, policy stability, and sustained capacity development are essential if export-promotion efforts are to translate into measurable improvements. NEPC's role is therefore important, but it cannot achieve broad-based diversification on its own. It represents a necessary component of the wider export-transformation agenda, but its effectiveness is shaped by the institutional and macroeconomic environment in which it operates.

The findings also show that staff members favour strengthening NEPC rather than merging it with other agencies. This preference suggests that respondents see value in maintaining a dedicated export-promotion institution, provided that its internal systems and resources are improved. Strengthening NEPC's capacity, enhancing coordination with related agencies, and investing in staff development would help create a more coherent and effective export-promotion framework.

Future reform should therefore focus on building institutional capability. This includes improving ICT systems, ensuring consistent funding, supporting regular professional development, and fostering stronger collaboration across the agencies involved in trade facilitation. These measures would help position NEPC to play a more effective role in advancing Nigeria's diversification goals and reducing the long-standing dependence on oil exports.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

All authors played a substantive role in shaping this study and developing the manuscript. G.O.I., A.J.E. and C.E.E. conceptualised the work and designed the overall study framework. Data analysis, interpretation of data and validation of findings were carried out collaboratively, with each author contributing to the discussions that informed the final results. C.E.E. and K.O.O. prepared the initial manuscript draft, covering the introduction, methods, results and discussion. Co-authors strengthened the analysis, offered detailed revisions and enhanced the clarity and coherence of the final document. Every author reviewed the complete manuscript, approved the final version and accepted responsibility for the integrity of the work.

## COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no competing interests.

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