Port Privatization and Performance in Nigerian seaports in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between port privatization and performance of seaports in Rivers State The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design. The population of the study comprised of two seaports in Rivers State while its participants were 61 managerial staff of the seaports. The study used census in determining its sample size, thus adopted the 61 as the sample size. Data for the study was collected through the administration of structured questionnaire. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to test the reliability of instrument at above 0.07 coefficients. The findings of the study show that port privatization influence performance in River State. It was thus concluded that objective privatization of Nigerian seaports in Rivers State is a critical step toward enhancing port performance. This is as such action will foster in innovation, creativity, competition and quality service delivery for optimum performance. Therefore, the study recommends that there is need for reevaluation of the current state of the ports operation by the management and government of Nigeria in order to identify possible areas where private sector participation is must needed to achieve quality service delivery and innovation in the sector.

Keywords: *Port Privatization, Quality Service Delivery, Innovation, Seaport*

Introduction

According to UNCTAD (2006), seaports are interfaces between several modes of transport, and thus they are centers for combined transport. In fact, they are multifunctional markets and industrial areas where goods are not only in transit, but they are also sorted, manufactured and distributed. Ndikom (2006) summarized that a port is a gateway to the nation's economy and that shipping is a primary logistic service of critical importance. Because of the strategic role of seaport in driving trade between countries of the world, its effective and efficient performance is considered critical for all stakeholders, that is, the port management, employees, government, importers and exporters. Generally, performance according to Gharakhani and Mousakhani (2012) is the capacity of an organization to create outcomes and actions at an acceptable level. Kennerley and Neely (2003) argue that for some time there has been considerable interest in performance measurement and in every organization today, performance measures have been used to assess the success of organizations. This is because all organizations are purposeful and without sustained performance those goals may not be achieved; and where nonperformance continues to reign, facilitated entropy is assumed to be imminent.

Port performance depends on a number of factors which its management must take seriously, such as engaging the right mix of human resource, adoption of modern technological equipment, finance etc. But due to the peculiar nature of Nigerian government leadership style together with high level of corruption among public office holders, Port Harcourt and Onne Port have been able operate to its full capacity. This is as lack of upgrading existing port facilities and services to meet changes in the industry is evidence, insufficient port financing for capital and maintenance projects, inadequate maintenance and management, and insufficiently skilled workforce, can hinder actually port efficiencies (CARICOM, 2013). In consonance with this assertion, Nyema (2014) reiterates that in view of the growing international sea traffic and changing technology in the maritime transport industry, seaports are coping with mounting pressures to upgrade and provide cutting-edge technology; improved container terminals efficiency to provide comparative advantages that will attract more traffic. Thus, reinforcing the views of Castro (1999) that countries without adequate unitized transport facilities will be disadvantage in their international trade. Incidentally, study shows that impressive growth of container traffic handling in ports of developing countries, such as Nigeria coexisted with a large gap in the perception of port quality between developed and developing countries. According to the port quality perception indicator prepared by the World Economic Forum (2014), developed countries outperform developing countries by 5.5 to 3.7 on a scale from 1 to 7 based on a country average comparison. With this view in mind together with the postulation that inefficient logistics services impede trade by imposing an extra cost in terms of time as well as money (Korinek & Sourdin, 2011), a serious port reform is considered inevitable to vitalize the dwindling performance of Nigerian Ports with emphasis on Port Harcourt and Onne Port. This is as Port reform connotes the changing institutional structure of the port business and the much greater involvement of the private sector in the exploitation and financing of port facilities, terminals, and services (Cullinane, Wang & Ji, 2005).

