

An X-ray of customers satisfaction perception of public private partnerships services in Nigeria power sector: Implication for service delivery and sustainable development

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study titled “An x-ray of Customers Satisfaction Perception of Public Private Partnerships Services in Nigeria Power Sector: Implication for Service Delivery and Sustainable Development”, examined the effectiveness and efficiency of the Public Private Partnerships framework for delivering sustainable economic development in Nigeria using the gauge of customers satisfaction ratings. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and Focused Group Discussion and were analyzed through thematic framework. The findings revealed perennial cold-war between EEDC and the Electricity Customers over claims of unsatisfactory service experiences within the PPP framework; to the effect that much has not changed from what obtained during the era of the defunct Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN). To improve the performances of the EEDC and customer satisfaction, the study recommends that EEDC should recruit, train and retrain field workers on professional best practices, shun opportunity to extort the public, eliminate estimated billing system, design a robust feedback mechanism, leverage community resources, among other recommendations.

Keywords:

Customers, Satisfaction, Power, Service Delivery, Sustainable Development.

Article History:

Received: 12 Apr 2023

Accepted: 29 May 2023

Available Online: 02 Jun 2023



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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the importance of having a sound and reliable power supply for the rapid and sustainable socio-economic development of the rural and urban sector has attracted scholarly attention (Edomah, Foulds & Jones, 2017; Ukeje, 2019a; Ewuim, et al., 2020; Ndukwe, et al., 2022), with little concern on the perceptions of service outcomes particularly as it affects the (citizens) or customers satisfaction. Although, there have been concerns over its inadequate supply, Mishra and Bekuretsion (2020), asserts that since the beginning of public sector reform movements, privatization has caught the fascination of the academic world. In this light, Idike, et al., (2020a) opined that the nature and practice of privatization policy, whether by (divestment, delegation, displacement, or decentralization) can determine citizens' satisfaction-dissatisfaction measurement as well as the type of market structure created, i.e., whether monopolistic or competitive structure. Privatization is primarily done to introduce effectiveness and efficiency, reduce government interference and administrative burdens, generate new investment, develop capital market and deepen the financial system, provide the opportunity to introduce competition, and enlarge individual choice and freedom (Idike, et al., 2020a). However, public sector service delivery processes are often considered inefficient with a low level of citizen focus and service orientation (Gronroos, 2018; Onele, et al., 2021; Ndukwe, et al., 2022) even in this era of globalisation. According to Farazmand et al. (2019, p. 10), citing Farazmand (2017), globalization has made the citizen government relationship more bilateral, changing the status of citizens from a “captive audience” of the local public administration to active “citizens.” This led credence to Idike, et al., (2020a) that the purpose of government and governance everywhere in the world in human societies is to meet and provide for the basic needs of citizens, as well as to manage the collective affairs of society in a manner that enhances the welfare of the citizens and promote sustainable and progressive development in the state. However, in Nigeria, the inadequacies of public service delivery of the energy sector came under heavy criticisms (Subair & Oke, 2008; Yeboah-Assiamah, 2015). According to Nnaji, et al., (2022), government-owned enterprises should serve the purpose of triggering socio-economic development in Nigeria and Africa at large, but the way and manner in which PPPs, particularly in the power sector are organized and managed in Nigeria, has great implication for service dissonance (Ndukwe, et al., 2022); thus

justifying government involvement in its ownership or management (Idowu et al., 2020) and service delivery. Effective public service delivery through implementation of governments' programs and policies (Idike, et al. 2019), enhances citizens (customers) satisfaction. However, according to Offu, et al., (2018) and Ukeje, et al., (2019b), “Nigeria public service was more of a shadow and pariah public service than a responsive, popular, and professional service and for many years and under different political regimes – civil and military, public governance in Nigeria was ineffective, unpopular and counterproductive in many respects.” Hence, privatisation became an option after external pressures and internal debates seemed prevalent. Nigerian power sector was privatised; a process that started in 1999 with privatisation idea leading to transformation of National Electric Power Authority into Power Holding Company of Nigeria (Idowu, et al., 2020); then, electric power sector reform bill in 2005 that allowed private participation (Ohajiana, Abumere, Owale, & Osaralube, 2014), and culminated in the unbundling of the sector into 18 companies consisting of one Transmission Company (TCN), six Generation Companies (GENCOs), and 11 Distribution Companies (DISCOs) under the regulation of National Regulatory Commission (NERC) (Idowu, Ibutan & Olukotun, 2020). The federal government retained ownership of the TCN but completely privatised the GENCOs and DISCOs (Onochie, Edgware & Eyakwanor, 2015).

