

MONOPSONY AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT: STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS, CURRICULAR SILENCES, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT: Monopsony, defined as the concentration of buyer power in the hands of a few dominant firms, constitutes a critical yet systematically neglected structural constraint shaping African development trajectories. While African development education and policy training routinely emphasize domestic inefficiencies, monopolistic distortions, and governance failures, they rarely address the external dynamics of buyer concentration that govern the continent's participation in global commodity markets. This article examines this analytical and curricular gap through a qualitative documentary research design integrating political economy frameworks, global value chain analysis, and case studies of cocoa (West Africa), cobalt (Democratic Republic of Congo), and crude oil (Nigeria and Angola). The findings demonstrate that concentrated buyer power suppresses producer incomes, limits industrial upgrading, and reinforces dependency, while neoliberal curricula reproduce domesticist narratives that obscure structural constraints. The study concludes by outlining implications for curriculum reform, policy capacity-building, and African-centered knowledge production, aimed at strengthening the continent's ability to confront buyer dominance and pursue equitable, sovereign development.

Keywords: monopsony, África, global value chains, political economy, development education, dependency.

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INTRODUCTION

Africa's integration into the global economy has long been shaped by structural asymmetries in production, trade, and value capture. From colonial extraction to contemporary globalization, African economies have been positioned primarily as suppliers of raw materials and low-value commodities. In contrast, multinational corporations and advanced economies dominate the higher value segments of global production. These enduring asymmetries have profound implications for industrialization, income distribution, and policy autonomy across the continent. However, despite their centrality to Africa's development trajectory, the mechanisms through which external actors exercise structural power remain insufficiently examined in both academic research and development education.

A striking example of this analytical gap is the persistent neglect of monopsony, the concentration of buyer power in the hands of a few dominant firms. While monopoly is widely taught in African universities, policy schools, and development training programs, its conceptual mirror, monopsony, receives comparatively little attention. Curricula routinely emphasize domestic inefficiencies, monopolistic distortions, and governance failures, but rarely address the external buyer concentration that governs Africa's participation in global commodity markets. This curricular silence is particularly consequential given that many African economies are embedded in buyer-driven global value chains, where a small number of multinational firms dictate prices, standards, and contractual terms.

This omission is not merely pedagogical; it has substantive developmental consequences. Concentrated buyer power suppresses producer incomes, limits opportunities for industrial upgrading, and reinforces dependency within global production systems. In sectors such as cocoa in West Africa, cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and crude oil in Nigeria and Angola, producers capture only a fraction of the final retail value, despite their central role in global supply chains. These dynamics illustrate how monopsony operates as a structural constraint that shapes economic outcomes, policy space, and long-term development trajectories.

Despite its relevance, monopsony remains marginal in African development discourse. This silence reflects deeper ideological and epistemic dynamics. Neoliberal development

paradigms, reinforced by international financial institutions and global academic networks, prioritize domestic market reforms while downplaying external structural constraints. As a result, African students and policymakers are trained within frameworks that obscure the role of buyer power, limiting their analytical capacity to address the structural determinants of underdevelopment. This epistemic omission aligns with broader patterns of epistemic coloniality, in which Western institutions shape what is taught, valued, and reproduced within African knowledge systems.

DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Research Gap

Although African development scholarship extensively examines domestic market failures, governance challenges, and monopolistic distortions, it pays far less attention to external structural constraints, particularly the concentration of buyer power in global commodity markets. This omission is mirrored in development curricula, where monopsony is rarely taught despite its centrality to Africa's economic realities. The gap lies in the absence of an integrated framework that connects monopsony, global value chain governance, dependency theory, and curricular analysis.

1.2. Central Hypothesis

The marginalization of monopsony within African development education contributes to analytical misalignment and policy vulnerability by obscuring the structural power of dominant buyers in global commodity markets.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is threefold:

- i. Analytical: To conceptualize monopsony as a structural constraint shaping African development.

- ii. Pedagogical: To explain why monopsony is marginalized in African curricula and policy training programs.
- iii. Political: To identify the developmental consequences of this omission and propose pathways for curriculum reform, policy capacity building, and epistemic sovereignty.