This support the argument that in some countries, the modernization port process is associated not only with the technological update to accommodate larger vessels and greater volume of container traffic, but also to the institutional changes, such as port privatization aiming to promote economic efficiencies and facilitate international trade (Rodrigue, Comtois & Slack, 2013). Port reform has produced a range of hybrid port organization models rather than conforming to traditional reform models which have the potentials to make port operations successful. However, Trujillo and Nombelan (2000) warn that the choice of a reform process is not straightforward. Therefore, the best option must necessarily be determined by realistically assessing the desired outcomes. It is generally accepted that the option that suits most requirements is limited to the privatization of terminals through concession contracts. This statement may probably be true where competition is effective, but not necessarily where competition needs to be created by regulation, as is often the case. Although, amid the need for port reforms to its performance agenda, numerous theoretical and empirical studies have been observed but to the best of our knowledge, none of these studies focused on the impact of port reform on performance of seaports operating in Rivers State, Nigeria. This is ad most of the study adopted a different predictor variable other than port reform and were carried outside Rivers State, Nigeria. For example, Notteboom, Coeck, Verbeke and Winkemans (1997) examined containerization and the competitive potential of upstream urban ports in Europe. Sánchez, Hoffmann, Micco, Pizzolitto, Sgut and Wilmsmeier (2003) investigated Port efficiency and international trade with port efficiency as a determinant of maritime transport costs. Therefore, in view of this empirical gap, this empirically examined the relationship between Port privatization and performance within the context seaports in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Every business faces operational challenges, notwithstanding size and scope. This is because all businesses operate in a fast changing and turbulent environment (Gabriel & Arbolor, 2015; Umoh & Amah, 2013). As a result of this, Robb (2000) posits that large organizations are failing at a faster pace; profit level is decreasing and overall organizational performance. These factors that inhibit organizational performance manifest in different forms, such as political stability or instability, economic, social-cultural, and legal and technology forces; marketing rigging by government (Wobodo, Asawo & Asawo, 2018; Gabriel, 2012). However, amid these general problems, it is very important to isolate some unique problems affecting the performance of seaports in Rivers State and Nigeria in general. According to Parola and Maugeri (2013), the competitiveness of seaports is now deeply affected by factors which are external to the port itself such as poor road and rail infrastructures, accessible logistics platforms, etc. Quansah (2008) opines that attempts to continue maintaining ports under full public authority management and operation have yielded the following operational problems: over employment, general inefficiency and persistent labor under productivity, divided interests (commercial interests as against the multiplicity of governments' interests such as employment, national social welfare, stakeholders, pressure groups and political interests).Also, the sector is plagued with unsatisfactorily unskilled workforce. The current and potentially future workforce lacks the adequate training and education not only in practical operations but also theoretical, hence these inadequacies are particularly acute at management level.

