EXPLORING ISSUES AFFECTING DOMESTIC AIR TRAVELERS' EXPERIENCES AT LAGOS AIRPORTS, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This exploratory study aims to identify challenges facing domestic air travelers at the departure hall, domestic wing, Murtala Mohammed Airport (MMA), Lagos. The study adopts descriptive survey, employs quantitative method and utilizes a structured and close ended questionnaire. The data collected are presented using tabular form and analyzed using simple percentages. The paper found that the air travelers are faced with diverse challenges. However, this study concludes that specific strategies can be employed to curb the issues facing the travelers. It recommends that the departure environment at the airport should be made conducive; passengers' needs should be catered for and process within acceptable international acceptable time frame and that government should improve on the information technology facilities within the airport to meet international standards.

Keywords: Domestic airport; Domestic air travelers; Air travelers' experience

INTRODUCTION

Travelling by has air remained one of the most vital means of traveling in the twentieth century and it has continued to evolve over the years. It enabled the movement of passengers and cargoes in the shortest time and also promoted the demand for both short and long-haul trips. In fact, every part of the world could be accessed by means of airplanes within a 24-hour time frame and thereby promoting globalization. It is believed that air transportation has contributed in no small measure in making the world a global village, in other words, it has been a major player in the globalization process.

Air transport is of great interest for tourism development and tourists flow because it offers less travel time and a significant routine platform in the tourism global interaction. It has remained the fastest means of transportation on a global scale that is shaping the tourism industry. People by means of air travel embark on long distant trips globally and reach destinations in a short travel time when compared to other travel means. Various flight services are offered today within the sector, there is short-haul and long-haul transport services globally.

Globally, the chief significance of this transport system is the considerable amount of time saved because of the high speed of the flight (Ariffin & Yahaya, 2013). In Africa, the domestic wing of the Murtala Muhammed Airport (MMA) located in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria is the busiest domestic airport in the region (Nnodim, 2010; Okeudo & Chikwendu, 2013)

However, Nigerian airports are not well equipped for this growing population. Travelers who traveled by air during recent times encountered significant obstacles at airports. Researchers (Daramola, 2014; Dirsehan & Kurtuluş, 2018; Fadugba et al., 2015; Hamzawi, 1992) have researched similar topics, and several articles to outline the top complaints from passengers about the airport operations, passengers' perception of airport service quality, challenges and prospects of Nigerian aviation industry and many more. Nonetheless, non focuses on challenges in the departure halls. Therefore, this study sets to identify challenges facing passengers in the departure hall and explore

possible strategies to improve domestic air travelers' experience.

Although, the setting of the paper was the departure hall of the domestic wing of the Muritala Muhhammed Airport, Lagos; often referred to as MM2; this in our opinion does not limit the adaptation of the recommendations contained in the paper at other airports in Nigeria.

AIR TRANSPORT TRENDS AND GLOBALISATION

Air transportation is the transportation of passengers and cargo by aircraft and helicopters. It is a transport system that involves the movement or carriage by air of persons or goods using airplanes and helicopters. It has become the most preferred means of common carrier travelling (Bari, 2001; Hagmann, Semeijn & Vellenga, 2015). The Greatest efficiency and value are obtained when long distances are involved and high value payloads are moved, although the time and cost efficiencies obtained reduces as distances travelled are decreased, air transport is often worthwhile even for relatively short distances.

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FLIGHT OPERATIONS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

Air transportation management is a challenging and high-risk business (Tolcha,

Bråthen & Holmgren, 2020. However, it is profitable when properly managed in a deregulated environment. The management of the aviation business in Nigeria is being undertaken by the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) and Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA). These two bodies work together to ensure a better business environment in the air transport industry by promoting competition and safety. FAAN is a service organization statutorily mandated to manage all commercial airports in Nigeria and offer serviced to both passengers and airlines. It also develops, provides and maintains airports, necessary services and facilities for safe, orderly, fast and economic operation of air travel. The Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority is the regulatory body for aviation in Nigeria. It became autonomous with the passing into law of the Civil Aviation Act 2006 by the National Assembly and assent of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Act not only mandates the Authority to regulate aviation safety without political interference, but also to carry out supervisory functions of airports, airspace, meteorological services as well as economic regulations of the industry (NCAA, 2014; Okeudo & Chikwendu, 2013).

The air transport sector is one of the most regulated industries in the world. Every single technical personnel, equipment and airport must be certified and supervised by qualified regulatory bodies known as the Civil Aviation Authorities (CAAs). Even the CAAs themselves are in turn examined by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and other international agencies. The MMA Lagos is the administrative head-quarters of these regulatory bodies overseeing flight operations in Lagos and the country in general (ICAO, 2016; NCAA, 2014).