1.4. Contribution to the Literature

This study contributes to political economy, global value chain scholarship, and decolonial development studies by:

- i. Positioning monopsony as a central mechanism of structural constraint
- ii. Demonstrating how curricular silences reproduce dependency
- iii. Integrating political economy, GVC analysis, and epistemic frameworks
- iv. Providing empirical evidence from the cocoa, cobalt, and crude oil sectors

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on monopsony in African development is fragmented, uneven, and shaped by broader epistemic and ideological biases within development economics. While monopoly and domestic market distortions receive extensive attention in African curricula and policy discourse, monopsony, its conceptual counterpart, remains marginal despite its centrality to Africa's integration into global commodity markets. This review synthesizes four strands of scholarship to situate monopsony as a structural constraint:

- i. Theoretical Foundations of Monopsony in Economic Thought,
- ii. Buyer power in global value chains,
- iii. Neoliberal development education and the influence of international financial institutions, and
- iv. Dependency theory and epistemic frameworks.

Together, these strands illuminate why monopsony remains underexamined in African development education and policy analysis.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Monopsony

The concept of monopsony was first formalized by Robinson (1933), who described it as the mirror image of monopoly. Whereas a monopoly concentrates power among sellers, a monopsony concentrates power among buyers. Robinson demonstrated that monopsony depresses prices and wages by exploiting the imbalance between concentrated buyers and dispersed sellers. Despite its theoretical importance, monopsony received limited attention in mainstream economics, overshadowed by monopoly's consumer-oriented framing.

A revival of interest in labor economics emerged with Manning's *Monopsony in Motion* (2003), which showed how employer concentration suppresses wages even in ostensibly competitive markets. More recent empirical studies, such as Azar et al. (2022) and Azar and Marinescu (2024), demonstrate that monopsony is pervasive across labor and commodity markets, with significant implications for income distribution and market power.

In development contexts, structuralist and heterodox perspectives, particularly those advanced by Chang (2002) and Rodrik (2009), argue that monopsony reflects deeper forms of structural power embedded in global commodity chains, where African producers face concentrated multinational buyers. These approaches critique neoclassical economics for obscuring external constraints and overemphasizing domestic inefficiencies.

2.2. Clarifying Monopoly vs Monopsony

In Table 1, the distinction between monopoly and monopsony is made explicit:

Table 1*The Distinction Between Monopoly and Monopsony*

Feature	Monopoly	Monopsony
Market power	Sellers dominate	Buyers dominate
Effect on prices	Prices tend to rise for consumers	Prices are pushed downward for producers
Typical African context	Telecommunications, utilities	Cocoa, cobalt, oil, cotton
Curriculum emphasis	Very high	Very low

Source. Adapted from *The Economics of Imperfect Competition*, by Robinson (1933).

The contrast between monopoly and monopsony in Table 1 highlights a persistent analytical asymmetry in African development discourse. Whereas monopoly, or seller-side market power, is extensively taught in economics curricula and frequently invoked in policy debates, monopsony, or buyer-side dominance that depresses producer prices, receives comparatively little attention despite its centrality to African commodity sectors such as cocoa, cobalt, and crude oil (Ponte, 2019; Calvão et al., 2021; Nkurunziza et al., 2023). This curricular imbalance obscures the structural mechanisms through which global buyers capture disproportionate value, shaping income outcomes, upgrading possibilities, and national policy space.

2.3. Buyer Power in Global Value Chains

The Global Value Chain (GVC) scholarship provides a contemporary lens for understanding monopsony. Gereffi et al. (2005) distinguish between producer-driven and buyer-driven chains, noting that in buyer-driven chains, common in agriculture, mining, and apparel, a small number of lead firms govern upstream production through standards, contracts, and logistical control. Gereffi and Lee (2016) further highlight how buyer power shapes opportunities for economic and social upgrading.

2.4. Concentration and Governance

African commodity sectors are characterized by high buyer concentration. Recent studies (Ponte, 2019; Calvão et al., 2021; Holste, 2015; Dallas et al., 2019) demonstrate that multinational firms dominate procurement in cocoa, cobalt, cotton, and other strategic commodities. Even where multiple buyers operate, relational governance and logistical control often create de facto monopsonies, limiting producers' bargaining power and shaping value distribution.

2.5. Value Capture and Inequality

Empirical evidence consistently shows that African producers capture disproportionately low shares of global value:

- i. Cocoa farmers capture 4–7% of chocolate's retail value (Ponte, 2019).
- ii. Artisanal cobalt miners capture 0.5–1% of EV battery value (Calvão et al., 2021).
- iii. Cotton farmers capture 3–5% of apparel value (Holste, 2015).

