



## The Relevance of Air Transport in Nigeria and Its Social-Economic Significant on National Development

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### Abstract

*Development is crucial and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation, while greatest achievement of any government is reaching a higher level of development, which makes its people naturally attached to it. Air transportation system is vital for economic vitality of any country, and has been categorized as one of the most important engine for economic development. The study interrogates Nigeria's social-economic development through air transport. The study chose economic theory of infrastructure as its theoretical framework. Qualitative analysis was also chosen to carry out the task of the work. Tax contribution, foreign direct investment attraction, employment opportunities, boosting productivity across national economy, improvement of quality of life, provision of vital connectivity among different regions within Nigeria, and promotion of social inclusion and belongingness were identified as social-economic impact of air transport in Nigeria. The paper found poor funding, overstretched and decaying facilities, corruption and bad management, and poor security among other factors militating the effectiveness of air transport in Nigeria. The study concluded by recommending among others adequate funding, provision of modern infrastructural facilities, and putting in place mechanism to curb corruption in the sector. Investing in modern security measures and devices is also key.*

**Keywords:** Air Transport, Airport, Aviation, National Development, Social-economic



## INTRODUCTION

World economy largely depends on transportation which is the mainstay economy is built (Adedeji, 2024). Transport industry is one of the most important industries globally been one of many means through which the country efficiently gathered economic wealth. Hence, transportation service is needed in every nation, irrespective of the size of its population, industrial capacity, or technological development (Chete, Adeoti, Adeyinka, and Ogundele, 2016). The ability to provide an incorporated transportation structure that will flourish the political, social, and economic facets of a country is the development of transportation (Claude, Brian, and Jean-Paul, 2006).

Globalisation primarily shapes people's social, economic, and cultural realities through transportation. The primary resource for developing global economy is now considered to be the aviation industry. Since it has handled the rising need for mobility, the sector has been one of the biggest beneficiaries in the development of modern environments. Transport, in particular air transport economics is rated to be the engine of economic activity (Oladun and Ayantoyinbo, 2020). Air transport system is fully driven by the global economy, and an important catalyst to the global economy.

The development and technical service achievements of air transport make it one of the main forces behind the growth of contemporary society. By realizing its potential, the sector has not only supported the production of wealth in the developed world, but has also greatly benefited the economies of Nigeria. However, the suitable operation of air transportation facilities affects not only the economic sustainability of the aviation industry but also the national and international cooperation, trade, and connectivity (Akintade, Akande, Falabi and Olowookere-Ayodele, 2023). Hence, positive correlation between air transport and economic development has also been created.

Compared to other forms of transportation, air transport offers a distinctive advantage in terms of speed, time, comfort, and leisure. When access by other means becomes a challenge, particularly in riverine or hilly regions is recommended. It plays a vivacious role in the economic expansion of nations, and Nigeria is no exception. As the most populated country in Africa with a growing economy, Nigeria relies on a well-functioning air transport sector to connect its regions, facilitate trade and tourism, and attract foreign investment (Owoputi, 2015).

Although air mode of transport is the youngest among other means, nevertheless, it has made a huge contribution to the advancement of Nigerian transportation. The aviation industry is growing at a rate that is unmatched by any other significant mode of

transportation because of its complexity and ongoing developments. The nation's and the world's economy are increasingly dependent on air transport due to the demand for these services (Nwaogbe, Wokili, Omoke, Asiegbu, 2013).

Air transportation is a better way to make rapid links between Nigeria's many economic sectors. The difference in resource endowment between the North and the South, in line with Ogunbodede (2006), is a momentous contributing factor to the development of air transport in Nigeria. Nonetheless, the Nigerian government views the subsector of air transportation as a key focus area for efforts to attract foreign investment and close the funding gap between needed and accessible levels of national investment (Adeyemi, 2001).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of the study is to examine the nexus between air transportation system and social-economic development in Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

The origin of the phrase "transport" or "transportation" are the two Latin words "trans," which means "across," and "portare," which means "to carry". Therefore, the literal meaning of the word "transport" is "to carry across," denoting "movement across space." The term "transport" has many different definitions. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003) quoted in Adeniran and Yusuf (2016) defined transportation as the practice or business of moving things from one location to another, or as a method for moving people or goods from one location to another.

