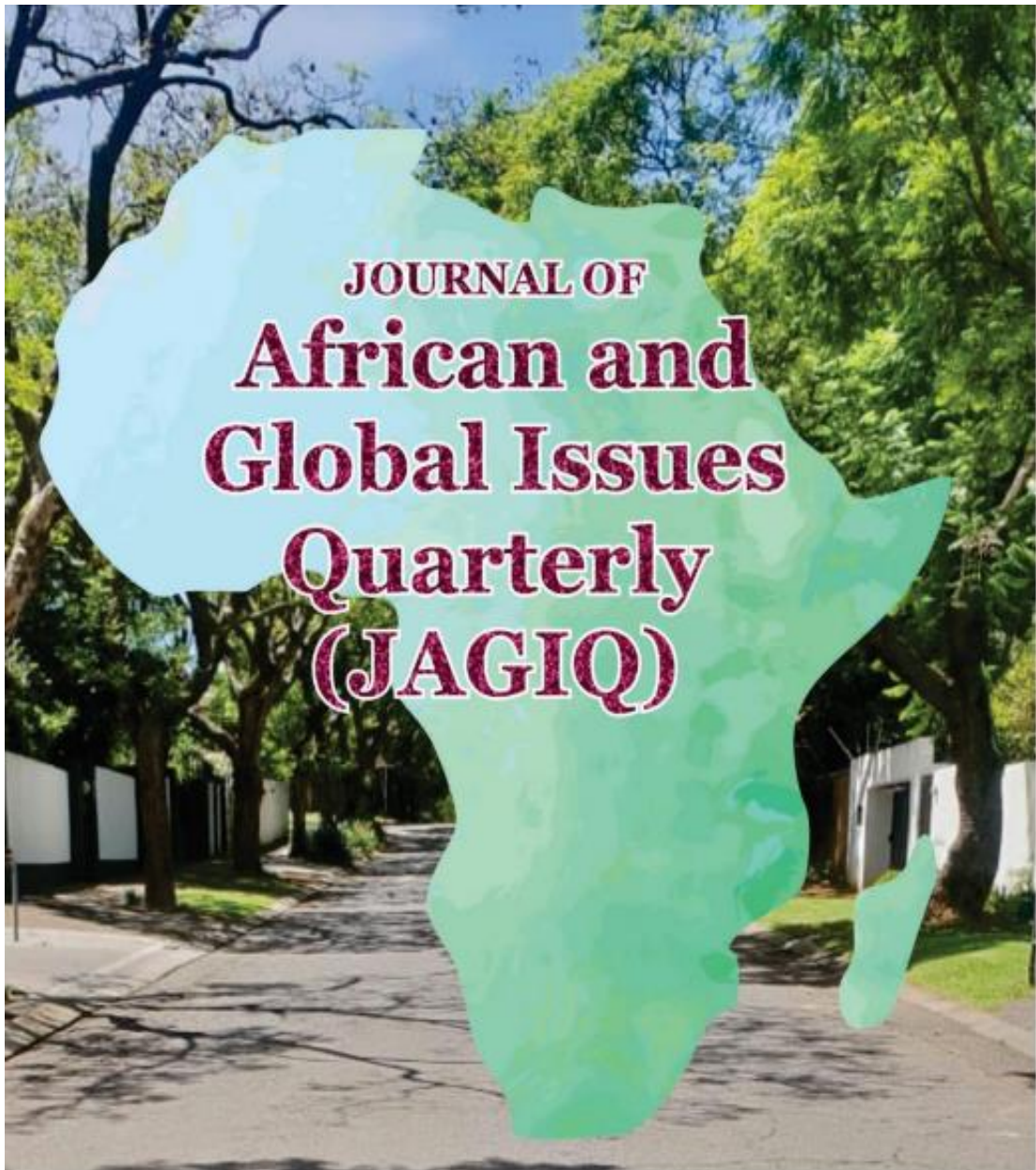




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EDITORIAL NOTE

This volume represents concerted calls within and outside Africa on the need for multidisciplinary collaboration and research output. Specifically, papers were drawn from all disciplines and research focuses, which has further increased the quality of research and collegial engagement. Hence, topics covered in this volume cut across the areas of economics, politics, security, ICT, indigenous knowledge, development studies, finance, trade, youth engagement, agriculture, democratization, and nation-building, among others.

For instance, Thizwilondi Josephine Mudau in *African Youths and the Promotion of Sustainable Development through the Lens of Indigenous Knowledge (IKS) in the 21st Century* employed qualitative desktop research methodology in synthesizing existing literature to argue that IKS represents a dynamic body of wisdom encompassing sustainable agriculture, natural resource management, and community resilience and offers proven, contextually grounded solutions to modern challenges like climate change and food insecurity. The analysis highlights youth-led initiatives across the continent that are revitalizing indigenous crops, integrating traditional ecological knowledge with climate adaptation strategies, and using digital platforms for cultural preservation. Mudau concluded that for Africa to achieve authentic and sustainable development, a concerted effort is needed to empower youth through inclusive education, supportive policy frameworks, and intergenerational dialogue, thereby transforming indigenous knowledge from a cultural heritage into a living toolkit for a resilient future.