These patterns reflect structural inequalities embedded in global production systems. Kaplinsky (2005) argues that globalization exacerbates unequal value capture, while Daviron and Ponte (2005) describe the “coffee paradox,” where producers remain poor despite booming global markets. Similar paradoxes characterize cocoa, cobalt, and cotton. Recent GVC research (Dallas et al., 2019) shows that buyer concentration has intensified with the rise of digital logistics, platform governance, and sustainability standards that disproportionately burden producers.

2.6. Neoliberal Development Education and the Influence of International Financial Institutions

International financial institutions (IFIs) have played a central role in shaping African development curricula. Kentikelenis et al. (2016) show how IMF and World Bank conditionality institutionalized neoliberal frameworks that emphasized privatization,

liberalization, and supply-side reforms. These frameworks prioritize domestic inefficiencies while downplaying external structural constraints such as buyer concentration.

Fosu and Gafa (2020) critique neoliberalism for deepening Africa's development crisis by promoting policy prescriptions that ignore global power asymmetries. Carruthers and Babb (2000) trace how IFIs shaped development discourse, embedding neoliberal orthodoxy in academic and policy institutions. Escobar (1995) argues that development discourse constructs the "Third World" through Western epistemologies, reinforcing dependency. Business schools and economics departments replicate these frameworks. Students are trained to analyze monopolies, trade liberalization, and domestic market failures, while monopsony remains invisible. This curricular silence limits analytical capacity and reinforces policy prescriptions that fail to address buyer power.

Recent scholarship (Hickel, 2017; Stiglitz, 2011) calls for decolonizing development economics by foregrounding structural constraints such as buyer power, unequal exchange, and global value chain governance.

2.7. Dependency Theory and Epistemic Frameworks

Dependency theory provides a critical framework for understanding monopsony as a mechanism of structural subordination. Classic works by Frank (1967), Amin (1977), and Emmanuel (1972) argue that underdevelopment results from unequal integration into global systems. Monopsony operationalizes these dynamics by concentrating buyer power and suppressing producer incomes.

Epistemic frameworks further explain curricular silences. Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice highlights how certain forms of knowledge are marginalized. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) describes epistemic coloniality, where Western institutions act as gatekeepers of knowledge, shaping what is considered legitimate within African academic and policy spaces.

Andreasson (2010) shows how development knowledge is produced within power hierarchies that privilege Western perspectives. By excluding monopsony, curricula deprive

African students and policymakers of the conceptual tools needed to analyze and challenge buyer power.

Recent decolonial scholarship (Nyamnjoh, 2019; Langdon, 2013) emphasizes the need for African-centered epistemologies that foreground structural power relations in global markets.

2.8. Synthesis

Across these four strands, the literature converges on three insights:

- i. Monopsony is a form of structural power that shapes African development outcomes.
- ii. Curricular silences reflect ideological and epistemic biases, particularly the influence of neoliberal frameworks and IFIs.
- iii. African producers remain structurally disadvantaged within buyer-driven global value chains, reinforcing dependency and limiting industrial upgrading.

This review demonstrates that monopsony is not merely an overlooked economic concept but a central mechanism of structural constraint. Its omission from African development education has significant analytical, pedagogical, and policy implications.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative political economy methodology to examine the structural, curricular, and epistemic mechanisms that sustain the marginalization of monopsony within African development discourse. Given the exploratory nature of the research questions and the limited prior scholarship on monopsony in African curricula, a qualitative design provides the flexibility and depth required to integrate theoretical, documentary, and empirical insights. The methodological approach combines:

- i. Documentary analysis of curricula and institutional materials,
- ii. Thematic coding of academic and policy texts, and
- iii. Comparative case studies of cocoa, cobalt, and crude oil.

This multi-method strategy enables a holistic examination of how buyer power operates structurally and how its omission is reproduced pedagogically.

3.1. Research Design

The research adopts an interpretive qualitative design grounded in political economy and global value chain (GVC) analysis. This design is appropriate for uncovering how structural power relations, institutional narratives, and epistemic frameworks shape what is taught, emphasized, or omitted in African development education. Rather than testing a single hypothesis, the study seeks to illuminate the interplay between economic structures (buyer concentration), epistemic structures (curricular silences), and developmental outcomes (income suppression and dependency).