Conceptual Framework

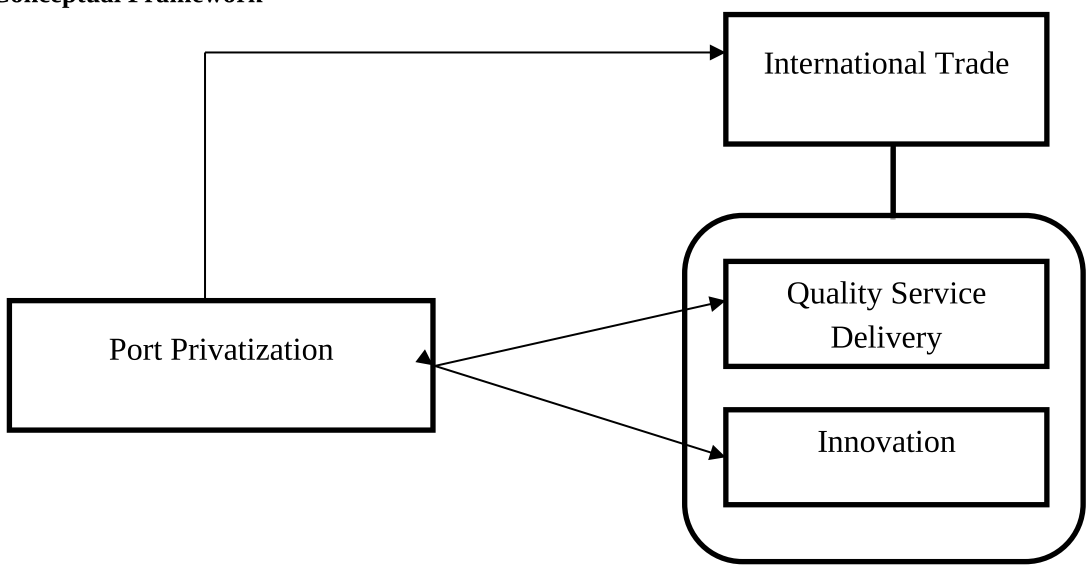

Fig.1: Conceptual Framework of Port Privatization and Performance
Source: Desk Research, 2021

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to empirically determine the relationship between Port Privatization and performance in Nigerian seaports in Rivers State. To achieve this purpose the following research objectives were stated:

i. To examine the relationship between port privatization and quality service delivery in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.

ii. To examine the relationship between port privatization and innovation in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.

Research Questions

In line with study objectives, the following research questions were raised to guide study:

i. How does port privatization relate with service quality in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State?
ii. How does port privatization relate with innovation in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

In tandem with the research questions raised, the following hypotheses were formulated:

$H0_1$: There is no significant relationship between port privatization and service quality in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.
$H0_2$: There is no significant relationship between port privatization and innovation in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.

Theoretical foundations

Contingency Theory

This study adopted the contingency as the baseline theory that offer salient explanation the relationship between port reform and performance. This is as several empirical as evidence as earlier stated support that the current environment of business is terribly unpredictable, and as such, requires the adoption and application of context specific strategies in pursuit of organizational goals, such as performance, survival, sustainability etc. The contingency theory was advanced by Fiedler in the 1960s and later enhanced in Jaja and Obipi (2005). According to the theory, successful managers must structure their leadership strategies based on the uniqueness of each situation (Sapru, 2013). The theory raised three fundamental forces that clearly explain the different situations managers face. First is leader-member relations; in this context, the theory looks at the level trust and confidence a manager's subordinates repose on him. Secondly, the task structure which explains how far work to be executed is formalized; and thirdly, position power, which looks at the extent to which a manager can make certain regarding the affairs of the organization.

However, in relation to its alignment with the study variables, which is port reform and performance, we think that based on the nature and complexity of maritime industry, no one single approach to driving its continuous performance is suitable. This is because a theory that serves in situation "A" might likely fail in situation "B". This situation is even worse in Nigeria where nothing works as plan. Therefore, in the face of inconsistency on the part of the Nigerian government to deliver on commitment made to the sector, especially in terms of budgetary provision due to corrupt tendencies among the leaders, there is need to adopt specific approach to salvage the Nigerian port. This is to say that where wholesome ownership structure of port by Nigerian government fails, there is need to try partial privatization, full privatization or modernization through reform.

Concept of Port Privatization

According to Anyebe (2002), privatization refers to as a situation in which control of activity is passed from the public sector by means of an issue of shares. In the same vein, The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1991) views it as a process of marketization wherein public enterprises is opened to market forces. Furthermore, Ezeani (2006) posits that it is a deliberate government policy of stimulating economic growth and efficiency by reducing state interference and broadening the scope of private sector activity through one or all of the following strategies, transfer of state owned assets to private ownership through the sale of shares, private control or management of state owned assets, encouraging private sector involvement informer public activity, and shifting decision making to agents operating in accordance with market indicators. It is also linked to any process aimed at shifting functions and responsibilities, in whole or in part, from the government to the private sector. In view of these definitions, we deduced that privatization involves shifting the delivery of services performed by public employees to private business. In the context seaport, the term is loosely used to refer to all manner of steps taken to enhance the commercial side of port operations (Anyadiegwu, 2014). Akinwale and Aremo (2010), argue that privatization is a broad policy to improve the economic performance of governments and nations. Hence, is a response to the recognized need for structural return of government agencies, state enterprise and national economics. Privatization can be either comprehensive or partial. The latter takes the form of a public private partnership and is usually combined with the introduction of a landlord port authority. Comprehensive privatization remains an exception and is not a preferred option for major ports (Banister, 2008).