Masila Joshua Masipa in *Beneficiaries of Corruption? An analysis of the function of South African banks in handling and making money from crime proceeds* adopted institutional theory and the political economy of corruption and a qualitative research design that combines semi-structured interviews with compliance officers, financial regulators, and civil society actors with document analysis of Zondo Commission and Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) reports, legal statutes, and policy papers in examining how, in spite of strict anti-money-laundering (AML) and anti-corruption laws, South African banks may profit from, handle, or ineffectively stop the flow of monies associated with corruption. Specifically, with an emphasis on whether banks directly or indirectly benefit from the proceeds of crime, Masipa investigated the relationship between financial institutions and illegal financial flows within the following objectives: (1) assess the regulatory framework that oversees AML compliance; (2) examine high-profile cases of corruption in which banks are implicated; (3) evaluate due diligence and institutional accountability; and (4) suggest changes to improve ethical banking governance.

Then Sipho Patrick Bhengu-Mancosa & Andrisha Beharry-Ramraj in *Advancing Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprise Growth through Digitalized Enterprise and Supplier Development in South Africa* examined the current state of Enterprise and Supplier Development (ESD) in South Africa, investigated the role of digitalization in enhancing ESD, identified the challenges and opportunities in digitalizing ESD, and provided recommendations for policymakers, corporates, and Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs). A qualitative secondary data approach was employed, drawing on thematic analysis of existing literature, reports, and industry initiatives. For key findings, Bhengu-Mancosa & Beharry-Ramraj indicated that ESD adoption remains limited; digitalization (Mancosa) significantly enhances market access and supplier diversity; infrastructure and skills gaps persist; and strategic digital integration can unlock growth opportunities for SMMEs.

Lere Amusan & Ebenezer O. Oni, in their study, *Disinvestment of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in Developing Areas: An Assessment of Shoprite Disengagement in*

Nigeria, started by reflecting on why, at the global level, many MNCs have started to disengage from their host states. In a bid to respond to the possible reasons, Amusan & Oni pushed further into examining possible reasons that could explain why Shoprite, a large South African retailing company, disinvested from Nigeria after operating in the country for about 15 years, using secondary sources supported by primary data and personal observations. For them, the reasons range from political, economic, marketing, and legal to civil society attitudes towards their business. Employing the twin theories of neoliberalism and oligopoly that facilitate globalization, Amusan & Oni concluded that, aside from losing litigation to its erstwhile Nigerian business partners, competition from domestic and foreign retail companies contributed in no small measure to why Shoprite exited the Nigerian market.

In A sober teacher is a problem”: Unpacking Political Ideology and Emancipatory Struggles Within teacher unionism, Zwane Theminkosi Trevor & Matsepe David adopted the grounded postcolonial theory in examining how teacher unions embody and deploy political stances and ideologies to promote the emancipation and freedom of education, as well as the broader communities they aim to serve. Clearly, Trevor and Matsepe employed a qualitative interpretivist approach to analyze data from narrative interviews with unionized educators, along with further examination of public union discussions. Key findings of their research indicated four interrelated themes: (1) political consciousness as both a threat to order and a driver of democratic emancipation; (2) teacher unions functioning as a counter-hegemonic force challenging neoliberal geopolitics and political norms; (3) the ideological repositioning of teacher unions as intellectual activists rather than compliant officials; and (4) tensions between political agency and professional identity.

Douglas Nyath in Rural Youth and the Future of Farming in Sub-Saharan Africa: Revisiting the Abandonment Debate explored whether rural youth are truly abandoning agriculture or are instead redefining their involvement through diversified livelihood strategies. It examines the socio-economic, institutional, and cultural factors influencing youth decisions and analyzes how emerging hybrid forms of engagement—such as agriprenuership and part-time farming—are reshaping rural economies. A systematic desktop synthesis of peer-reviewed literature (2000–2025) was conducted using databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. Nyaath observed that youth disengagement from agriculture is not uniform but context-specific, and the key determinants to such disengagement include land scarcity, education, labor market structures, gender norms, and limited access to finance and technology.

Then, in ***Equal Ideals, Unequal Realities: Gender Dynamics in the Workplace of an International Religious Non-governmental Organisation in Eswatini***, Thembumenzi Jomo Ntshalintshali & Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza examined attitudes, experiences, and organizational practices regarding gender roles, power dynamics, and inclusivity by drawing on in-depth interviews and focus groups with 20 employees from a range of departments and hierarchical levels. The results of their findings show that male participants, who were primarily ideologically devoted to gender equality, showed conflicted feelings about shifting power dynamics. Unconscious bias, policy implementation gaps, and organizational culture were equally identified as the primary obstacles to change. The results emphasize that in order to guarantee changes in gender equality, context-specific solutions are required that go beyond the adoption of policies.

In Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Environmental Conservation Ngugi's Petals of Blood, Thabo Prince Zondo started by reflecting on members of the impoverished and socio-economically disadvantaged community who are distressed by incessant drought and who consult

a seer and offer sacrifices to seek solutions. Using this as a point of departure, Zondo explored how text gestures and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) address the real dilemmas faced by Africans following the extensive and cross-generational crises that accompany coloniality. In this, Zondo provided an ecocritical reading of the text, drawing on relevant postcolonial/decolonial ideas to illustrate the ways in which indigenous African epistemologies can indeed boost efforts at environmental conservation and poverty alleviation in rural communities today.