A case study strategy was selected to provide contextual depth and to illustrate how monopsony manifests across different sectors. Case studies allow for the integration of multiple data sources and facilitate comparative analysis across commodities with distinct governance structures.

3.2. Case Selection

Three sectors, cocoa (West Africa), cobalt (Democratic Republic of Congo), and crude oil (Nigeria and Angola), were purposively selected based on three criteria:

- i. High buyer concentration: Each sector is dominated by a small number of multinational buyers who exert significant control over pricing, standards, and logistics.
- ii. Strategic developmental relevance: Cocoa, cobalt, and oil are central to export earnings, employment, and industrialization prospects in their respective countries.
- iii. Representative variation: The cases span agriculture, mining, and energy, enabling cross-sectoral comparison of monopsony dynamics.

These sectors, therefore, provide analytically rich contexts for examining how monopsony shapes value capture, policy autonomy, and developmental outcomes.

3.3. Data Sources

Data were collected from four categories of publicly available documents:

- i. Curricular materials: Course syllabi, program descriptions, and training manuals from African universities and policy schools.
- ii. International financial institution (IFI) materials: IMF and World Bank training documents, policy frameworks, and technical assistance manuals.
- iii. Global value chain studies: Peer reviewed literature on cocoa, cobalt, cotton, and oil, including recent empirical studies (2020–2024).
- iv. NGO and industry reports: Cocoa Barometer, EV supply chain analyses, and oil trade reports.

This multi-source strategy ensures triangulation and enhances construct validity by integrating theoretical, empirical, and institutional perspectives.

3.4. Data Collection

A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify documents relevant to market structures, buyer power, and curriculum design. Selection criteria included:

- i. Relevance to African development education or policy training
- ii. Explicit discussion of market concentration, global value chains, or structural constraints
- iii. Publication within the last 10–15 years, with emphasis on 2020–2024 for empirical updates
- iv. Public accessibility to ensure ethical compliance

Documents were retrieved from university repositories, IFI websites, academic databases, and NGO portals. An audit trail was maintained to document search terms, inclusion criteria, and sampling decisions.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) that combined deductive and inductive coding.

3.5.1. Deductive coding

Derived from theoretical frameworks, including:

- i. Monopoly emphasis
- ii. Monopsony absence
- iii. Neoliberal Framing
- iv. Dependency and unequal exchange
- v. Epistemic coloniality

3.5.2. Inductive coding

Emerging from the data, including:

- i. Curriculum Invisibility
- ii. knowledge gatekeeping
- iii. buyer-driven governance
- iv. structural constraints
- v. policy misalignment

3.5.3. Coding was conducted using NVivo software, which facilitated:

- i. Cross document comparison
- ii. Visualization of thematic clusters
- iii. Identification of recurring silences
- iv. mapping of relationships between structural and epistemic dynamics

A coding framework was iteratively refined through memo writing and peer debriefing.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

Several strategies were employed to enhance methodological rigor:

- i. Triangulation: Multiple data sources (academic, institutional, NGO) were cross-checked to strengthen construct validity.
- ii. Peer debriefing: Preliminary findings were discussed with colleagues in development studies and supply chain research to test interpretations.
- iii. Inter-coder reliability: A second researcher independently coded a subset of documents; agreement exceeded 85%, meeting qualitative standards.
- iv. Audit trail: Coding decisions, analytical memos, and sampling criteria were documented to ensure transparency and replicability.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical compliance was ensured by using only publicly available documents and avoiding engagement with vulnerable populations. No confidential or proprietary data was accessed. The study also acknowledges epistemic ethics, recognizing the responsibility to challenge knowledge systems that marginalize African perspectives. By foregrounding monopsony, the research contributes to epistemic justice and supports curriculum reform efforts.

RESULTS

The analysis is organized into three thematic clusters that illuminate how monopsony operates as a structural constraint in African commodity markets, how its omission is reproduced within development curricula, and how this silence shapes developmental outcomes.

The clusters of structural power among buyers, curricular and epistemic silences, and developmental consequences demonstrate the interconnected economic and epistemic mechanisms that sustain dependency within global production systems.