Transport, according to Wayne (1983) cited in Salami and Soile (2018), is "an activity that provides for the movement of goods or individuals from one place to another". It is conveying products and people from one location to another. Transportation, as defined by Good and Jebbin (2015), is a system for moving people, products, and raw materials both domestically and abroad, frequently using machinery that is powered by electricity. It is commonly used to describe the transportation of people and products between locations. The means of transportation are vehicles, such as buses, trains, airplanes, etc., or networks of vehicles.

The crucial components shared by all definitions of transportation are movement, changing physical location of people, animals, and products. Transport, however, is more than moving people and things from one place to another. Given the foregoing, the movement of people, products, ideas, information, and animals between points as well as the mechanisms by which such movement is carried out can be referred to as transport.

There are many various means of transportation, but some of the first ones used by humans were trekking and human portage; in riverine societies, rafts, canoes, and boats were used; in the savannah region, pack animals or beasts of burden such as donkeys, mules, camels, and horses were also used. These days, there are many different ways for individuals to travel that enable them to go from one location to another, travel great distances quickly, cross oceans and seas, even travel to space, and carry enormous amounts of cargo and goods.

There are three different types of transportation, nevertheless, and they are categorized according to the medium, the vehicle, the motive force, and the endpoints. Land, river, and air transportation are the three main forms of transportation, according to Salami and Soile (2018). The other modalities include space (satellite), cable (for internet and energy supplies), and pipeline (for the transport of gas or oil). The term "air transport" describes the movement of people and products throughout the atmosphere using many types of aircraft, including gliders, airships, jets, helicopters, and aeroplanes.

Air transport is the most expedient, expensive, and cozy mode of transportation. It is appropriate for transporting valuable items, mail, and passengers of a high standard. Although it does not require the building and upkeep of roads and tracks to function, it is the most costly mode of transportation due to the significant costs associated with building airports, hangars, wireless and meteorological stations, wind indicators, control towers, floodlight houses, and other infrastructure. Air transport is categorised into passenger travel and cargo travel.

It is a widely held belief that development is a multifaceted notion with numerous interpretations from different social science schools of thought. For example, its meaning has evolved from its original, limited interpretation based on certain economic indicators, like an increase in per capita income in the 1950s and 1960s, to a more expansive interpretation (Okowa, 1991) cited in (Adeniran and Yusuf, 2016). Within this framework, development is defined as the process by which a society transforms in all respects for the benefits of all its members, or at least majority of the members.

Development, in the words of Gboyega (2003), is the philosophy that encompasses all efforts to enhance human existence in all its manifestations in a sustainable manner so that consumption in the present does not jeopardize future generations. It also calls for the elimination or significant reduction of poverty and disparities in access to the good things in life. Development may also be described as a process of societal growth in which strong collaborations between business entities, other societal groups, and all sectors of the economy are used to promote people's well-being (Adeniran and Yusuf, 2016).

It is realistic to assume that development comprises all aspects of societal life and is not just an economic endeavor. A nation can offer its people a high-quality of life is considered developed. However, a country needs certain prerequisites, such as socio-political and economic stability, in order to be in a developmental phase (Tolu and Abe, 2011). At the center of this relationship is the levels of geographical accessibility, freight, people mobility, and accessibility. Where transportation infrastructures are able to meet mobility needs and ensure access to markets and resources, economic prospects are likely to materialize (Jean-Paul, Claude and Brian, 2006).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study chose economic theory of infrastructure as its theoretical framework. Frischmann (2005) propagated the economic theory of infrastructure and commons management. The idea offers a theoretical framework for examining how an air network contributes to economic development and progress, as well as the social ramifications that follow in emerging nations like Nigeria. According to Frischmann (2005), giving the general public unrestricted access to infrastructure like the air network would benefit society economically and bring about social change. The theory looks into how the general public might benefit from air transport and focuses on the demand side of an economy.