Also, **Rendani Tshifhumul** in *Exploring the Role of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Healing Practices and Resilience During the COVID-19 pandemic in Thohoyandou*, presented a narrative inquiry into the experiences of individuals who survived COVID-19 without requiring hospitalization, based on in-depth interviews with three respondents. For Tshifhumul, among the identified practices were the inhalation of steam treated with stones and salt, as well as the application of various herbal concoctions, including *Tshiumbeumbe*, *Musese*, *Mufula Musudzungwane*, *Miora*, and *Mubomo*, guava leaves, and lemon grass tea, including a mixture that comprises onion, ginger, lemon, honey, and garlic. Therefore, Tshifhumul concludes that these findings not only shed light on the adaptive strategies employed by individuals in response to the pandemic but also underscore the significance of traditional healing practices in the context of contemporary health crises. Khulisile Judith Nkuna & Sikhumbuzo Sibuso Khoza, in their work, *Capturing Cultural Heritage: Exploring the Poetic Elements of Domesticated Animal Praise*, carried out an analytical analysis of the lyrical components found in the praises of Siswati domestic animals. Nkuna & Khoza observed that expressing gratitude to animals for their contributions to human life remains a significant goal of animal praise. Reflecting on case studies, they noted that the Nguni people view domestic animals as very close environmental companions, particularly for those who live in rural areas. Praise poetry's primary goal is to commemorate great men's accomplishments. However, the reverse is the case for the Swati people, who have a tradition of honoring non-human animals in their poetry, including the wild animals they encounter in their environs as well as the domestic livestock they raise.

Intaher M. Ambe, Ellsworth C. Jonathan, Phathutshedzo D. Lavhelani,* and David H. Selby, in their study, *Exploring the landscape of demand management practices in the public health sector in the Gauteng Province, South Africa: An Empirical Analysis*, employed secondary sources in determining what demand management practices are employed within Gauteng, South Africa, and public health sector institutions. Findings in their study revealed substantial obstacles in organizational structure, demand management techniques, budget, and alignment between demand planning and strategic goals, as well as supply chain management (SCM) rules, regulations, and specifications. They conclude that the paucity of demand management implementation in public sector organizations reveals a misalignment between strategic goals, demand management, and demand planning, resulting in a loss of value for public sector organizations.

Aderinsola E. Kayode, Shalini Sing, & Patricia P. Badenhorst's research, *ICT for Indigenous Knowledge Dissemination and Education in Africa: A Systematic Review*, conducted a systematic review of literature published between 2015 and 2025 to examine how ICT tools and platforms have been deployed to support indigenous knowledge dissemination and education in African contexts. The findings of their research indicated that ICT can enhance indigenous knowledge preservation, improve youth engagement, facilitate intergenerational learning, and broaden global visibility of African knowledge systems when implemented with community participation. However, challenges remain regarding digital access, cultural sensitivity, intellectual property rights, and the sustainability of technology-driven initiatives.

In ***Donald Trump-Twitter Diplomatic Disruptions And Impact On The Post-World War II International Order.***, Ndivhoniswani Aaron Tshidzumba & Puseletso Nthate examine how President Donald Trump's unprecedented use of Twitter as a direct channel for foreign policy communication disrupted established diplomatic norms inherited from the post-World War II international order. Through content analysis of Trump's social media communications, examination of foreign policy outcomes, and comparative analysis with traditional diplomatic practices, Tshidzumba & Nthate demonstrated that Trump's social media presidency constituted a significant departure from institutional diplomacy and contributed to broader challenges facing the established international order. Further findings reveal that digital direct engagement by heads of state bypasses institutional constraints, undermines multilateral consensus-building, and creates new vulnerabilities in international relations.

Furthermore, in ***Determinants And Effect Of Small-Scale Livestock Production On Household Income In Malawi: Evidence From Fifth Integrated Household Survey***, Gladson Andrew Chipala, Christopher Chombo & Hannah Dunga examined the determinants and effects of small-scale livestock production on household income among farmers in Malawi, using cross-sectional data from the Fifth Integrated Household Survey (IHS5) with a sample of 8,795 households. Their key findings indicate that household size, access to credit, access to extension services, landholding size, distance to the market, and location in the Northern region significantly increase the likelihood of participation in livestock production. Notably, households engaged in livestock production earned, on average, an additional MWK 36,405.76 compared to non-producing households, demonstrating its important role in improving economic welfare.

