THE PRODUCTIVITY TRAP: WHY NATIONS STAY POOR AND HOW NIGERIA CAN ESCAPE

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Abstract

In other to identify practical and evidence-based strategies through which Nigeria can escape the productivity trap, the study evaluated how these variables foreign direct net inflows, access to electricity, and internet access influence GDP per capita. To achieve this aim, the quantitative research design was adopted. Secondary data obtained from world bank was used from the period of 2000 to 2024. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, heteroskedasticity, multicollinearity test was done to evaluate the reliability of the model. Whereas, the ordinary least square (OLS) was performed to test the extent of the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The OLS results show that Foreign Direct Net Inflows (FDNI) show a negative and significant impact on GCAP, Access to Electricity (AELE) has a negative but statistically insignificant coefficient whereas, Internet Access (INAC) has a positive and statistically significant effect on GDP per capita. The study recommends prioritizing internet access as a productivity enhancing asset, restructuring FDI inflows, and addressing power supply reliability.

Key words: Productivity, Trap, Escape, GDP Per Capita

INTRODUCTION

Many developing countries remain trapped in a cycle of low productivity and limited income growth, despite ongoing reforms, foreign aid, and international development support. This persistent challenge commonly referred to as the productivity trap has hindered sustainable economic transformation across sub-Saharan Africa, with Nigeria as a notable example. While other regions of the world have experienced significant gains in living standards, Nigeria continues to struggle with structural barriers that limit output and economic diversification (Imene, 2023). According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2019) 40.1 percent of total population were

classified as poor. On an average, 10 individuals in Nigeria has real per capita expenditures below 137,430 Naira per year. This translates to over 82.9million Nigerians who are considered poor by national standards

Productivity is a central determinant of a nation's economic performance and standard of living, often measured through GDP per capita. In Nigeria, GDP per capita has remained relatively low over the years, which reflect the need to identify and address the underlying factors limiting economic growth (Aroghene & Obiekea, 2025). This research focuses on three key variables that are vital to enhancing productivity: foreign direct net inflows, access to electricity, and internet access. These elements form the backbone of modern economic infrastructure and have been shown to contribute significantly to industrial expansion, business growth, and improved public services.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) plays a critical role in economic development by introducing capital, technology, and managerial expertise (Osuji & Ehrijakpor, 2023). Countries that attract steady and productive FDI tend to experience enhanced industrial capabilities and improved productivity levels. Similarly, access to reliable electricity is fundamental to supporting businesses, manufacturing, education, and health services. Without sufficient energy infrastructure, economic activities remain limited in scale and efficiency (International Energy Agency, 2023). Internet access is also increasingly important for participation in the global economy, facilitating communication, e-commerce, and access to information and services (Okoro et al., 2025).

Nigeria, despite its abundant natural resources and strategic economic potential, continues to face a prolonged struggle with low-income levels and weak productivity (Obiekea & Ebiaghan, 2023). Over the years, GDP per capita in the country has remained stagnant, reflecting deep-rooted structural challenges that hinder economic transformation and inclusive development (World Bank, 2023). These challenges are particularly evident in the country's limited infrastructure, underutilization of investment opportunities, and inadequate access to essential services that support productivity (Aroghene et al., 2025).

One major concern is the country's inconsistent inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI), which plays a critical role in boosting capital formation, technological advancement, and employment creation in developing economies. While FDI is widely regarded as a driver of economic growth, Nigeria's unstable policy environment, insecurity, and infrastructural deficits have discouraged

sustained foreign investment (Akinlo, 2022; Osuji & Ehrijakpor,2023). Consequently, the nation has been unable to fully benefit from the productivity-enhancing effects of FDI.