However, despite the reform of the power sector, there still persist inadequate service delivery (Mustapha & Imuetinyan, 2016) resulting from poor management. Over billing (Okafor, 2008; Ise, 2014), low voltage, dilapidated facilities, inadequate and poor customer services, professional and technical incompetence were spotted in the new management of the power sector and this was despite the establishment of a regulatory body known as Nigeria Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) as an official control over the new arrangement (Ohajiana et al., 2014). This therefore calls for a kind of management innovation that entrenches efficient and effective service delivery in the entire process. Onele, et al., (2021), stated that management innovation in the power sector entails, “a creatively dynamic approach to leading and ordering an organizational setting; a critical shift from the normal and formal management environment to a new and promising one; new idea in management theory and practice; exploring new alternatives in public service delivery”. This implies thinking out of the box to orchestrate new ways of managing PPPs for effective performance; for instance, creating opportunities for leveraging extra-

organizational resources to fill resource gaps in the areas of Human Resources and capital investment using community social capital. Privatisation came with claim as a panacea for ameliorating debilitating public service failures, especially as it concerns the demand and supply crisis in the Nigerian energy sector. However, studies have showed that the privatization policy particularly in the power sector has not yielded the desired results (Idowu, Ibieta, & Olukotun, 2019; Ndukwe, et al., 2022).

Unfortunately, its promises came under serious doubt when management reports received so far have not been able to substantiate the claims (Okafor, 2008; Olorunkanmi, 2014; Mustapha & Imuetinyan, 2016), necessitating the research to validate the relevance of the privatisation reforms. Electricity is, unarguably, one of the most essential ingredients of joy and beauty of modern life. It is used in our cars, industries, workplaces, homes, etc. The importance of electricity cannot in anyway be overemphasised. From the foregoing, it is glaring that the power/electricity companies have faced various degrees of challenges globally, more in Africa and especially in Nigeria. Such challenges include vandalisation of properties belonging to the electricity companies, using power and refusal to pay the accrued bills, violence against the electricity company workers, etc (Ewuim, et al., 2020; Ndukwe, et al., 2022). However, little or no literature has dealt on why the electricity consumers (beneficiaries), instead of protecting the electrical gadgets installed in their areas for them and appreciating the electricity workers, rather react in the opposite direction. Thus, the salient truth is that the consumers of electricity who are the customers of electricity companies are not satisfied with the service delivery they receive. Service satisfaction refers to the pleasure or gratification obtained from the fulfilment of a need or desire. Hence, the customers are not satisfied because they have a need or desire that is yet to be fulfilled. The persistent question that comes to mind is “why are the customers of electricity company (EEDC) not satisfied”? Hence, an x-ray into their perceptions and power-service experiences calls for urgent research attention.

2. CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE

2.1 Linking customers satisfaction perception, PPPs and Power Sector Governance in Nigeria

According to Onele, et al., (2021), effective power sector governance entails mutual management of the power sector by both the state agency and the power users; decentralized power management model involving the citizenry; building linkage between public and private management of the power sector; people-focused approached and management perspective drawn from their user-experience(s). Thus, the following are the causes of the dissatisfaction of the customers of the power sector:

- i) Epileptic power supply- the poor cries and the rich also cries of the partial and unsteady power supply. Ewuim, et al., (2020) further identified and implicated factors such as fear of contract review/ withdrawal and lack of job security after the probation period (2014-2018) due to change of government are also other challenges that affect the performance of electricity supply by EEDC in Abakaliki. These results into constant light interruption, over voltage, load shedding, bulk billing, disconnections (Ewuim, et al., 2020). Hence the need for an alternative renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and diesel could be used to overcome epileptic power challenges for the attainment of sustainable development.
- ii) Corruption has been defined as an impaired integrity, virtue and moral principle. In the words of former President Olusegun Obasanjo (2003), “Nigerians have for too long been feeling short-changed by the quality of public service delivery as been characterized by the combined evils of inefficiency and corruption”. Thus, evidencing challenges to building robust institutional capacity for improved performances in the power sector. Study revealed that fear of contract termination, lack of institutional and pervasive corruption are challenges to EEDC operations (Ewuim, et al., 2020). Brinkerhoff (2000) highlighted that corruption retards investment, development and economic activities. Corruption touches all facets of life, including the power sector.
- iii) Estimated billing- is an arbitrary billing system. According to Ndukwe, et al., (2022):
 “...They have insufficient meters and over-billing system. In my house, I pay about eleven thousand naira (#11,000) every month, without high gadgets. In fact, there was a month we were without light, sometimes, low voltage. You know, they don't have a fixed method of power supply. Yet, they bill the same or almost the same amount. Personally, I pay through my nose just to run away from their problems. So, don't talk