Value creation is the main tenet of the theory. According to Frischmann (2005), the public having unrestricted access to the air network can have a major positive impact on society. Numerous scholars have proposed that a comprehensive analysis of transportation investment and its correlation with economic growth should take into account various factors, such as GDP, population size, notch of urbanization, and economic expansion (Agbigbe, 2016). In line with the theory of this study, granting the general public unrestricted access to the air network would have a major effect on economic development and raising the standard of life for the majority of people and causing social transformation.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The study adopted a descriptive method, and it is therefore qualitative and historical in nature. This means presenting the work in a chronological manner consistent with the chronological method. The veracity of the topic "Air Transport and Social-Economic Development of Nigeria" call for research which has been comprehensively examined. This is a replication of the complex nature of aviation industry in the global village.

The work utilized content analysis relying mainly on information obtained from secondary sources of data collection of existing literature on the subject matter such as books, journals, newspaper, conference papers, and other related documents. Others are reports primarily published by relevant government institutions and agencies in Nigeria on aviation industry. A thematic method was employed to estimate the contributions of air transport to the social-economic development of Nigeria.

## **Result and Analysis of the Finding**

### **Emergence and Rise of Transportation and Air Transport System**

Transportation as related to human endeavor or activity is as old as humanity itself. According to Salami and Soile (2018), it has a history that extends back to the beginning of documented account. From the beginning of human history, humans have always been nomadic or migratory animals, always seeking food, shelter, and opportunities to trade goods and services with other people. Its significance for the growth of civilizations and the development of cultures cannot be overstated, despite the fact that the forms employed have evolved over time.

Transportation is essential to all human endeavors, and the history of transportation is the history of human civilization. It established the basis for the innovation of agriculture and the advanced tradition of iron smelting (Salami and Soile, 2018). For example, the emergence of early agricultural activities can be traced back to the nomadic nature of early humans, who noticed the regeneration of abandoned seeds in their surroundings and made primitive tools for hunting wildlife.

Some have argued that a society cannot go beyond its transportation development (Salami and Soile, 2018). Therefore, a society lacking a sophisticated and effective transportation system remains primitive. It is known that the creation of an effective and sophisticated transportation system was the first step toward the greatness of all historical imperial empires and great kingdoms. Therefore, it is not overstatement to say that transportation is essential to human existence (Salami, 2018).

Among the various forms of transportation, air transport is the most recent, and the world's gift from the 20th century. The development of air transportation was greatly aided by the two World Wars. In 1903, the first flight was accomplished in the air, lasting just twelve seconds. Following World War I (1914-1918), it proved to be an effective mode of transportation (Salami and Soile 2018). 1919 saw the launch of the first aircraft service between London and Paris. At present, all countries in the world have airports.

### **The Historical Development of Air Transportation System in Nigeria**

Nigeria's history of aviation growth began during the era of post-World War II, when the British Royal Air Force (RAF) flew flights between Britain and her colonies in West Africa. It is shown that the start of World War II compelled the British Imperial government to push Nigeria and other West African nations to accelerate the development of air transportation services, mostly for calculated purposes.

In order to maintain the connection between Britain and her four colonies in West Africa, namely Nigeria, the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Sierra Leone and the Gambia; they joined forces and founded the West African Airways Corporation at the end of World War II in 1945. The corporation has its headquarters in Lagos. (Akpogomeh, 1995). WAAC was dissolved for Ghana and Nigeria to run their own national airlines after gaining their independence in 1957 and 1960, respectively.

A turning point in the history of commercial aviation in West Africa, and Nigeria specifically, was the founding of the West African Airways Corporation (WAAC) by an Order in Council in 1946. The public company WAAC was tasked with running air transport between and within the British colonies in West Africa. The West Africa Air Transport Authority (WAATA), which has the authority to enact laws and carry out policies, oversaw its operations (Salami and Soile, 2018).