The reasons that might prompt governments or a port authority to enter into the privatization process may include: removal of trade barriers, outdated work practices, obsolete facilities, inadequate institutional structures, and excessive charges in ports cause inefficiencies that can create obstacles to foreign trade. Indirectly, the entire population of a country pays for port inefficiencies, which are reflected in the prices of both import and export commodities; harnessing the efficiency and expertise of the private sector; increasing specialization in the shipping and port industry requires highly trained personnel, advanced systems and equipment, and capital-intensive cargo handling techniques to meet the fast changing demands of port users worldwide (Megginson & Netter, 2001).

Performance

Kaplan and Norton (2002) view performance as a set of financial and non-financial indicators capable of assessing the degree to which organizational goals and objectives have been accomplished. It refers to as the accomplishment of a given task measured against preset known standards of accuracy, completeness, cost and speed (Aloa, 2014). In furtherance, Griffin (2003) posits that it is the degree to which the organization is able to meet the needs of its stakeholders and its own needs for survival. The issue of performance in an organization is considered as the gate way to corporate survival. This is why every organization desires performance, and without the achievement of which, the organization's continuous existence is threatened. In the same trend, Anya, Umoh and Worlu (2017) assert that performance guarantees the continuity of the organization to be competitive in a global market place. Increasing and intense competitiveness in the market has made performance the most important issue for profit and non-profit organizations for businesses. It comprises of three specific areas of firm outcome which includes financial performance, product market performance and shareholder return (Richard, Simon & Brut, 2009).

Likewise, Mihaela (2012) opines that organizational performance can be explored or measured from two perspectives: financial and non-financial aspects. For example, an organization's performance can be measured base on variables that involved productivity, revenue, growth, service delivery, customer's satisfaction and many more. (Rolstadas, 1998), argues that the performance of an organization is a complex relationship involving seven performance criteria that must be followed: effectiveness, efficiency, and quality, and productivity, quality of work, innovation and profitability. In the notion, (Didier, 2002) sees performance as not just a mere finding of an outcome, but rather it is the result of a comparison of the outcome and the objective while Neely (2007) holds that performance should consider quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of actions.

Service Quality

Silvestro and Cross (2000) argue that services are not physical resources but economic transactions exchanged for money, comprising of the exchange of specialized skills including training or expertize in a particular area. In their opinion, goods can be regarded as tangible expressions of knowledge as well as activities, and therefore can be considered as nothing more than distributional mechanisms for services. Pugh (2001) appeared to share the same view as he describes services as reflecting activities that we cannot feel or touch which are carried out by either machines or human being in or both in order to generate value or service to the customers. He also added that based on the intangible nature of service, actions generated by the service provider with reference to the needs or desires of the client, their quality is usually based on the perceptions or experience and value assessment of the client.

Therefore, according to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), service quality can be defined as an overall judgment similar to attitude towards the service and generally accepted as an antecedent of overall customer satisfaction (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). It is also seen the ability of the organization to meet or exceed customer expectations. It is the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. Perceived service quality results from comparisons by customers of expectations with their perceptions of service delivered by the suppliers (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berr 1990). If expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs (Lewis & Mitchell, 1990). Services unlike tangible products are produced and consumed at the same time in the presence of the customer and the service producer. The presence of the human element during the service delivery process greatly increases the probability of error on the part of employees and customers. This error is due to intangible behavioural processes that cannot be easily monitored or controlled.