Another pressing issue is the persistent inadequacy of electricity supply. Access to reliable electricity is fundamental to industrialization, small business growth, and service delivery. However, power supply in Nigeria remains unreliable and insufficient to meet the growing demand, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. This has significantly constrained economic activity, increased production costs, and discouraged private sector expansion (Adenikinju, 2022; Iwayemi & Okonkwo, 2021; Imene & Ikenga 2023). Furthermore, the digital divide poses a major obstacle to national development. Internet access remains limited, with many citizens especially in rural communities lacking the connectivity needed to engage in digital trade, access financial services, or improve educational outcomes. The lack of affordable and reliable internet infrastructure hinders innovation and limits productivity gains that are achievable through digital inclusion (Adeleke et al. 2021; Imene & Udjo-Onovughakpo, 2023).

These interrelated constraints have created a situation in which productivity remains low, poverty levels remain high, and economic growth fails to improve living standards. Without targeted efforts to enhance foreign investment, improve electricity access, and expand internet infrastructure, Nigeria risks remaining stuck in a cycle of underdevelopment. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the extent to which foreign direct net inflows, access to electricity, and internet access affect GDP per capita in Nigeria, with the goal of identifying viable strategies to break free from the productivity trap.

Conceptual Review

1. Foreign Direct Net Inflows

Foreign Direct Net Inflows (FDIN) represent investments made by foreign entities into domestic assets, enterprises, or industries. Conceptually, FDI serves as a conduit for capital accumulation, knowledge transfer, and technological upgrading in host countries. According to Olayungbo and Quadri (2022), FDI enhances domestic productivity by injecting long-term capital, creating employment, and fostering competition within local industries. In developing countries like Nigeria, however, the full potential of FDI is often limited by macroeconomic instability, regulatory bottlenecks, and infrastructural challenges. Empirical studies have established that FDI,

when effectively harnessed, positively influences GDP per capita through industrial expansion and innovation (Ajide & Raheem, 2022; Erhijakpor & Aroghene, 2023).

2. Access to Electricity

Electricity access is a core infrastructural element that underpins productivity and economic growth. It enables manufacturing, digital service delivery, agricultural mechanization, and efficient logistics. Conceptually, electricity access reduces transaction costs, supports firm-level productivity, and enhances quality of life. Adegbite and Ayodele (2021) argue that inadequate and unreliable electricity supply is a primary constraint to productivity in Nigeria, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Access to stable power infrastructure is closely linked to human capital efficiency and overall national output, thus serving as a key determinant of GDP per capita (Obi & Ekeocha, 2023).

3. Internet Access

Internet access has evolved from a luxury to a necessity in modern economies. It facilitates access to information, digital financial services, e-commerce, and education. Conceptually, the internet acts as an enabler of productivity by improving communication, business processes, and public service delivery. As explained by Ezenwata and Nwachukwu (2023), internet penetration enhances economic activities by connecting individuals and firms to new opportunities, improving efficiency, and fostering innovation. In economies like Nigeria, expanded internet access could significantly reduce informational asymmetries and promote inclusive economic growth (Uzonwanne, 2022).

4. GDP per Capita

GDP per capita is a standard measure of average income per person and is widely used to assess a nation's economic performance and living standards. Conceptually, it reflects a country's productivity level higher GDP per capita implies a more efficient and prosperous economy. According to Yusuf and Salisu (2023), GDP per capita is sensitive to changes in capital investment, infrastructure, and technological development. It serves as the dependent variable in this study, capturing the cumulative economic effects of foreign investment, infrastructure quality, and digital connectivity.

Empirical Review

Eniekezimene et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between foreign direct investment (FDI) and economic growth in Nigeria using the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model. Their study, covering the period from 1981 to 2022, revealed that FDI had no significant long-term impact on GDP growth, though there were some short-term effects. Data were obtained from the Central Bank of Nigeria and the World Bank databases.

Longe et al. (2020) examined the connection between energy consumption and FDI in Nigeria using cointegration and Granger causality techniques. Their analysis, based on data from 1981 to 2018, found a long-run causal relationship from electricity supply to FDI inflows. The study concluded that high energy costs and inconsistent power supply discouraged foreign investors. Janghorban et al. (2024) conducted a field study using a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE) to determine rural households' willingness to pay for electricity in Nigeria. Primary data collected from off-grid communities revealed a strong preference for reliable and affordable power, underlining electricity's role in enhancing productivity and supporting local enterprises.