In ***Navigating Artificial Intelligence Personalization and Consumer Privacy in Digital Marketing across South Africa and Global Contexts***, Suraksha Moothura and Andrishya Beharry-Ramraj critically examined how AI-driven hyper-personalization in digital marketing influences consumer privacy, with a specific focus on its ethical implications and regulatory challenges in South Africa in comparison to global standards using desktop literature review methodology. Moothura & Beharry—Ramraj observed that ethical concerns such as manipulation, algorithmic bias, and reduced consumer autonomy were found to be inadequately addressed in South Africa, where legal instruments like POPIA lack the specificity and enforcement capacity evident in global standards like the GDPR. Taleat, Bisiriyu Abiodun & Lukamba, Muhlya Tshombe's article, ***Energy Sustainability and Sustainable Development Agenda: The Role of Public-Private Partnership in South Africa***, investigated the role and effectiveness of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in South Africa's energy development towards sustainability using a qualitative desk research methodology to analyze secondary data from policy documents, scholarly literature, and government publications. For Abiodun & Tshombe, key findings demonstrate that PPPs have attracted a substantial amount of private investment and benefited the economy through job creation and community development. However, institutional and systemic barriers, e.g., Eskom monopoly, regulatory uncertainty, grid integration constraints, and institutionalized dependency on coal, impede the full implementation of PPPs in accelerating the energy transformation. Hence, they recommend policy stability, energy regulation reform, enhancing financial methods, and ensuring that social equity consideration is factored into PPP structures.

For Olukayode Idris Lasisi in ***The Governance–Development Nexus in Nigeria: A Conceptual Synthesis of Good Governance and Policy Discourse Theories***, a qualitative, conceptual, and desk-based review approach was employed, relying on the literature, policy documents, and theoretical frameworks in reevaluating the governance development interface in Nigeria in terms of the role of institutional weaknesses, the inconsistency of policies, and discursive framing in the

determination of sustainable development outcomes. Findings revealed that weak institutions, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, low accountability, and marginalization in policymaking processes bedeviled Nigeria's sustainable development, thereby distorting policy implementation and weakening effective service delivery. Lasisi concludes by calling for the need to strengthen institutions, improve transparency, guarantee policy sustainability, encourage civic participation, and apply digital governance solutions, which is essential to attaining sustainable development.

Eyitayo Francis Adanlawo & Mpho Chaka in *The Effect of Ethnicity And Politics on the Democratization of African Nations* examined the theoretical challenge that ethnicity poses to the African state and the challenges it poses for democratization on the continent. To guide the discourse, critical questions are raised: What kind of connection exists in Africa between politics and ethnicity? Under what conditions may ethnicity either support or undermine democracy? Can citizenship rights be reconciled with ethnicity? . Furthermore, Adanlawo & Chaka explored the evolution of ethnicity from the viewpoints of development communication and provided it with a psycho-social meaning. In their conclusion, Adalanwo & Chaka posited that, if ethnicity has an informative component, we should anticipate that voters' reliance on ethnic cues will decrease when certain forms of higher-quality information become available.

Lindokuhle Senamile Ntuli & Innocent Simphiwe Nojiyeza in *Does Resource Scarcity Constrain Rural Women's Entrepreneurial Performance in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa?*, examined whether resource scarcity significantly constrains the entrepreneurial performance of rural women in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa. Anchored in the Resource-Based View (RBV), the study adopts a quantitative research design using survey data collected from 273 rural women entrepreneurs across uMhlabuyalingana, Big5Hlabisa, and eJozini municipalities. **Ntuli & Nojiyeza** revealed statistically significant relationships between entrepreneurial performance and seven resource-based constraints: leadership skills, financial institutional barriers, entrepreneurial experience, regulatory constraints, access to financial resources, technological limitations, and limited training opportunities. Lastly, in *Transformative Governance Frontiers: Relational Public Administration for Smart City Inclusivity*, Melvin Diedericks examined the conceptualization of informal systems in the context of South African smart city initiatives. By repositioning informal systems as co-creators in urban governance, this study advocates for a paradigm shift from technocratic optimization to relational inclusion. This reframing aligns with South Africa's constitutional and developmental goals, enabling transformative governance and the effective localization of SDGs in sustainable cities.

It is expected that these works compiled in this volume will further enrich the discourse and provide policy options to individuals, governments, and countries, particularly in Africa.

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THE GOVERNANCE–DEVELOPMENT NEXUS IN NIGERIA: A CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND POLICY DISCOURSE THEORIES

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Abstract

The debate on the governance-development nexus in Nigeria has been framed mostly within the orthodox good governance paradigm, which has placed institutional quality, accountability, and administrative capacity as the key determinants of developmental outcomes. Although these dimensions are kept in check, these approaches tend to pay insufficient attention to the discursive processes by which governance issues are defined and the reform priorities are legitimised. This paper proposes a synthesised analytical framework connecting the Good Governance Theory to the Policy Discourse Theory to discuss the interaction between institutional performance and reform narratives in defining national development trajectories. The paper offers a critical conceptual review and analytical synthesis and argues that sustainable development is not only dependent on institutional design but also on whether governance discourse is consistent with institutional reality. In the Nigerian context, the discussion shows that a mismatch between the rhetoric of ambitious reforms and the capacity of the administrative system can lead to policy distortions and uneven development outcomes. The paper offers a sophisticated conceptual prism through which the governance-development nexus can be analysed in Nigeria and similar settings, combining institutional and discursive aspects of governance.