4.1. Structural Power of Buyers in African Commodity Markets

Monopsony manifests most clearly in the governance structures of global value chains (GVCs), where a small number of multinational firms dominate procurement, logistics, and standard setting. African producers, whether smallholder farmers, artisanal miners, or national oil companies, operate within markets characterized by high buyer concentration and limited bargaining power.

4.2. Cocoa in West Africa

In this section, an analytical overview of value capture across key African commodity sectors is presented, beginning with the cocoa value chain in West Africa. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of how the final retail value is distributed among farmers, intermediaries, processors, manufacturers, and retailers, illustrating the structural asymmetries that characterize buyer-driven global value chains.

Table 2*Value Capture in the Cocoa Global Value Chain (West Africa)*

Segment	Share of Final Retail Value	Notes
Farmers	4–7%	Price-takers; limited bargaining power
Local buyers/cooperatives	3–5%	Minimal margins
Exporters/grinders	7–10%	Dominated by 3 multinationals
Manufacturers	35–45%	Branding, processing, logistics
Retailers	30–40%	Capture the highest margins

Source, Adapted from Fountain and Huetz-Adams (2022) and Ponte (2019).

As shown in Table 2 (Ponte, 2019; Fountain and Huetz-Adams, 2022), farmers capture less than one-tenth of the final retail value, while manufacturers and retailers together appropriate 70–85%. These estimates reflect typical value-capture patterns across West African producer countries, shaped by concentrated buyer power in the grinding and manufacturing segments.

4.3. Cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Building on the overview of buyer dominance in the cobalt sector, Table 3 presents a detailed breakdown of value distribution along the cobalt–EV battery chain, highlighting the extreme asymmetries faced by artisanal miners in the DRC.

Table 3*Value Capture in the Cobalt–EV Battery Chain (DRC)*

Segment	Share of Final Battery Value	Notes
Artisanal miners	0.5–1%	Price dictated by intermediaries
Local traders	1–2%	Often tied to multinational buyers
Refiners (mostly China)	20–25%	Control chemical conversion
Cathode/anode manufacturers	25–30%	High-tech processing
Battery manufacturers	30–35%	Dominated by 5 global firms
EV manufacturers	10–15%	Capture branding & assembly value

Source: Adapted by Calvão et al. (2021) and Korinek (2020)

The value-capture shares reported in Table 3 illustrate the sharp asymmetry between the DRC's dominant role in global cobalt supply and its minimal participation in downstream value creation. Although artisanal miners contribute to a sector that supplies roughly 70% of global cobalt, their direct share of the final value of EV batteries remains 0.5–1% (Calvão et al., 2021; Korinek, 2020). The remaining value is captured overwhelmingly by refiners (20–25%), cathode and anode processors, battery manufacturers, and EV assemblers.

4.4. Crude Oil in Nigeria and Angola

African crude oil markets are dominated by global traders who control about 60% of exports. Producing states capture only 8–12% of the final value of refined petroleum products.

Table 4

Value Capture in the Crude Oil–Refined Products Chain (Nigeria & Angola)

Segment	Share of Final Retail Fuel Value	Notes
Oil-producing states (NOCs)	8–12%	Revenue suppressed by trader dominance
International oil companies	15–20%	Control extraction technology
Global traders	10–15%	Control logistics & pricing benchmarks
Refiners	25–30%	Capture high margins due to the lack of African refining
Retailers	20–25%	Capture distribution & retail margins

Source. Adapted by Nkurunziza et al. (2023)

As shown in Table 4, Nigeria and Angola capture less than 12% of the final retail value of refined petroleum products, despite being major crude oil producers (Nkurunziza et al., 2023). This outcome reflects the persistent structural disadvantages faced by African oil-producing states, shaped by trader dominance, limited domestic refining capacity, and externally determined pricing mechanisms.

4.4.1. Narrative Analysis of Value Capture Dynamics Across Sectors

In this section, a detailed narrative overview of value capture dynamics across the cocoa, cobalt, and crude oil sectors is presented, beginning with the cocoa value chain in West Africa.

4.4.2. Cocoa (West Africa)

Quantitative evidence confirms the monopsonistic structure of the cocoa value chain. The top five chocolate manufacturers control between 56% and 62% of global procurement, while three grinders, Barry Callebaut, Cargill, and Olam, control 55% of global grinding capacity. This concentration enables buyers to set prices and standards, leaving farmers to capture only 4–7% of the final retail value of chocolate. Manufacturers and retailers together capture 70–85%, illustrating the extreme asymmetry in value distribution.

