
**FREIGHT FORWARDING OPERATIONS AND PORT
PERFORMANCE AT APAPA SEAPORT, LAGOS**

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ABSTRACT

This article examined the nature of freight forwarding operations and the level of port performance at Apapa Seaport, Lagos. It was derived from Objectives One and Two of the dissertation, which examined the characteristics of freight forwarding activities and assessed Apapa Port's performance. Data were obtained from 187 respondents drawn from port stakeholders, and descriptive analysis was conducted using weighted mean scores with a criterion mean of 3.0. The findings showed that respondents disagreed that freight forwarding operations involved extensive cargo documentation and customs-clearance activities ($M = 2.4$) and disagreed that transportation and cargo delivery were efficiently coordinated ($M = 2.5$). Conversely, warehousing and cargo consolidation ($M = 3.3$), international trade facilitation ($M = 3.3$), and digital technology adoption ($M = 3.4$) were positively assessed. Port performance was mixed: cargo-handling efficiency ($M = 2.4$) and vessel turnaround time ($M = 2.5$) were assessed below the criterion mean, while cargo clearance ($M = 3.2$), infrastructure support ($M = 3.4$), and handling of large cargo volumes ($M = 3.3$) were assessed positively. The article argues that freight forwarding at Apapa is multidimensional and that port capacity does not automatically translate into efficient cargo handling or vessel turnaround. The findings highlight the need for coordinated documentation, multimodal transport, digitalisation, modern handling equipment, and integrated port management.

KEYWORDS: Freight Forwarding, Apapa Port, Cargo Handling, Vessel Turnaround, Digitalisation, Logistics Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Freight forwarding is an important coordination function within international logistics and maritime transport. Freight forwarders link shippers and consignees with shipping lines, customs authorities, terminal operators, transport providers and warehouses, while coordinating documentation, cargo consolidation, storage and inland movement (FIATA, 2022; Christopher, 2016; Bowersox et al., 2019). Ballou (2007) similarly treats logistics as the management of the flow and storage of goods and related information from origin to consumption. In a seaport environment, these functions are closely connected with the movement of cargo through terminals and onward into inland distribution networks.

The importance of these functions is particularly visible at Apapa Port, Lagos, where a large network of freight forwarders, shipping companies, terminal operators, regulators and transport providers interact. The dissertation identifies documentation and customs clearance, cargo handling, warehousing, cargo consolidation, transportation coordination and digital technology as central dimensions of freight forwarding. The literature further recognises intermodal connectivity and transportation infrastructure as important conditions for cargo evacuation (Afolayan & Nwosu, 2021; Akinola & Hassan, 2022; Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2023; Mustapha et al., 2022).

Port performance is multidimensional. Cargo throughput, vessel turnaround time, cargo dwell time, cargo handling, berth utilisation and operational productivity are commonly considered in assessing port effectiveness (Nwachukwu et al., 2025a, 2025b; World Bank, 2023; UNCTAD, 2023). A port may therefore handle substantial cargo volumes while still experiencing weaknesses in specific processes. This distinction is central to the present analysis because the dissertation found a positive assessment of Apapa's capacity to handle large cargo volumes but less favourable assessments of cargo handling and vessel turnaround.

2. OBJECTIVES

The article addresses two objectives from the dissertation: (1) to investigate the nature of freight forwarding activities at Apapa Port, Lagos; and (2) to ascertain the level of port performance at Apapa Port, Lagos.

3. Literature and Conceptual Basis

The dissertation conceptualises freight forwarding through four interrelated dimensions: cargo documentation and customs clearance; cargo consolidation and warehousing; transportation coordination and multimodal integration; and digital technology adoption.

Documentation supports the identification, classification and regulatory processing of cargo, while customs clearance authorises release for onward movement (Adekunle & Emenike, 2022; Eze & Chukwuma, 2022). Warehousing and consolidation support storage, cargo organisation and shipment grouping (CSCMP, 2023). Transportation coordination connects terminals with inland destinations and is affected by road, rail and inland-waterway connectivity (Rodrigue, 2020; Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2023).

Digitalisation adds an information-coordination dimension. Electronic documentation, cargo tracking, digital customs processes and automated information exchange can strengthen visibility and coordination among stakeholders. The dissertation's literature identifies digital freight-forwarding systems as increasingly relevant to Apapa Port (Adeyemi & Eke, 2025a). The conceptual perspective is also compatible with Systems Theory because port operations involve interconnected actors whose performance depends on the functioning of other components.

For port performance, the dissertation identifies cargo handling efficiency, vessel turnaround time, cargo throughput, cargo dwell time and operational efficiency as principal indicators. Cargo-handling equipment is especially important because cranes, forklifts, reach stackers and related equipment affect the speed of loading, discharge and internal movement (Ojo & Balogun, 2022). Vessel turnaround reflects the total time required to complete port activities and depart, and it is influenced by cargo handling, documentation, berth availability and regulatory processes (Chukwu & Eze, 2021; Nwachukwu et al., 2025b).

4. METHODOLOGY

The dissertation employed a descriptive survey research design. The study area was Apapa Port Complex in Lagos State, Nigeria. The accessible population was estimated at 350 stakeholders, while 187 respondents constituted the sample. The respondents included relevant port stakeholders, with the dissertation's empirical tables identifying shipping agents and terminal operators as the principal respondent categories. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The analysis reported in Chapter Four used a four-point Likert structure and a criterion mean of 3.0, with descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) used for inferential testing. The present article focuses on the descriptive results relevant to Objectives One and Two.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1. Nature of Freight Forwarding Operations at Apapa Port.