The Civil aviation is a critical element in Nigeria's transportation system and indeed its economy. Nigeria has twenty (20) airports and many regulated airstrips and heliports, 23 active domestic airlines; 554 licensed pilots; 913 licensed engineers and 1700 cab-in

personnel. Nigeria being Africa's most populous country is an important destination for over 22 foreign carriers. Nigeria currently has Bilateral Air Services Agreements with over 78 countries. From Nigeria, air travelers can fly directly to several of the world's business destinations such as London, Paris, Frankfurt, New York, Johannesburg, Atlanta, Amsterdam, Beijing, Dubai, Jeddah and many more. With the attainment of America's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA), Category One Certification, Nigerian registered carriers can now fly directly into the United States of America (NCAA, 2014).

There is a rapid growth in the flight operations in Nigeria both on the domestic and international arena and Lagos happens to witness most of these operations by virtue of the fact that it is the commercial hub of the country and the West Africa region. It also serves as a hub to many airlines operating international routes in West Africa. Nigeria has about 20 domestic airlines headquartered in Lagos rendering short and long hauls flight services within and outside country. The size of Nigeria's air market is second only to South Africa in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria has 22 airports, four of which are international airports. From 2005 to 2007, the aviation industry experienced some growth which the result was that by 2008 passenger movement increased by 21 percent, cargo movement increased by 74.6 per cent and aircraft movement improved by 2.3 percent. In the first quarter of 2009, the global economic recession impacted on the aircraft movement, but later in 2009/2010, traffic figures reveal a 17.2 percent growth and aircraft traffic figures showed a 12.3 percent growth (Bankole, 2002, Nnodim, 2010).

ISSUES ENCOUNTERING BY AIR TRAVELLERS AT THE DEPARTURE HALL

The figure below showcases challenges facing domestic travelers at the departure hall.

Figure 1: Challenges Facing Domestic Air Travelers
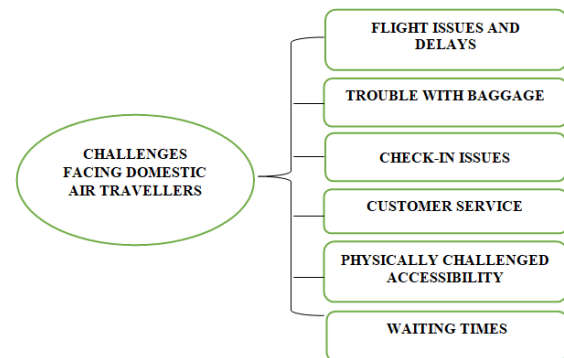
Source: Adekunle, Adedokun-Fagbolu and Babalola (2022)

Flight issues and delays
One of the biggest complaints that passengers have about airports today is that they are not kept informed of flight issues and delays. There is nothing more frustrating as a passenger, than turning up early and waiting around for hours, only to discover at the last minute there has been a delay or change in the flight schedule (Karzan, 2012). Delays is one of the most common problems faced by the passengers. It can due to any reason whether natural or unnatural. This includes – delays due to weather, unrealistic schedules, unserviceable aircraft, under-staffing, and more. Some of these are avoidable and some not.

Trouble with baggage
After flight issues and delays, baggage troubles are another common complaint. It is understandable considering that the number of passengers passing through airports has significantly increased in recent years (Okeudo & Chikwendu, 2013; Yang et al., 2012). This has placed a lot of pressure onto the current, outdated baggage handling system, which is why airports need to start looking into more modern baggage solutions.

Check-in
It is not just missing and delayed baggage which can cause issues. The check-in process

can also be quite lengthy and stressful. There are times when the ground staff is not enough. The main reason behind that after the introduction of online check-in, there can be seen a huge reduction in the number of staff members (Mendes & Santos, 2008; Nghiêm-Phú & Suter, 2018). But on the other hand, someone is still needed to take your bag. Hundreds of passengers are traveling through a single flight and majority of them need to check their luggage. This can be seen as a matter of frustration among the passengers.

Customer service

When you are in the departure hall you have to rely upon attendants for your different tasks (Jeeradist, Thawesaengskulthai & Sangsuwan, 2016; Mayer, Ryley & Gillingwater, 2012; Park, Robertson, & Wu, 2004). They are mostly friendly and helpful, but this is a physically demanding job, hence there can be times when due to some reason or because of the rude behavior of some other passenger, these may act rude to you. Overall, they are humans too. But by doing so, they can ruin your overall journey and it is also counted as one of the flight problems.

Physically challenged accessibility

As technology has developed, those with disabilities are finding it much easier to travel. However, the airport is still yet to catch up in providing adequate accessibility and assistance in the way of physically challenged (Oluwole et al., 2020).

Waiting times

Waiting times are one of the most frustrating challenges passengers face when travelling. From getting through airport security to waiting for bags to be checked in, queues can be a really stressful and time-consuming part of the airport experience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts descriptive survey, employs quantitative method and utilizes a structured close ended questionnaire in two (2) sections.

The first section, is an embodiment of bio-data of the respondents. The second section is on a Five Point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) to Strongly Disagree (SD). The sample size for the study is 100. The survey administration entails purposive sampling method comprising face to face administration, on the spot filling, wait and collect back of the research instrument from the respondents. The data collected from the respondents are analyzed using tabular form with frequency and simple percentages for easy understanding.