Keywords: *Governance–development nexus; Good governance theory; Policy discourse; Institutional capacity; Discursive institutionalism; Nigeria*

Introduction

Nigeria presents a persistent developmental paradox: the country is still hard hit by poor service delivery, a lack of infrastructure, poverty, and institutional weaknesses, even with high levels of natural and human resources. This governance–development gap has generated sustained scholarly debate within African development studies (Adebami & Adepoju, 2017; Fagbemi et al., 2020). The paradox seems especially glaring in the context of the expansion of reform projects over the past three decades to reinforce people’s institutions and increase accountability.

Governance has become a key factor in the development results of mainstream development discourse. In the late 1980s, the international development institutions started to focus on the significance of institutional quality: rule of law, corruption control, regulatory effectiveness, and accountability as a precondition to sustainable growth (World Bank, 1989; Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2010; UNDP, 2022). Scholars such as Hyden (2006) and Leftwich (1993) have gone so far as to suggest that development performance is more entrenched in political and institutional structures than in the economy’s policy design. Poor institutional capacity, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and elite capture have long been cited as barriers to sustainable

development in the Nigerian context (Ijewereme, 2020; Ogbuabor et al., 2020).

Institutional explanations, although indispensable, are not entirely able to account for the modest transformative effect of recurrent reform programmes. Periodically, anti-corruption, civil service restructuring, public financial management reform, and digital governance measures have been implemented, but the structural developmental performance remains unbalanced (Ugoani, 2020; Lasisi, 2025). The literature pays a lot of attention to governance deficits resulting from administrative or technical failures, but little to the way policy problems are constructed, framed, and legitimised in political discourse.

The scholarship of policy discourse proposes that development issues are neither inherent nor self-evident, but are constructed through discourses, framing practices, and power-biased interpretations (Hajer, 1995; Bacchi, 2000; Stone, 2022). The discursive construction of corruption, institutional reform, or development priorities affects which solutions are legitimate and which structural questions are marginalised. In this respect, institutional weakness is not the only way in which governance reform can be hampered in Nigeria; domineering policy discourses that favour technocratic solutions at the expense of fundamental political change also hamper reform.

This paper argues that sustainable development in Nigeria is conditional on the mutually supportive compatibility of institutional governance reform and the discursive definition of policy issues. It is not enough to restructure the institution when reform agendas are either episodic, depoliticised, or framed in ways that maintain the status quo. On the other hand, the discursive commitment to transparency and accountability is not a good substitute for strong institutional capacity. The interactions between the structural

institutional quality and the discourse of governance issues, as a narration of issues in Nigeria, thus determine the governance-development nexus.

This paper provides a conceptual synthesis of a study on the relationship between good governance and policy discourse theories by combining the latter with the former, thereby contributing to the governance development debate in three ways. First, it unites the institutional and discursive perspectives, which are usually not connected in the literature. Second, it establishes how governance quality and political storytelling may interact to support development paths. Third, it offers reform implications specific to Nigeria that are analytically grounded and go beyond generic prescriptions.

Methodology / Analytical Approach

This paper adopts a critical conceptual review and analytical synthesis approach. The paper chooses to engage selectively and critically with the important theoretical and policy literature on governance, institutional reform, and development in Nigeria. Relevant sources were identified through purposive engagement with foundational works in governance theory, policy discourse scholarship, and Nigerian public administration studies. They consist of works on good governance, institutional quality, and discourse analysis, as well as peer-reviewed research on governance in Nigeria. The choice of sources depended on their conceptual relevance, theoretical importance, and impact on the development and governance scholarship. The analysis proceeds through iterative engagement with the literature, identifying points of convergence and tension between institutional and discursive perspectives. Instead of making empirical discoveries, the article constructs a synthesised analytical tool that builds on both the good governance theory of governance and policy discourse theory to redefine the Nigeria governance-development nexus.

The objective is thus interpretive and analytical, rather than empirical, to demystify the relationships among concepts, to perfect the integration of theory, and to draw context-sensitive implications of reform based on the experience of Nigerian governance.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Governance: Beyond Administrative Control

Governance denotes the procedures, bodies, and normative systems by which state power is exercised, and mutual affairs are handled. It concerns the process of running a state. In most cases, it is the exercise of power by a country's political, social, and economic institutions. Governance is more inclusive of the interplay among state institutions, civil society, and private actors in policy formation and resource allocation (Abubakara et al., 2020), unlike the term government, which refers to formal state organisations. These institutions entail formal laws, traditions, and unwritten rules, which jointly shape the incentives of the people who shape public policies, oversee the work of public employees and provide public services. The concept of governance focuses not only on the manner in which state affairs are conducted but also on the quality of governance and its institutions (Nwogbo & Akhakpe, 2021).

In the modern governance literature, institutional quality, accountability, regulatory effectiveness, and relations between states and societies are highlighted as factors that affect development performance. Efeurhobo and Egbon (2023) described governance as the act of leading people, with the expectation of influencing their lives across economic, political, social, psychological, and cultural domains. It explains the use of authority and power to control a country's social, political, and economic resources. It involves collaboration among institutions

and groups of public workers and citizens to make decisions and implement policies. Effective governance encompasses accountability, transparency, law-abiding, involvement, and equity, which help oversee the successful and effective management of public affairs (Newiak, 2022).