Innovation

The concept of innovation is one which can be defined on several bases which includes the essence of innovation, characteristic of innovation, innovation as a process, and so on. According to McFadzean, O'Loughon and Shaw (2005), innovation is a process that provides added value and novelty to the business, its suppliers and customers through the development of new procedures, solutions, products and services as well as new methods of commercialization. More so, Harrison, (2010) asserts that it is an input or introduction of new component into a product or new process or ways of carrying out an operation in an organization. In fact, it represents a basic willingness to depart from existing technologies or practices and venture beyond the current state-of-the-art. Innovation differs from improvement in that innovation means doing something different, rather than doing the same thing better. Souza *et al*. (2013) indicates that the implementation and management of innovation stem from the sequence of process, search, and the discovery, development, updating, and commercialization of new processes or procedures, products or business. Innovation is considered essential for an organization to remain competitive. This is because to survive in business amid changing customers' preferences, an organization must be able to create new ideas to do common things in an uncommon way. This is why Oslo Manual (2005) argues that innovation has to characterize the implementation of anything new to the organization, gaining competitive advantage through five possible innovation typologies: (1) the introduction of new products; (2) a new production method; (3) the opening of new markets;(4) the development of new sources/providers of raw materials and other inputs; and (5) the creation of new market structures in an industry. The manual notes that innovation must ultimately improve performance; for this reason, organizations seek to acquire advantage over their competitors when engaged in negotiations involving pricing, cost minimization, and profit amplification. Accordingly, Vankessel, Oerlemans and Van Stroe-Biezen (2014), state that the importance of being innovative cannot be overemphasized, especially in this competitive business era.

Privatization and Performance

According to Nwanosike, Tipi, Nicoleta and Warnock-Smith (2012),the quest for efficiency is claimed to be the major objective of port privatizations and this has led many ports in Africa to undertake port reforms.Privatization is seen as the first step towardscreating free trade, it has therefore not surprisingly been a high priority for developing countries.It begins with the transfer of absolute control of industry away from the government to private partners with particular expertise. One primary reason for privatization is to achieve efficiency through private sector management skills **(**Adedeji, 2017). The study carried out by Megginson, Nash, Randenborgh and Van (1994) compared pre and post privatization financial and operating performance of 61 firms that experienced full or partial privatization through public share offerings from 32 industries in 18 countries (6 developing and 12 developed) between 1961 and 1990. They used several financial indicators such as profitability, sales, operating efficiency, capital investment, leverage ratios and dividend pay-out figures. The study documents strong performance improvements achieved without sacrificing employment security. Specifically, after being privatized, the firms increase real sales, become more profitable, increase their capital investment spending, improve their operating efficiency and increase their work forces.

Furthermore, these companies significantly lower their debt levels and increase dividend payout. Zuobao, Varela, D'Souza and Hassan (2003) examined the pre- and post-privatization financial and operating performance of 208 firms privatized in China during the period 1990-1997. The full sample results show significant improvements in real output, and sales efficiency, and significant declines in leverage following privatization, but surprisingly, no significant change in profitability. Further analysis by the authors shows that, privatized firms experience significant improvements in profitability compared to fully state-owned enterprises during the same period. Examining privatization in different countries, Kianpuor (2009) concluded that the benefits of privatization are received when the government guarantees a competitive environment, provides suitable procedures to reduce costs, enhances quality and promotes small and medium-sized corporations, sets efficient laws to reduce injustice and corruption, enacts appropriate regulations to correctly implement privatization, is transparent in submissions and monitors after submission and prevents from monopoly in the private sector. Nasrollahi, Aghaeiand Bagheri (2009) evaluated the stock returns procedures of privatized companies and concluded that privatization did not have a positive effect on stock returns.

$H0_1$: There is no significant relationship between port privatization and service quality in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.
$H0_2$: There is no significant relationship between port privatization and innovation in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.