A popular discussion thread on Reddit (2023) captured public opinion regarding Nigeria's energy sector. Contributors speculated that with uninterrupted electricity supply, Nigeria's productivity could double or even triple, reducing reliance on generators and supporting entrepreneurship and job creation. While not an academic source, the thread reflects common perceptions on the productivity potential of electricity access. Yohanna (2013) examined the macroeconomic determinants of FDI in Nigeria, with a focus on economic transformation. Employing ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and using data from 1981 to 2010, the study identified key factors influencing FDI, including access to electricity, GDP size, exchange rate stability, and inflation. The findings highlighted the crucial role of infrastructure development in attracting foreign investment.

Omoregie (2015) explored the concept of absorptive capacity and its influence on the effectiveness of FDI in Nigeria. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study analyzed the interplay between FDI inflows, infrastructure, and human capital. The author concluded that without adequate infrastructure and skilled labor, FDI would have limited impact on economic growth. The Wikipedia entry on Telecommunications in Nigeria (2025), drawing from sources such as the Nigerian Communications Commission and World Bank, reported that the telecommunications

sector contributes approximately 10 to 14 percent of Nigeria's GDP. Despite over 140 million internet subscribers, challenges remain in broadband penetration, especially in rural areas, which limits the economic benefits of internet access.

Onayemi et al. (2019) conducted a study titled absorptive capacity and the impact of foreign direct investment on economic growth in Nigeria. The study focused on how Nigeria's infrastructure and human capital condition the positive effects of FDI. Using data from 2010 to 2018, they employed econometric analysis and found that FDI alone is insufficient for growth unless the country enhances its absorptive capacity through infrastructure development and skilled labor.

Omodero and Yado (2024) examined the influence of FDI and trade openness on tax revenue in Sub-Saharan Africa, with emphasis on Nigeria. Their study utilized the Pooled Mean Group (PMG) technique with panel ARDL models covering the period from 1990 to 2022. They concluded that in the long run, FDI has a negative impact on tax revenue in Nigeria, largely due to weaknesses in tax policies and incentives given to foreign investors. Omodero et al. (2022) analyzed how FDI and ICT-related taxes affect national revenue generation in Nigeria. The study relied on time-series data and regression analysis to assess the correlation between investment flows and digital infrastructure. The authors found that the synergy between FDI and ICT investments plays a crucial role in improving government income, suggesting better policy coordination between fiscal authorities and technology sectors.

Longe et al. (2020) explored the long-term link between electricity consumption and FDI in Nigeria. The researchers used ARDL cointegration and Bai-Perron structural break tests with data from 1970 to 2015. The findings revealed that electricity supply significantly determines the volume of FDI inflows, and that policy shifts in the energy sector often coincide with structural breaks in investment flows. Wiredu, Nketiah, and Adjei (2020) assessed the impact of trade openness and FDI on economic growth across four West African countries, including Nigeria. Utilizing static panel regression analysis and data from 1998 to 2017, the study found that while trade openness positively contributes to economic growth, the impact of FDI in Nigeria was negative, possibly due to the lack of value-added investment types.

Omodero et al. (2022), in a study focusing on Arab countries, examined the impact of FDI and ICT on economic growth. Although the context differs, the methodology and conclusions are applicable to Nigeria. The study found that FDI and improved digital access positively influence GDP per

capita, especially when supported by policy frameworks that encourage ICT investment. Adelakun and Ogujiuba (2023) conducted a comparative study on the determinants of FDI in the top ten African investment destinations, including Nigeria. The analysis covered the period 1970 to 2021 and applied ARDL models. Results showed that infrastructure and good governance were essential for attracting foreign investment. Nigeria's underperformance in these areas was noted as a key limitation.