According to Nwogbo and Akhakpe (2021), governance involves managing the public sector and establishing a legal framework for development, transparency, and accountability. Therefore, good governance is defined as the performance in managing the country's political, social, and economic resources to spur the growth and development of the people (Akinlade et al., 2024). Governance is the rule of the affairs of the people through the application of governmental instruments and therefore has broader responsibilities and demands.

Governance is a term that came to the fore in development debate after the late 1980s when it was realised that economic reforms were insufficient to spur growth without institutional integrity (Fukuyama, 2016). Governance thus came to be explained as the enabling environment in which public policy is shaped, executed, and superintended. In the Nigerian case, institutional weakness, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a lack of citizen involvement in governance have been governance issues of concern, mediating developmental processes.

Good Governance: Normative Reform Agenda and Analytical Framework

Good governance did not originate with a single theorist or a conventional grand theory. Instead, it emerged from discussions of international development during the late 1980s and early 1990s, specifically in policy-making at the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. A crucial change came with the 1989 World Bank report on Sub-Saharan Africa, which identified

governance failures rather than distortions in economic policies as the major hindrances to development (Tandon, 1998; Lateef, 2016). Nonetheless, in academia, the first to write extensively about it was Dr Md. Mostafizur Rahman, whose book *Good Governance: Theory and Practice* was published in 2014. Subsequent scholarship operationalised the quality of governance using quantifiable dimensions, most notably the Worldwide Governance Indicators project by Daniel Kaufmann and Aart Kraay, which identified six fundamental dimensions: voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. Other scholars, including Goran Hyden and Adrian Leftwich, continued to conceptualise governance as a relationship among political power, institutions, and societal forces in determining developmental outcomes.

The theory is based on the idea that development depends on strong governance structures that facilitate public participation, uphold fairness, and allocate resources equitably. Good governance theory emphasises the virtues of governance principles of accountability, transparency, participation, and the rule of law to attain sustainable development. Good governance theory stresses the values that must govern government operations. Adherence to these principles shows that good governance is anchored in how the state in the third world responds to the demands of the populace. A government needs to focus on its accountability to citizens and efficiency to be considered effective (Emeh et al., 2019). The theory provides a framework for understanding how weak institutions of governance have hindered development in Nigeria.

The economic and social development of the country depends primarily on good governance, and the further development of good governance, in turn, contributes to the creation of a more democratic and

transparent society (Addink, 2017). Scholars of development argue that all countries aspire to successful development and that good governance is the key to achieving it (Emeh et al., 2019). Good governance refers to treating people as citizens, not as customers or consumers (as in the new public management approach), because citizens have the right to hold their governments accountable for the actions they take (Ekundayo, 2017).

Good governance thus functions both as:

1. A normative reform agenda advocating transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law; and
2. An analytical framework linking institutional quality to socio-economic performance.

The discourse of good governance has been a key focus of reform programmes in Nigeria, including anti-corruption efforts, public financial management reforms, and civil service reorganisation, but institutional weakness and elite capture have constrained transformative outcomes. The chronic governance development gap thus necessitates a higher level of theoretical questioning than institutional prescriptions.

Policy Discourse Theory: Language, Power, and Policy Construction

Policy discourse theory is an approach grounded in discourse theory and political discourse theory. Policy discourse theory is based on discourse theory and post-structuralist traditions that highlight the constitutive role of language in the production of social reality. Discourse approaches hold that policy problems are constructed through language, narratives, framing, and symbolic representation, rather than treating them as objective states of affairs in which technical solutions are possible (van Hulst *et al.*, 2025). This

theory examines the impact of language and communication on policy-making and policy decisions, and how this affects the outcomes of those decisions. Discourse theory emphasises the role of language and communication in shaping the social realities produced by power and knowledge practices within society (Angermuller, 2015).

Hajer (1995), Bacchi (2000), and Stone (2022), among other scholars, highlight the power dynamics involved in policy debates, where various competitors define problems, blame, legitimise interventions, and marginalise alternatives. The discourses not only explain the governance failures but also define how these failures are interpreted and what solutions are acceptable. According to discourse theory, language as an instrument shapes our perception and communication in the world, and this is no exception in policy processes. It sheds light on how power could be instrumental in discourse construction, which impacts valid and legitimate policy choices (Atkinson et al., 2010). By analysing the language of debates on healthcare, climate change, and education, an individual can understand how different actors construct issues and advance certain policies, and how language influences the process of policy implementation.

In the case of individuals seeking to make policy, a policy-as-discourse approach is relevant, as the activities of different interest groups are used to define and solve social problems. Public practitioners are prompted to consider how, by whom, and why policy problems are construed by examining the language and arguments groups use. It also poses a challenge for them, as they are forced to think of ways to apply their own language effectively when questioning the policies of others and using it to create social change (Shaw & Russell, 2025). Gasper and Apthorpe (1996) argued

that this framework is a more gratifying approach to policy creation. The policy analysts who represent policy as discourse have, at some point, an agenda for change (Bacchi, 2000). This study aims to show that change is a difficult issue, not only because it is opposed to reform initiatives, but also because the way problems are voiced has numerous implications that undermine the effectiveness of reform efforts. The description of the problems places the blame for their own failures on people and often on the systems that generate unjust outcomes.