about proportionate billing to consumption... First, I must say I'm not satisfied with their services because they don't read meters. There is power interruption and power-upsurge. In one of the occasions, they burnt all my gadgets when they disconnect powers, there is always serious delay in re-connection unless you “mee aka n'aka” (give bribe) to the field workers. Billing is not proportionate to consumption at all...”

Thus, the charging methods are not in harmony with the consumption and NERC seems to be sleeping about it to the detriment of innocent consumers in the sector.

- iv) Poor relationship with customers- In the new public service, efforts are geared towards valuing people (customers) by transforming recruitment processes through which they are hired in every organisation (Ukeje, et al., 2020b; Ndukwe, et al., 2020). Specifically, “understanding the concept of public service recruitment practices is tangential to the idea of administrative behavior and “influences” (Ukeje, et al., 2020b). Importantly, the attitudes of street-level bureaucrats (workers) can be negatively influenced by factors such as poor condition of service, lack of cash rewards, work hazards, job insecurity, high workloads, lack of skills etc (Ndukwe, et al., 2020; Ndukwe, et al., 2022). This is because the street-level bureaucrats have “direct contact with members of the general public (street) in the policy process. It is the face of government and the points of state-citizen interactions in social services provisioning. It is also the theory and practice of implementation and evaluation of policies at the frontline using relative discretionary independence to innovate on or modifies policies of government to suit prevailing circumstances, perhaps poorly envisaged at policy-design level (Ukeje, et al., 2021). Thus, the citizens (customers) interest and satisfaction must be placed first (Ndukwe, et al., 2021; Onele, et al., 2021).
- v) Bad governance- The research reveals that customers are dissatisfied because the government seems to be silent over their plight in the power sector. Similarly, looking at the challenges bedeviling the power sector leadership and management, EEDC lacks supervision by NERC (Ndukwe, et al., 2022).

In his New Year message to Nigerian, Buhari (2020) asserts:

Power has been a problem for a generation. We know we need to pick up the pace of progress. We have solutions to help separate parts of the value chain to work better together. In the past few months, we have engaged extensively with stakeholders to develop a series of comprehensive solutions to improve the reliability and availability of electricity across the country. The solutions include ensuring fiscal accountability for the sector, increasing both government and private sector investments in the power transmission and distribution segments, improving payment transparency through the deployment of smart meters and ensuring regulatory actions maximize service delivery.

Political campaign promise on revamping the power sector has been one of the winning points of many Nigerian presidential candidates. Needless to say, campaign strategy of capitalizing on solving perceived “wicked problems” in Nigeria is a tradition and culture of Nigerian politicians. Though with little or no concern about their capabilities, they indulge in “big” promises but divulge in real actions. Power failure is a type of “wicked problem” in Nigeria. “Wicked problems” in Nigeria are those problems that Nigerians know how to solve but cannot solve them. This area too needs serious research attention. Electric power is the lifeline of economic development and socio economic well being of world families (Onele, et al., 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using 6 (six) focused group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews on the Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) performances and customers satisfaction in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The researchers covered six (6) LGAs in Ebonyi State urban metropolises due to their high consumption of electricity. The areas covered include Abakaliki LGA, Ebonyi LGA, Ohaukwu LGA, Ezza-North LGA, Ezza-South LGA, Izzi LGA and Abakaliki (the Capital territory of Ebonyi State, Nigeria). The target interviewees and respondents were adults who not only use power for their enjoyment/entertainment but depend on it directly or indirectly for sustenance and survival. We chose the target age

(adults ranging from 20 years to 65 years) because they appreciate the value of power in fending for themselves and those under them. For the purpose of the study, research instrument was designed – a questionnaire, to guide the researchers on their discussions and interviews with the target population. The questionnaire was designed to ascertain people's views (customers/ citizens) of the EEDC performances, their experiences with EEDC field workers, public awareness of the National Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) existence and activities, citizens popular opinions (desire, public impression) of the privatisation policy and their general assessment of the power sector (see Figure 1 and 2) below.