Obi et al. (2024) explored the relationship between external debt, FDI, and economic growth in Nigeria. Drawing on data from the World Bank and Central Bank of Nigeria, the study concluded that high levels of public debt tend to reduce the growth-enhancing impact of FDI, implying that debt sustainability is crucial for attracting productive investment. The Wikipedia entry on Nigeria's digital divide (2025), referencing the Nigerian Communications Commission and World Bank sources, reported that over 140 million Nigerians have internet subscriptions. However, digital inclusion is uneven due to challenges such as electricity instability, cost of broadband services, and low digital literacy, especially in rural areas. These issues continue to limit the economic benefits of digital infrastructure in Nigeria.

Research Method

The study evaluated how these variables foreign direct net inflows, access to electricity, and internet access influence GDP per capita in Nigeria so as to identify practical and evidence-based strategies through which Nigeria can escape the productivity trap. To achieve this aim, the quantitative research design would be adopted. Secondary data obtained from world bank would be used from the period of 2000 to 2024. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, heteroskedasticity, multicollinearity test would be done to evaluate the reliability of the model. Whereas, the ordinary least square would be to test the extent of the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The regression model is stated in the functional form as

$$\textbf{GCAP} \;=\; \textbf{f(FDNI, AELE, INAC)} \qquad\qquad \textbf{equation (1)}$$

Econometrically as:

$$\textbf{GCA} \;=\; a_0 + a_1\,\textbf{FDNI} + a_2\,\textbf{AELE} + a_3\,\textbf{INAC} + et \qquad\qquad \textbf{equation (2)}$$

In other to avoid spurious result the variables is presented in the logarithm form as:

$$\text{LogGCAP} = a_0 + a_1 \text{Log FDNI} + a_2 \text{LogAELE} + a_3 \text{LogINAC} \qquad \text{equation (3)}$$

Where:

Log   = Logarithm

a_o = Intercept

a_1-a_3 = Coefficients of the independent variables

et   = Error term

FDNI = Foreign Direct Net Inflows measured as FDI net INFLOWS % of GDP

AELE = Access to Electricity measured as access to electricity % of population

INAC = Internet Access measured as individuals using the internet % of population

GCAP = GDP per Capita () measured as GDP per Capita Us Dollars

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	GCAP	FDNI	AELE	INAC
Mean	3.218480	3.303625	1.719542	0.916653
Median	3.304770	3.303628	1.724276	1.204120
Maximum	3.489776	3.306211	1.786751	1.591065
Minimum	2.738225	3.301030	1.637490	-1.000000
Std. Dev.	0.214530	0.001589	0.045839	0.757392
Skewness	-1.073562	-0.004280	-0.232939	-1.308780
Kurtosis	3.030105	1.796179	1.988386	3.556678
Jarque-Bera	4.803176	1.509644	1.292089	7.459904
Probability	0.090574	0.470094	0.524115	0.023994

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025.

Table 1 provides a preliminary summary of the dataset. GCAP, FDNI, AELE are approximately normally distributed as their skewness is close to zero and kurtosis is near 3. The Jarque-Bera p-values (especially for FDNI and AELE) are above 0.05, implying non-rejection of the normality assumption. INAC, however, has significant negative skewness and a kurtosis above 3, indicating a distribution that is left-skewed and leptokurtic. The Jarque-Bera test p-value is 0.024, suggesting INAC is not normally distributed. GCAP and INAC shows variability (Std. Dev = 0.215, 0.757), while FDNI varies very little (Std. Dev = 0.0016), implying a relatively stable foreign direct investment inflow.

Table 2: Correlation Test

	GCAP	FDNI	AELE	INAC
GCAP	1.000000			
FDNI	0.662673	1.000000		
AELE	0.650034	0.559426	1.000000	
INAC	0.753991	0.690838	0.518151	1.000000

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025.