Thus, political actors who facilitate good governance that leads to sustained development are grounded in the language and communication that shape policy formulation and implementation, as they examine how language, narratives, and symbolic representations affect the creation, execution, and interpretation of public policies.

Integrating Good Governance and Policy Discourse

While good governance theory focuses on institutionalisation and mechanisms of accountability, policy discourse theory focuses on the communicative and ideational facets that inform institutional reform agendas. Their synthesis gives them a multidimensional analytical framework. Good governance determines the institutional conditions required for development. Policy discourse theory asks how such conditions are framed, prioritised, and legitimised in popular discourse.

In this paper, the argument is that sustainable development in Nigeria cannot be achieved through mere institutional reform, since it is also important to well-adjust the discursive. Institutional change is superficial when reform narratives are diluted into technocratic anti-corruption slogans, without considering the underlying political incentives. On the

other hand, the most carefully thought-out institutions can fail when prevailing policy discourses prevent people from trusting or even from involving citizens in the process.

Therefore, the quality of governance and policy discourse is mutually reinforcing. Institutional flaws corrupt the development

process, whereas discursive constructions define the paths of reform and societal expectations. The governance-development nexus, in this case, can only be understood as a structural capacity and narrative framing is analysed simultaneously.



Fig. 1: Conceptual Model

Explanation of the Conceptual Model

Figure 1 demonstrates the interactive relationship between policy discourse framing and institutional quality of governance in influencing sustainable development outcomes in Nigeria. The policy discourse shapes the definition of governance issues, the legitimisation of the

reform priorities, and the institutional restructuring. The content of governance interventions is determined by dominant discourses such as technocratic anti-corruption rhetoric or industrial reforms aimed at managerial effectiveness. These reforms will, on the other hand, lead to successful policy implementation

depending on institutional governance quality. Good institutional capacity, accountability system, and regulatory consistency increase performance in service delivery and development. Nevertheless, in the provision of weak institutional structures, reform narratives can be symbolic or performative, generating policy distortion rather than substantive change.

The model also incorporates a feedback loop: the institutional performance justifies or disputes the credibility of policy discourse. In cases where reform narratives do not yield any practical improvement, trust among the masses is destroyed, undermining the legitimacy of governance. Sustainable development thus does not arise from institutional reform or discursive commitment alone, but from a combination of the two. The conceptual model aligns with North (1990), Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), Bacchi (2000), Hajer (1995), Stone (2022), Sen (1999) and UNDP (2022).

Theoretical Integration: Institutional and Discursive Dimensions of Governance

Good Governance Theory has been a dominant development discourse, especially after it was institutionalised in international development policy frameworks (World Bank, 1989; Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2010). At its core, the theory assumes that development outcomes depend on institutional quality, including the rule of law, accountability, transparency, bureaucratic capacity, and regulatory effectiveness (Leftwich, 1993). The conceptualisation of governance reform is thus largely institutional restructuring to increase administrative efficiency and curb corruption.

Although such institutional emphasis has played a major role in the policy reform agenda in the Global South, and in Nigeria in particular, it has also received perennial

criticism. Scholars have argued that orthodox models of good governance tend to be technocratic and linear: that developmental improvement will automatically follow improvements in formal institutional set-ups (Hyden, 2006). These kinds of formulations are more likely to marginalise the political and discursive practices through which governance issues are outlined, reform agendas are justified, and consent among the population is created.

Policy Discourse Theory offers a corrective lens. Inspired by interpretive and constructivist traditions, discourse scholars claim that governance is not only a pattern of institutionalisation but also a domain of meaning-making in which actors construct problem frames, assign blame, and legitimise policy action (Hajer, 1995; Schmidt, 2008). Reform agendas do not float freely but are incorporated into discourses that define what can be viewed as a governance problem, and solutions are deemed suitable. Anti-corruption, public sector reform programmes, and economic restructuring, such as these, are usually supported by a rhetoric of technocracy, which prioritises managerial efficiency and obscures underlying structural limitations.

The Good Governance Theory and Policy Discourse Theory are thus seen to have a critical analytical gap at their intersection. The first is more concerned with institutional form and capacity, while the latter challenges the language, narratives, and symbolic politics used to build reform trajectories. Each framework represents only part of the governance dimension when viewed separately. Institutional reform lacking discursive legitimacy would be performative; discursive commitment without institutional capacity would be rhetorical.

This paper makes a combined suggestion: sustainable national development cannot be achieved solely through the quality of governance institutions, but also through the clustering of policy discourse and

institutional realities. Reform stories should be aligned to real administrative capacity, political motivation and socio-economic factors. In cases where discourse holds promise of change but lacks structural viability, policy distortion and a lack of trust in the government may ensue. On the other hand, in those few cases where institutional upgrades are well-positioned, justified, and entrenched, the results of governance upgrades are more likely to generate sustainable developmental outcomes.

By integrating institutional and discursive dimensions, the paper moves beyond the orthodox good governance paradigm and develops a more context-sensitive framework for analysing the governance–development nexus in Nigeria.