After gaining independence in 1958, Ghana established Ghana Airways Limited and left the WAAC. As a result, WAAC was renamed WAAC (Nigeria) Limited, and the Nigerian government owned 51 percent of the company, followed by the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) at 33 percent and Elder Dempster at 16 percent. The Nigerian government later purchased the shares of WAAC (Nigeria) Limited from Elder Dempster and the BOAC shortly after Nigeria gained independence in 1960 with 100% share of the airline (Onokala and Olajide, 2019). Subsequently, the company was renamed Nigerian Airways.

The Federal Government of Nigeria invested enormous sums of money in the advancement of aviation technology from the very beginning. During this time, there was a well-documented surge in air traffic in the nation (Ogunjumo, 1992; and Akpoghomeh, 1995). Over its first eight years of operation, Nigeria Airways expanded gradually, running internal flights from Lagos to Kano, Sokoto, Maiduguri, and Port Harcourt, as well as five international airports at the time. It also ran sub-regional flights to the capitals of several West African nations, including Robertsfield in Liberia, Freetown, Banjul, and Abidjan. Nigerian Airlines also provided international travel to regions of Europe, North America, Asia, and East and West Africa.

Nigeria took action to support the demands of its small number of airline passengers by establishing an indigenous airline. Furthermore, owing to what it perceived as the financial incompetence of private investors, the government had an unfavourable view of private involvement in the aviation sector. This was codified in the 1964 Civil Aviation Act, a rewrite of the Civil Aviation Act of the United Kingdom. Thus, government monopoly of providing domestic air services with strict and total control of the aviation industry until 1980s (Onokala and Olajide, 2019). The aviation sector in Nigeria was deregulated and opened up as a result of the poor performance of Nigerian Airways and its enormous debt load.

The deregulation and privatization of Nigeria's aviation industry were formalized in 2001 with the adoption of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP). The expansion of the aviation industry was facilitated by the introduction of uncontrolled competition among aspiring operators. As a result, a respectable number of private airline operators were granted licenses to conduct non-scheduled passenger and cargo aviation services both inside and outside of Nigeria (Salami and Soile, 2018). As the sector developed, three domestic licensed operators were promoted from non-scheduled to scheduled status, and two of them were later given authorization to operate on international routes.

The state monopoly was effectively broken by the rise of private airline companies, who now operate commercial flights on the majority of local and international routes. According to Onokala (2002), Nigeria's aviation industry has changed from being entirely public in the 1970s and 1980s to being liberalized and including private sector involvement in airline operations, in keeping with a worldwide trend. In actuality, both domestic and foreign traffic had significantly increased in Nigeria during the past 20 years, with domestic traffic still accounting for the majority.

The air transportation industry is expanding alarmingly over time and holds great promise for Nigeria's social and economic advancement. Nigeria now boasts a constantly growing number of airports, many of which have been modernized to meet international standards and accommodate contemporary aircraft. Owing to its natural resource endowment advantage over other modes of transportation, air transport has played a significant and inescapable role in Nigeria's social and economic growth. Nevertheless, there is still much space for development in Nigeria's aviation sector.

Numerous organizations have been established to supervise and manage the aviation sector in Nigeria. The Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), established by Decree 49 of 1999, is in charge of providing aviation security and economic supervisory services that are compliant with international standards. The Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) is

in charge of maintaining the physical infrastructure within all Nigerian airports. The Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) established by Decree No. 48 of 1999 is responsible for developing and executing policies for the effective running of Nigeria's airspace (Salami, 2018). The process of deregulating aviation, and putting it into practice has never been easy due to governments continue to interfere in the sector.