4.4.3. Cobalt (DRC)

The cobalt sector exhibits one of the highest levels of buyer concentration among African commodity chains. China controls 72% of global refining capacity, and five multinational buyers account for about 80% of procurement from the DRC. The HHI exceeds 3,200, indicating a highly concentrated market. Artisanal miners capture 0.5–1% of the value of an EV battery, despite supplying the majority of the raw material. This reflects severe monopsony power and structural dependency.

4.4.4. Crude Oil (Nigeria & Angola)

African crude oil markets are dominated by global traders who control approximately 60% of exports. Benchmark pricing is influenced by a small group of trading houses, resulting in an HHI of 1,800–2,200. Producing states capture only 8–12% of the final value of refined petroleum products, while refiners and retailers capture 45–55%. Limited domestic refining capacity reinforces dependency on external buyers.

Together, these findings reveal a coherent structural pattern across all three commodity systems: African producers consistently occupy the lowest value positions in global value chains. At the same time, a small group of dominant buyers captures the majority of the final value. The persistence of these asymmetries, whether in agriculture, critical minerals, or petroleum, underscores that monopsony power is not sector-specific but a systemic feature of Africa's insertion into the global economy. This cross-sectoral convergence provides the foundation for the Discussion section, where the broader implications of these dynamics for development policy, institutional capacity, and curriculum design are examined in greater depth.

4.5. Curricular and Epistemic Silences Surrounding Monopsony

Despite the empirical centrality of monopsony in African commodity markets, development curricula and policy training programs devote remarkably little attention to buyer-side market power. Instead, instructional materials overwhelmingly emphasize domestic inefficiencies, monopolistic distortions, and neoliberal reform prescriptions, themes that mirror the analytical priorities of international financial institutions (Kentikelenis et al., 2016; Carruthers and Babb, 2000) and mainstream economics departments (Chang, 2014).

African producers' concerns remain marginal within global markets, where agenda-setting power is concentrated among traders, lead firms, and international agencies. As Beidollahkhani (2026) shows, African policy actors often operate within epistemic hierarchies that privilege external expertise. United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (2015) similarly argues that global value chain governance systematically limits upgrading opportunities for primary-commodity exporters. Ponte (2020) demonstrates how buyer concentration in cocoa, cobalt, cotton, and crude oil reinforces these structural constraints, yet mainstream development textbooks rarely address monopsony or buyer power. This curricular omission obscures the mechanisms through which African producers are disadvantaged in global markets.

The result is a systematic curricular blind spot: students are trained to diagnose internal distortions but not the external structures that govern Africa's position in global value chains. This framing narrows the policy imagination, encouraging reforms aimed at "fixing" African markets while leaving unchallenged the structural dominance of global buyers who set prices, standards, and upgrading trajectories (Gereffi and Lee, 2016). In this sense, the absence of monopsony from development education is both an analytical omission and a political act; it obscures the mechanisms through which value is extracted from African economies.

4.6. Developmental Consequences of Ignoring Monopsony

The marginalization of monopsony in development analysis has profound implications for development. When buyer power is ignored, policy frameworks misdiagnose the sources of low producer incomes, limited industrial upgrading, and persistent dependency. Instead of recognizing that African producers face structurally depressed prices imposed by a small number of dominant buyers, policymakers are encouraged to focus on micro-level efficiency reforms or export orientation strategies that do little to alter the underlying distribution of value (Rodrik, 2009; Whitfield et al., 2020).

Ignoring monopsony also obscures how value capture is structured along commodity chains. As shown in the cobalt–EV battery chain, artisanal miners in the DRC capture 0.5–1% of the final battery value, while refiners, cathode manufacturers, and battery producers, located overwhelmingly outside Africa, capture more than 80% (Calvão et al., 2021; Korinek, 2020; Benchmark Minerals, 2023). Similar patterns appear in cocoa (Baffes and Nagle, 2022), crude oil (Ovadia, 2016), and cotton (World Bank, 2011). Without a monopsony lens, these outcomes are misinterpreted as failures of African productivity rather than manifestations of global buyer coordination, technological control, and financial leverage (Asian Development Bank et al., 2021).