No.	Objective 1 indicator	Mean	Decision
1	Extensive cargo documentation and customs clearance activities	2.4	Disagreed
2	Freight forwarders coordinate transportation and cargo delivery efficiently	2.5	Disagreed
3	Warehousing and cargo consolidation services are effectively carried out	3.3	Agreed
4	Freight forwarding operations support international trade activities	3.3	Agreed
5	Digital technologies have improved freight forwarding operations	3.4	Agreed

Source: Field Survey (2026).

The analysis indicates that the strongest positive assessment under Objective One was digital technology ($M = 3.4$), followed by warehousing/cargo consolidation and international trade facilitation (both $M = 3.3$). In contrast, extensive documentation/customs clearance ($M = 2.4$) and transportation/cargo delivery coordination ($M = 2.5$) fell below the criterion mean. The pattern suggests that respondents recognised important value-adding functions within freight forwarding while identifying specific coordination processes requiring improvement.

Table 2. Level of Port Performance at Apapa Port.

No.	Objective 2 indicator	Mean	Decision
1	Cargo handling operations at Apapa Port are efficient	2.4	Disagreed
2	Vessel turnaround time at Apapa Port is satisfactory	2.5	Disagreed
3	Cargo clearance procedures are completed within a reasonable period	3.2	Agreed
4	Infrastructure available at Apapa Port supports efficient port operations	3.4	Agreed
5	Apapa Port performs effectively in handling large cargo traffic volumes	3.3	Agreed

Source: Field Survey (2026).

The performance assessment was mixed. Cargo handling efficiency ($M = 2.4$) and vessel turnaround time ($M = 2.5$) were below the criterion mean. Cargo clearance ($M = 3.2$), infrastructure support ($M = 3.4$), and the ability to handle large cargo volumes ($M = 3.3$) were above the criterion mean. The result therefore distinguishes between physical or throughput capacity and process-level efficiency.

6. DISCUSSION

The finding that warehousing and cargo consolidation were positively assessed is consistent with the logistics view that storage and cargo organisation are integral to the continuity of

cargo movement (Ballou, 2007; CSCMP, 2023). At Apapa, cargo may remain temporarily within terminals or warehouses while documentation, customs processes and transportation arrangements are completed. Effective consolidation and storage can therefore support cargo organisation even when other parts of the logistics chain are less efficient.

The lower scores for documentation/customs clearance and transportation coordination are also consistent with the literature's emphasis on documentation quality and intermodal integration. Adekunle and Emenike (2022) relate freight-forwarding documentation to cargo-clearance efficiency at Apapa, while Eze and Chukwuma (2022) address customs procedures and trade facilitation. Ibrahim and Yusuf (2023), Afolayan and Nwosu (2021), and Akinola and Hassan (2022) similarly emphasise the importance of transportation infrastructure and modal integration for cargo evacuation.

The positive assessment of digital technology is notable. The dissertation reports that respondents agreed that digital technologies had improved freight forwarding ($M = 3.4$). This is consistent with Adeyemi and Eke (2025a), whose study concerns digital freight-forwarding systems and operational efficiency at Apapa Port. Digitalisation should nevertheless be viewed as one component of a wider system involving infrastructure, equipment, institutional coordination and human capability.

For port performance, the relatively low cargo-handling and vessel-turnaround scores indicate process constraints despite positive assessments of infrastructure and cargo-volume capacity. Ojo and Balogun (2022) emphasise cargo-handling equipment, while Chukwu and Eze (2021) and Nwachukwu et al. (2025b) identify vessel turnaround as an important productivity indicator. The findings therefore suggest that having infrastructure and the capacity to receive large cargo volumes does not necessarily guarantee fast or reliable processing.

The descriptive results should be interpreted as perceptions measured within the study sample rather than as causal estimates. They identify areas respondents regarded positively or negatively, but they do not by themselves establish that one variable caused another. This distinction is important for interpreting the broader dissertation findings.

7. CONCLUSION

The article concludes that freight forwarding at Apapa Port is a multidimensional activity encompassing documentation, customs-related processes, warehousing, consolidation, transportation coordination and digital technologies. The empirical pattern shows stronger assessments for warehousing/consolidation, trade facilitation and digitalisation than for

documentation/customs clearance and transportation coordination. Port performance also presents a mixed profile: infrastructure and cargo-volume capacity were positively assessed, while cargo handling and vessel turnaround were assessed below the criterion mean. The evidence therefore supports an integrated approach in which freight-forwarding efficiency and port performance are considered within the wider logistics system.

8. Practical Implications

- Freight-forwarding firms and port stakeholders should strengthen documentation, customs communication and transportation scheduling.
- Terminal operators should continue investment in modern cargo-handling equipment, maintenance and operational scheduling.
- Multimodal cargo evacuation should be strengthened through better integration of road, rail and inland-waterway options.
- Digital freight-forwarding and cargo-information systems should be interoperable across relevant stakeholders.
- Port performance monitoring should distinguish cargo capacity from process-level indicators such as handling efficiency and vessel turnaround.

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