### **Significant Economic Benefits of Air Transport in Nigeria**

Nigeria's economy has benefited greatly from the air transportation industry as detailed by Nwaogbe, et al (2013), Oxford Economics (2005), and Adediran (2018):

1. **Tax Contribution:** The aviation industry assists the government in terms of generating income and providing the public services required for the global transportation of goods and services. The aviation sector also make a substantial contribution to Nigerian public finance account through corporation tax paid by companies under the aviation sector, the income tax paid by all their employees, and social security payments (both employer and employee contributions).
2. **Attracting Foreign Direct Investment:** A well-developed air transport industry attracts foreign direct investment into Nigeria. International airlines and aviation-related businesses establish operations in the country, bringing in capital, expertise, and technological advancements. This boosts economic activity, creates job opportunities, and contributes to the overall development of the aviation sector. In 2015, the aviation industry supported 254,500 jobs and contributes US\$940 million (N184.7 billion) to national GDP.
3. **Employment Opportunities:** The sector enhances quality of life, social networking, and standard of living within the nation. All this helps generate economic growth and poverty alleviation by providing employment opportunities for the teeming population. Employment would be realised through supply chain dynamics and airport transformations.
4. **Human Capital Development:** The air transport industry promotes skill development and technological advancements in Nigeria. Training programs for pilots, engineers, and other aviation professionals enhance human capital development. Investments in aviation infrastructure and technology transfer bring modern aircraft, navigation systems, and operational efficiency thereby positioning Nigeria's air transport industry on par with international standards and Ancillary Services.
5. **Facilitation of World Trade:** Air transport helps Nigeria participates in the international market by increasing access to main markets and allowing globalisation

of production. It also encourages Nigeria to specialize in activities in which they have a comparative advantage and to trade with countries producing other goods and services.

6. **Boosting Productivity across National Economy:** Improved air transport links expand the market in which companies operate. As a result, companies are better able to exploit economies of scale thereby reducing costs, and to specialize in areas of comparative advantage. By opening up markets, air services expose companies to stiffer competition, encouraging them to become more efficient.
7. **Increasing Supply Chain Efficiency:** Several sectors, for instance, employ air transportation to expedite deliveries as a component of their just-in-time delivery systems, allowing them to deliver goods to customers promptly and dependably while cutting expenses.
8. **Spur to Innovation:** The industry promotes efficient networking and cooperation between businesses situated across the nation, as well as with nations abroad. A strong air transportation network also encourages businesses to invest more in research and development.

### **Significant Social Benefits of Air Transport in Nigeria**

The airline sector has a variety of positive effects on sustainable development and enhances social welfare and quality of life of Nigeria as enumerated by Nwaogbe, et al (2013), Air Transport Action Group ATAG<sup>1</sup> (2005), ATAG<sup>2</sup> (2012), Owoputi (2015).

- 1) Traveling by air enhances people's quality of life by expanding their leisure and cultural horizons, as it provides a wide choice of holiday destinations around the country and an affordable means to visit distant friends and relatives. It can be established that no other transport system aids people to have adventures in different regions as well as different countries like air transport.
- 2) Air transport provides vital connectivity between different regions within Nigeria. This allows for efficient movement of people and goods, fostering regional integration and economic development. It also facilitates the expansion of Nigeria's tourist and hospitality industries as it is convenient for both domestic and international tourists to visit different regions within the country, thereby promoting tourism activities.
- 3) More than any other mode of transportation, aviation unites people from all backgrounds and cultures. It makes it possible for more people to explore diverse worlds. In addition to providing a link between developing and industrialized nations, air transportation gives residents of isolated places where there is no other way to get about a sense of

social inclusion and belonging. The social benefits of air transport are evident in Nigeria today, given the sheer number of people and cultures it has brought together.

- 4) The aviation sector also supports charitable groups with the help of its enterprises as a way to contribute to the world community. Each year, all of the big airlines make noteworthy financial assistances to various organizations. Major carriers typically support both national organizations and local charities in their hub cities.
- 5) It makes it easier to provide emergency and humanitarian relief across the nation and guarantees the prompt delivery of medical supplies in the event of an emergency.