Section A: Bio-Data of the Respondents

The Table below presents thee bio-data of the respondents. A total of 100 (one hundred) questionnaires are distributed and collected. From the table above, evidence shows that 57% of the respondents were male while 43% are female. 23% respondents are between age 0 to twenty, 21% of respondents are between 21-25 years, 20% respondents are between 26-30years, 19% of the respondents are between 31-35 years, 7% are between 36-40 years while 10% are 41 years and above. The above table portrays that 20% of the respondents are ND/NCE holder, 39% are HND/Bachelor Degree certificate holder, 36% possess Masters and 5% of the respondents are higher qualifications holders. The table further reveals that 29% of the respondents are employed, 23% are unemployed while 48% are self-employed. 44% of the respondents declare they are frequent user, 30% are not frequent while 26% partially use the airport.

Table 1: Demographic of the Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender Distribution		
Male	57	57%
Female	43	43%
Total	**100**	**100%**
Age		
0- 20	23	23%
21-25	21	21%

26-30	20	20%
31-35	19	19%
36-40	7	7%
41 and above	10	10%
Total	**100**	**100%**
Level of Education		
National Diploma (ND)/National Certificate of Education (NCE)	20	20%
Higher National Diploma (HND)/ Bachelor Degree	39	39%
Masters	36	36%
Others	5	5%
Total	**100**	**100%**
Occupational Level		
Employed	29	29%
Unemployed	23	23%
Self employed	48	48%
Total	**100**	**100%**
Frequent User of the Airport		
Yes	44	44%
No	30	30%
Partially	26	26%
Total	**100**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2022.

Section B:

The table below showcases the responses to the issues facing domestic air travellers at the airport.

24% strongly agree that not enough check in staff is a challenge in the departure hall while 22% strongly disagree. 25% of the respondents strongly agree that lack of facility for people with disability is a challenge while 16% strongly disagree. 18% of the respondents strongly agree that they are not enough banking facilities while 28% of the respondents strongly disagree. The analysis further reveals that 28% of the respondents disagree with lack of seats as a challenge but 18% of the respondents agree. 23% agree that the time of waiting at screening point is too much even as 15% disagree. 12% strongly agree that the long queue is a challenge while 15% disagree. Furthermore, 22% of the respondents strongly disagree that the condition of restrooms is a challenge and 7% strongly agree. 9% of the respondents strongly agree that congestion is a challenge while 15% of the respondents strongly disagree. 21% of the respondents disagree with the touting as a challenge, while 14% of the respondents agree.

Table 2: Challenges Encountered at the Departure Hall

S/N	QUESTIONS	SA		A		U		D		SD		TOTAL	
		FREQ	%	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	FREQ	%
1	Not enough check in staff	24	24%	25	25%	11	11%	18	18%	22	22%	100	100%
2	Lack of facility for people with disability	25	25%	16	16%	20	20%	23	23%	16	16%	100	100%
3	Not enough banking facilities	18	18%	12	12%	13	13%	29	29%	28	28%	100	100%
4	Touting which leads to exploitation	14	14%	20	20%	25	25%	20	20%	21	21%	100	100%
5	Not enough seats for passengers' friends and Families	18	18%	20	20%	9	9%	25	25%	28	28%	100	100%

6	Congestion due to inadequate spacing to accommodate increasing passengers	9	9%	34	34%	31	31%	11	11%	15	15%	100	100%
7	Long queue during check in due to insufficient check in counters and weighing scales	12	12%	21	21%	24	24%	28	28%	15	15%	100	100%
8	State of rest rooms (water supply)	7	7%	21	21%	21	21%	29	29%	22	22%	100	100%
9	Increase in waiting times due to inadequate screening facilities	23	23%	14	14%	28	28%	20	20%	15	15%	100	100%

Source: Field work, 2022

CONCLUSION

Airport passenger terminal operations consist of a variety of terminal activities designed to serve terminal passengers. The structure of different terminal facilities participates in the provision of these services and activities devoted to airport passengers. Based on the existence of many issues observed within airport passenger terminals, certain related problems in terminal design, check-in facilities, baggage handling, gates, and security can have their own impacts on terminal operations. Terminal design problems include long passenger walking distances, narrow passage ways, and limited federal funding. Passenger check-in problems include the related issues with number and availability of check-in counters along with the existence of temporary congestions which happen as a result of lack of some necessary amenities in the departure hall. Space and lack of standardization are some of the essential problems. Lastly, consistent security threats from different sources like touting which may lead to exploitation are other problems that affect airport passenger in the departure. The impacts of these challenges can be seen when they have a variety of outcomes affecting passenger flight operations in terms of travel time, convenience, and security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Possible strategies should be explored and implemented to curb the challenges facing the travelers as it will be beneficial to the airport.
ii. The departure environment at the airport should be upgraded and conducive for the passengers.
iii. The requests, agitations and complaints of the passengers should be catered for and process on time.
iv. The Nigerian government should improve on the facilities at the airports in terms of information technology to meet international standards.
v. Future researcher are enjoined to conduct similar studies in other domestic or

international airports in the country and beyond.

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