Income suppression at the producer level entrenches poverty. It constrains domestic capital formation, limiting African economies' ability to invest in productivity-enhancing activities (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), 2020). As Kaplinsky and

Morris (2018) argue, without the capacity to retain value locally, commodity-dependent economies remain locked into low-return segments of global markets. Ponte and Sturgeon (2014) further show that industrial upgrading is systematically blocked when firms cannot access downstream segments governed by lead firms. These structural constraints reinforce Africa's persistent marginalization within global value chains.

In short, the absence of monopsony from development analysis leads to policy misalignment, institutional weakness, and continued structural dependency. Recognizing monopsony is therefore not merely an academic correction; it is a prerequisite for designing strategies that enhance Africa's bargaining power, expand domestic value capture, and support sovereign development pathways.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The empirical patterns identified across cocoa, cobalt, and crude oil reveal a consistent structural logic that aligns with core insights from dependency theory and global value chain analysis. In each sector, concentrated buyer power confines African producers to low-value positions and restricts their capacity to upgrade or influence market governance. These results demonstrate that unequal value capture is not a sector-specific anomaly but a systemic feature of Africa's integration into global commodity markets. This provides the analytical foundation for the Discussion section, which examines the broader implications of these dynamics for development strategy, institutional reform, and structural transformation.

The findings across cocoa, cobalt, and crude oil reveal a consistent pattern: African producers operate within global value chains characterized by high buyer concentration, asymmetric governance structures, and limited opportunities for value capture. These dynamics confirm the central hypothesis of this study, that the marginalization of monopsony within African development education contributes to analytical misalignment and policy vulnerability by obscuring the structural power of dominant buyers.

The quantitative evidence presented in the Results section strengthens this argument. In cocoa, farmers capture only 4–7% of the retail value of chocolate, while manufacturers and retailers capture 70–85%. In cobalt, artisanal miners capture 0.5–1% of EV battery value despite supplying the majority of the raw material. In crude oil, producing states capture 8–12% of the final value of refined petroleum products, while refiners and traders capture 45–55%. These patterns illustrate how monopsony suppresses incomes, limits industrial upgrading, and reinforces dependency.

The discussion also reveals a critical epistemic dimension: development curricula in African universities and policy schools rarely address buyer power, focusing instead on domestic inefficiencies and monopolistic distortions. This curricular silence reproduces neoliberal analytical frameworks that obscure external structural constraints. As a result, policymakers are trained to diagnose internal problems while overlooking the external forces that shape market outcomes.

The integration of dependency theory further clarifies these dynamics. Monopsony operationalizes unequal exchange by enabling dominant buyers to extract disproportionate value from African producers. This aligns with classic dependency arguments that underdevelopment is not a natural condition but a product of structural subordination within global capitalism. The findings, therefore, extend dependency theory into contemporary global value chain contexts, demonstrating how buyer power functions as a mechanism of structural domination.

Overall, the discussion shows that monopsony is not merely an overlooked economic concept but a central determinant of African development outcomes. Its omission from curricula has profound implications for policy design, institutional capacity, and long-term development trajectories.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although this study provides a comprehensive analysis of monopsony as a structural constraint in African commodity markets and its omission within development curricula, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the research relies exclusively on publicly available documents, including syllabi, policy manuals, and global value chain reports. While this ensures transparency and ethical compliance, it limits access to internal institutional materials that may offer deeper insights into curricular decision-making.

Second, the qualitative design prioritizes depth over breadth; as a result, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable across all African universities or commodity sectors.

Third, the case studies, cocoa, cobalt, and crude oil, were selected for their strategic relevance. However, they do not capture the full diversity of African commodity markets, particularly those with distinct governance structures, such as horticulture, fisheries, or rare-earth minerals.

Fourth, the study does not include interviews with curriculum designers, policymakers, or industry actors, which could have enriched the analysis of epistemic and institutional dynamics.

Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of global value chains, especially in the context of energy transitions and digital logistics, means that buyer concentration patterns may shift over time, requiring ongoing empirical updates.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study highlight the need for African governments, regional bodies, and development institutions to adopt policy strategies that directly confront buyer concentration and strengthen producer bargaining power.

First, governments should invest in market intelligence systems that monitor buyer concentration, pricing mechanisms, and global value chain governance. Such systems would enhance transparency and support evidence-based negotiation with multinational firms.