### **Challenges Facing Air Transport in Nigeria**

Among the many elements working against the expansion and development of air transportation in Nigeria are the following:

1. **Inconsistency in Air Transport Policy:** Nigeria's early history of air transportation growth was organized and steady. In due course, these characteristics were all but abandoned, which led to the downfall of Nigerian Airlines (Salami and Soile, 2018). Lack of consistent policy, bureaucratic manipulation, and lack of commercial principles therefore plague Nigeria's civil aviation sector. The worst scenario is that the nation's principal airports still maintain the outdated 1970s architectural style.
2. **Poor Funding:** The sector's low and inadequate budget makes it impossible for aviation sector to properly fulfill its mandate at all of the nation's airports (Adedeji, 2024). Up until recently, the government did not give the same financial attention to civil aviation as it did to other ministries and organizations that were thought to be more crucial.
3. **Overstretched and Decaying Facilities:** Despite a considerable and ongoing increase in traffic, there has been little influence on overhauling and rebuilding the airport. As a result, Nigeria's airport system was left in a sad state and provided clients with extremely subpar services. Due to this, the majority of airport facilities are unquestionably overcrowded. One of the main effects of deteriorating infrastructure has been sporadic aviation accidents that affect the nation's airlines' safety records (Ogbeidi, 2006).
4. **Corruption and Poor Management:** The Nigerian aviation industry has seen more corruption, neglect, and poor management than any other sector. The sector eventually failed in 2004 due to a combination of poor management and corruption. For example, the Nigerian Airlines fleet comprised twenty-nine well-maintained and operational aircraft in 1979, by 1999, only two remain functional (Salami and Soile, 2018).
5. **Inadequate Security:** According to Akintade, Akande, Falabi and Olowookere-Ayodele (2023), there is often inadequate security at Nigerian airports. The majority of airports

in Nigeria are porous to the extent that they are frequently referred to as the scene of pickpocketing, cargo snatching, and bare-faced robberies. There have also been numerous instances of security measure breach.

## CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, Nigeria's aviation sector is expanding rapidly. The sector has grown to be among the biggest and most competitive in Africa during the era of government regulation, and tight control in the 1960s and the deregulation phase beginning in the late 1980s. The results show that the aviation industry has, directly and indirectly, created millions of jobs and induced effects that have contributed to industrialisation. It was also established that air transport has a viable benefit over all other methods of transportation due to its ability to travel a distance in the shortest possible time. Air transport has also definitely been the safest means of transportation.

The aviation sector has supported wealth generation in Nigeria and brought humongous impacts to advanced industrialisation. The discovery of air travel dates back to the 19th century, and it has undergone numerous transformations to reach its current state. In addition, it has been determined that Nigeria's weak road infrastructure and other topographical, economic, and sociocultural issues contribute to the country's air transport development. It's also critical to make sure that the standard of domestic air transportation services is maintained despite the rise in demand for air travel.

## Recommendations

It is advised that the following be used as workable answers to the identified challenges:

- 1) The National Transport Policy has made it clear that action must be taken to improve the air transportation network's coordination, coherence, and rationality. The modernization of airports around the country need to be operationally aided through consistent and integrated policies. It is important to continue using conventional airplanes, ICT, and online flight reservations.
- 2) In order for the aviation sector to fulfill its legal obligations, funds must be made available as soon as they become available. Funding is a catalyst that can assist the industry in properly participating in the country's development process. Therefore, it is advised that the relevant government provide adequate funding for the aviation sector. Although the financial availability of the respective governments is their duty, the management should use the funds for intended purposes.

- 3) In order to satisfy and manage the growing demand for air travel, the government should make infrastructure investments in airports a priority. Modern infrastructures are proposed to accommodate the nation's ports of entry. The federal government of Nigeria should increase the budget of aviation industry to meet up with the provision of modern infrastructural facilities.
- 4) Government should put in place mechanism to curb corruption in the sector. People of integrity and high skilled managerial prowess should be appointed to be at the helm of affairs of the sector for proper and effective management of both human and material resources.
- 5) To prevent more complex and well-thought-out operations by anti-security agents, the government should embrace and invest in new security measures and cutting-edge technology. Various security forces of the aviation sector should be empowered by the agency with necessary modern equipment to carry out their task.

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