Methodology

Research design refers to a set of advance decisions made to develop the master plan to be used in the conduct of a research study. It is the strategy, the plan, and the structure of conducting a research (Carriger, 2000). It is a plan, to be used in the conduct of a research study. It is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceives as to obtain answers to research questions and to control variance (Kerlinger, 2003). A research design determines how the research will be conducted, including the analytical method to be used. Zikmund (1991), as cited in Ahiauzu and Asawo (2015), opined that a research design is the master plan that outlines the methods and procedures that will be utilized in the research work. Therefore, in this study, the cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The reason for its adoption is because, it allows for a single time data collection which may cover period weeks and months.However, the population of this study is 61 management staff of the firms examined and adopted same as its sample size. Data collection was carried out using structured questionnaire. Structured questionnaire instrument according to Bryman and Bell (2003), allow for a more convenient and consistent approach towards survey and data generation. Consequently, we analyzed data using the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient at a confidence interval of 95% and a significance of 0.05. These were carried out with aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

Data Analysis

In this section, data results for the analysis and tests for all previously hypothesized bivariate associations are presented. The section examines the relationship between port privatization and the measures of the criterion – Performance which constitutes the objective of the study. Bivariate associations are tested in this section using the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient at a 95% confidence interval. The decision rule is set at a critical region of $p > 0.05$ for acceptance and $p < 0.05$ for rejection (two-tailed).

Table 1: Correlation for Port Privatization and Measures of Performance

			Privatization	Service Quality	Innovation	Cohesiveness
Spearman's rho	Privatization	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.927**	.884**	.942**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	56	56	56	56
	Service Quality	Correlation Coefficient	.927**	1.000	.888**	.849**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	56	56	56	56
	Innovation	Correlation Coefficient	.884**	.888**	1.000	.797**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	56	56	56	56

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between port privatization and service quality in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.

The result of correlation matrix obtained between port privatization and service quality was shown in Table 4.12. Similarly displayed in the table is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. The correlation coefficient of 0.927confirms the direction and strength of this relationship. The coefficient represents a positive moderate correlation between the variables. The tests of significance shows that that this relationship is significant at p 0.000<0.01. Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between portprivatization and service quality in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between port privatization and innovation in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.

The result of correlation matrix obtained between port privatization and innovation was shown in Table 4.12. Similarly displayed in the table is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. The correlation coefficient of 0.884confirms the direction and strength of this relationship. The coefficient represents a positive very strong correlation between the variables. The tests of significance shows that that this relationship is significant at p 0.000<0.01. Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between port privatization and innovation in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the relationship between port privatization and performance in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State. The study found that port privatization greatly influences all performance indicators. The findings of the study agree with the theory of contingence proposed by Fiedler in the 1960s and later enhanced in Jaja and Obipi (2005). The theory states that successful managers must structure their leadership strategies based on the uniqueness of each situation (Sapru, 2013). Ucheh (2020) further explained that Nigerian ports are said to be performing better than it were before the reform such as privatization. However, comparatively, it is still obvious that there is no competitiveness among the ports because of poor management. This is as some ports are still performing below expectation in spite of the concession of the ports. Hence, further reform on our port system is considered necessary to upscale the performance of the ports. Akinwale and Aremo (2010) also explained that efforts to improve port performance require a cooperative action by both the public and private sector. Most required is private sector involvement to ensure an improvement in the quality of services offered. The private sector should take the lead where there are sufficient infrastructure and appropriate regulatory environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In view of the study findings which revealed that there is a significant relationship between port privatizationand all performance measures in Nigerian seaports, Rivers State, this study concludes that objective privatization of Nigerian seaports in Rivers State is a critical step towards enhancing port performance. This is as such action will foster innovation, creativity, competition and quality service delivery for optimum performance. Therefore, the study recommends that there is need for reevaluation of the current state of the ports operation by the management and government of Nigeria in order to identify possible areas where private sector participation is must needed to achieve quality service delivery and innovation in the sector.

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