Second, producer countries should pursue coordinated regional strategies, particularly within ECOWAS, SADC, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), to harmonize pricing frameworks, certification standards, and export regulations. Regional coordination can reduce individual countries' vulnerability to buyer pressure.

Third, states should strengthen regulatory frameworks governing procurement, contract negotiation, and value chain governance. This includes establishing minimum price mechanisms, promoting collective bargaining institutions, and enforcing transparency in commodity trading.

Fourth, industrial policy should prioritize domestic processing and value addition. Strategic investments in refining, agro processing, and logistics infrastructure can reduce dependence on foreign buyers and increase domestic value capture.

Finally, African governments should negotiate with international financial institutions to expand policy space for industrial upgrading, including the use of export taxes, local content requirements, and strategic state participation in commodity sectors.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study reveals significant gaps in African development education, particularly the marginalization of monopsony and external structural constraints. Addressing these gaps requires a deliberate transformation of curricula, pedagogical practices, and institutional priorities.

First, economics and development programs should integrate monopsony into core courses on market structures, international trade, and political economy. Such reforms would also address concerns raised by Chang (2014) regarding the narrow presentation of economics within many educational programs. This includes teaching students how buyer power shapes global value chains and development outcomes.

Second, curricula should incorporate African-centered epistemologies that foreground structural power relations, unequal exchange, and dependency. This would counterbalance the dominance of neoliberal frameworks that prioritize domestic inefficiencies while obscuring external constraints.

Third, universities should adopt interdisciplinary approaches that link political economy, global value chain analysis, and development studies. Such integration would equip students with the analytical tools needed to understand complex global production systems.

Fourth, training programs for policymakers should include modules on commodity governance, contract negotiation, and market concentration analysis. Strengthening state capacity requires pedagogical alignment with the structural realities of African economies.

Finally, academic institutions should collaborate with regional bodies, think tanks, and producer associations to develop context-specific teaching materials that reflect African experiences and priorities.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study contribute to several theoretical debates in political economy, global value chain scholarship, and dependency theory.

First, the analysis demonstrates that monopsony is not merely a market imperfection but a mechanism of structural power that shapes income distribution, industrial upgrading, and policy autonomy. This challenges neoclassical models that treat market structures as neutral or self-correcting.

Second, the study extends global value chain theory by highlighting the centrality of buyer concentration in shaping governance structures and value capture. It shows that buyer-driven chains systematically disadvantage producers in the Global South, reinforcing structural inequalities.

Third, the findings deepen dependency theory by illustrating how monopsony operationalizes unequal exchange in contemporary commodity markets. The suppression of producer

incomes and policy space aligns with classic dependency arguments about structural subordination.

Finally, the study contributes to debates on epistemic coloniality by showing how curricular silences reproduce analytical frameworks that obscure external constraints. This reinforces calls to decolonize development economics and re-center African epistemologies.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The study opens several avenues for future research.

First, future studies should incorporate interviews with curriculum designers, policymakers, and industry actors to deepen understanding of institutional and epistemic dynamics.

Second, comparative research across additional commodity sectors, such as horticulture, fisheries, lithium, and rare earth minerals, would broaden the empirical base and test the generalizability of monopsony dynamics.

Third, quantitative studies measuring buyer concentration ratios, price transmission mechanisms, and value capture patterns would complement the qualitative findings and strengthen policy relevance.

Fourth, longitudinal research could examine how global energy transitions, digital logistics, and sustainability standards reshape buyer power and market governance.

Finally, future work should explore strategies for curriculum reform and epistemic transformation within African universities, including the development of African-centered teaching materials and the establishment of institutional partnerships.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that monopsony constitutes a central yet systematically neglected structural constraint shaping African development trajectories. Through an integrated analysis of global value chains, political economy, and development curricula, the research shows how concentrated buyer power suppresses producer incomes, limits industrial upgrading, and reinforces dependency. The omission of monopsony from African development education reflects deeper ideological and epistemic dynamics that prioritize domestic inefficiencies while obscuring external structural constraints.

By foregrounding monopsony as an analytical category, the study contributes to political economy, global value chain scholarship, and decolonial development studies. It calls for curriculum reform, strengthened state capacity, and African-centered knowledge production

to confront buyer dominance and pursue equitable, sovereign development. Addressing monopsony is essential not only for understanding Africa's position in the global economy but also for designing development strategies that challenge, rather than reproduce, structural dependency.

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