Table 2 shows correlation among the variables. Where, GCAP is strongly correlated with INAC (0.754), suggesting that better internet access is closely associated with higher GDP per capita. FDNI and AELE also show strong correlations with GCAP (0.663, 0.650), but slightly less than INAC.The coefficients also shows firm correlations among independent variables (FDNI, AELE, INAC), especially FDNI–AELE (0.559) and FDNI–INAC (0.690).In view of the aforementioned there is need for multicollinearity test to check for multi collinearity among the variables.

Table 3: Multicollinearity Test
Variance Inflation Factors
Date: 06/26/25   Time: 14:36
Sample: 2000 2024
Included observations: 25

Variable	Coefficient Variance	Uncentered VIF	Centered VIF
C	8786.097	38227792	NA
FDNI	822.6452	39064066	4.672007
AELE	0.773779	9961.434	6.791085
INAC	0.002124	12.85221	5.088372

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025.

Table 3 shows the centered variance inflation factors for the variables. A VIF > 5 indicates moderate to high multicollinearity. Multicollinearity is not an issue in this model because the centered VIF is less than 10. Hence there is no multicollinearity in the model.

Table 4: Heteroskedasticity Test: Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey

F-statistic	1.027610	Prob. F(3,21)	0.4005
Obs*R-squared	3.200238	Prob. Chi-Square(3)	0.3618
Scaled explained SS	1.677076	Prob. Chi-Square(3)	0.6420

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025.

The heteroskedasticity test in Table 4 test if the variance of the error term of the model is constant overtime. From the table, all p-values are greater than 0.05, indicating no evidence of heteroskedasticity. Meaning the variance of the error term is constant. This supports the validity of the regression model's standard errors and confidence intervals.

Table 5: Regression Result

Dependent Variable: GCAP
Method: Least Squares
Date: 06/26/25   Time: 13:57
Sample: 2000 2024
Included observations: 25

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	256.1814	93.73418	2.733063	0.0125
FDNI	-76.40873	28.68179	-2.664015	0.0145
AELE	-0.538516	0.879647	-0.612196	0.5470
INAC	0.424248	0.046083	9.206145	0.0000

R-squared	0.890759	Mean dependent var	3.218480
Adjusted R-squared	0.875153	S.D. dependent var	0.214530
S.E. of regression	0.075802	Akaike info criterion	-2.175748
Sum squared resid	0.120664	Schwarz criterion	-1.980728
Log likelihood	31.19685	Hannan-Quinn criter.	-2.121658
F-statistic	57.07825	Durbin-Watson stat	0.925762
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000		

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025.

Table 5 shows the extent of the effect of the independent variables. From the data, Foreign Direct Net Inflows (FDNI) surprisingly show a negative and significant impact on GCAP, suggesting either a crowding-out effect, repatriation of profits, or misaligned investments. Access to Electricity (AELE) has a negative but statistically insignificant coefficient, implying it does not have a clear linear impact within this model possibly due to measurement scale or already high access levels reducing marginal returns. Internet Access (INAC) has a positive and statistically significant effect on GDP per capita ($p < 0.01$), highlighting the crucial role of digital infrastructure in economic productivity. R-squared of 0.891, Adjusted R-squared of 0.875 shows the model explains about 89% of the variation in GDP per capita. While, F-statistic of 57.08, p-value of 0.0000 shows the overall model is statistically significant.

Conclusion

This analysis provides strong empirical support for internet access as a key driver of economic productivity in Nigeria. While FDIN appears counterintuitively negative in this model, it may reflect structural inefficiencies in capital absorption or productivity lag. Access to electricity, despite its intuitive importance, was not statistically significant.

Recommendation

The study recommend that Nigeria can take bold steps toward breaking free from the productivity trap by prioritizing internet access as a productivity enhancing asset, strategically restructuring FDI inflows, and addressing power supply reliability. Also, policymakers must pursue a balanced and integrated approach that leverages digital inclusion, infrastructure efficiency, and targeted foreign investment to create sustainable economic growth and improve the quality of life for its citizens.

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