Governance, Policy Discourse, and Development in Nigeria: An Integrated Analysis

Nigeria presents a compelling case for examining the interaction between institutional governance quality and policy discourse framing. The results of development, despite the many reform efforts that began after the restoration of civilian governments in 1999, have been rather lopsided, with services continuing to be delivered with difficulty, institutional weakness, and wavy waves of public confidence in the development process.

Institutional Governance Quality

On the institutional front, Nigeria has been undertaking a series of reforms to enhance public-sector accountability, strengthen anti-corruption enforcement, promote fiscal transparency, and professionalise bureaucracies (Ukwandu & Ijere, 2020). The public service reform programmes have aimed to improve the capacity of administration and governance coordination, but the implementation of the reforms is usually patchy across sectors (Asaju & Giwa, 2024). This has been limited by weak institutional capacity, especially in regulatory coherence,

enforcement autonomy, and administrative continuity, which in turn limit policy effectiveness and the delivery of public services.

Moreover, the literature on institutional effectiveness indicates that the quality of governance is one of the main determinants of welfare in Nigeria, and that better institutions are associated with higher human development indicators (Ozigbu *et al.*, 2025). Nevertheless, organisational performance and policy implementation are still hampered by structural constraints such as bureaucratic inertia, political interference, and resource constraints.

Policy Discourse Framing

The reform process of governance in Nigeria is often presented through hegemonic discourses that focus on anti-corruption, efficiency, and transformation. The language of publics tends to reduce structural issues, such as systemic patronage, political incentives, and elite capture, to moral or managerial terms, shaping how reforms are designed and how the public perceives them (Adenuga *et al.*, 2025). For example, rhetoric oriented to anti-corruption movements or administrative tightening can elevate symbolic commitments to a priority above long-term institutional reforms, thereby influencing policy priorities and expectations.

The policy discourse is not a description of the problems; rather, it defines which issues are perceived as legitimate and which answers are given. By modelling governance issues as managerial efficiency rather than systemic constraint, such reform agendas might generate reforms that are rhetorically attractive yet institutionally maladapted, undermining their impact in the long term.

Institutional–Discursive Misalignment

The combined framework developed in this paper implies that the governance and development nexus in Nigeria is not only

determined by institutional weaknesses, but also by the poor fit between reform rhetoric and institutional imperatives. Policy distortion may occur when reform stories lead to quick transformation in the absence of administrative capacity, fiscal discipline, and political agreement. The institutional reforms can be symbolic rather than long-term structural changes, destroying public trust and causing a sense of reform fatigue.

Recent literature on the subject of governance and revenue indicates that such aspects of institutional quality, of the control of corruption, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, and rule of law have a statistically significant effect on fiscal results in Nigeria, supporting the correlation between governance structure and development performance (Ibrahim, 2024). This brings to the fore the paramount role of matching discourse with institutional possibilities in the event that governance reform will have developmental payoffs.

Developmental Implications

The historical issues of development in Nigeria, such as inadequate infrastructure, unequal distribution of services to citizens, unemployment, and inequality, cannot be reduced to mere institutional forms or delivered through mere rhetorical promises. Sustainable development requires robust institutional capacity underpinned by sensible, contextualised policy discourses.

The nexus between governance and development in Nigeria can therefore be clearly viewed as a process of interaction in which institutional performance and policy discourse reinforce or undermine one another. Where reform accounts are consistent with institutional capacities and the governance discourse is pragmatic in its approach to Nigeria's socio-political dynamics, there is a likelihood of achieving sustainable development outcomes.

Conclusion

This paper revisits the governance nexus of development in Nigeria using an institutionalised discourse. Going past the conventional uses of the Good Governance Theory, the paper has contended that it is impossible to explain sustainable development within the framework of institutional design, administrative capacity, or anti-corruption measures. Although these components continue to be central to the quality of governance, they cannot be achieved without giving discursive procedures in which governance issues are located, the reform agenda legitimised, and public expectations constructed.

The paper is a conceptual contribution to the field of governance by introducing Good Governance Theory into the Policy Discourse Theory discourse. It shows that institutional reform and policy discourse are mutually constitutive aspects of government activity. Institutional performance determines the credibility of reform narratives, whereas dominant narratives determine the direction of reform design and implementation. It is not institutional reform or rhetorical commitment alone that leads to development outcomes, but a combination of both.

When applied to Nigeria, the framework helps explain why the outcomes of successive reform efforts have been uneven over time despite institutional restructuring on paper. The discussion posits that a discrepancy between excited reform rhetoric and administrative or political realities may create distortions in policy, symbolic obedience, and a lack of trust. On the other hand, institutional capacity, whilst aligned with credible policy framing, augurs well for sustainable developmental gains.

This paper primarily refines the concepts of the subject rather than measuring them. It offers a superior analytical framework for studying the governance-development nexus in situations typified by reform

instability and the complexity of structures, by combining its institutional and discursive aspects of governance. This practice will spur future studies to go beyond technocratic institutional measurements and explore how governance narratives condition, limit, and facilitate developmental paths.

By so doing, the study will add to current discussions in the governance and development literature by emphasising the interactive premises of reform efficacy and by suggesting a context-dependent perspective on how national development processes in Nigeria and similar contexts may be analysed.

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