No.	Question
1	Did you know of the government privatization policy in the power sector/ EEDC?
2	At what stage did you think EEDC has failed in rendering service delivery?
3	What do you think the government intends to achieve by privatizing the power sector?
4	Do you think privatization of EEDC can address constant power supply, citizens/ customers satisfaction, sustainable power/electricity supply in Ebonyi state?
5	Can you think of any problems with achieving quality service delivery in the power sector?
6	What is your assessment of the process NEPA/EEDC billing system, metre reading, constant light interruption, over voltage, load shedding, bulk billing, disconnections, and delay in new connection, as experienced by customers in Ebonyi state?
7	(b) Is billings proportionate to consumption?
8	Are there any remedies to these problems?
9	How effective is the National Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) in addressing customers' complaints in Abakaliki?
10	What is your general impression about EEDC performance and customers satisfaction in the state?
11	Are there any aspects you think government could improve in the sector to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all in Abakaliki?
12	How would you rate the attitudes of EEDC staff members towards customers-especially field workers and marketers?
13	What are some experiences you have had with the EEDC staff?
14	Would you want the government to take over the power sector or sustain the privatisation policy?
15	Any other comments?... people's views of the power sector, performances, customers experiences with EEDC field workers, public awareness of the NERC existence and activities, citizens popular opinions (desire, public impression) of the privatisation policy and general assessment of the power sector.

Figure 1. List of focused group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview questions on EEDC and Customers service delivery

The researchers adopted this method of in-depth interview to be able to ascertain the real experiences of the people concerned and not based on assumptions and theories. Actually, in the course of the study, the citizens opened up and said it the way they felt because, "he who wears the shoe knows where it pinches him". This study was carried out between the months of October 2019 and April 2020. The researchers interviewed (discussed with 42 landlords, 66 tenants, 24 pastors and general overseers (G.Os) of various churches, 18 entrepreneurs who run different small-scale businesses that require power to thrive, 54 civil/public servants within the selected locations and 24 proprietors of schools. The total number of interviewers were 228. The interviewers were put in a table to determine their frequency and percentage.

Table 1. Distribution of Interviewees by portfolio

Portfolio	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Landlords	42	18.42
Tenants	66	28.94
Proprietors	24	10.52
Church Pastors	24	10.52
Enterpreneurs	18	7.90
Civil/ public servants	54	23.70
Total	228	100%

The responses of all those interviewed tilted towards the same direction, unsatisfactory. The respondents are not comfortable with the services of EEDC but seem to have no option. They yearn for an improved energy delivery but they do not know how the desired change will come.

Do you think privatization of EEDC can address constant power supply, citizens/ customers satisfaction, sustainable power/electricity supply in Ebonyi state?	I perceive the government intended to stabilize service delivery in the power sector but they acted in ignorance. They did not consult the expert in the power sector. If they had done the needful, they would have been well advised on the mode and procedure of privatising the power sector (Respondent 3).
Can you think of any problems with achieving quality service delivery in the power sector?	The problem of EEDC is poor power generation. Hence, they give low current that is useless in the homes and where they want to avoid such, they often ration the power – i have power today, and tomorrow, my neighbour will have. But power is our right as citizens. Another problem of EEDC is lack of staff and manpower. Because they lack power, they hire road-side electricians or technicians to work for them as fieldworkers. Hired workers to work to protect their job, so they do anything that seems beneficial to them at the moment and walk away. After all, "waiting concern agboro with overload". (Respondent 11)
What is your assessment of the process NEPA/EEDC billing system, metre reading, constant light interruption, over voltage, load shedding, bulk billing, disconnections, and delay in new connection, as experienced by customers in Ebonyi state?	Ah! Everything is zero. They don't use the metre where it exist; it is just arbitrary billing. In one occasion like that, we travelled to the village and no one used power within our flat, but that month, #16,000 was brought to us by EEDC as our bill for that month. From this you will know that billing is not proportionate to consumption at all (Respondent 25).
How would you rate the attitudes of EEDC staff members towards customers-especially field workers and marketers?	An adage said, "If you are eating with the devil, use long spoon". I try as much as possible to avoid talking with them on any matter because they will get me irritated. However, i've witnessed their case with my neighbour. They didn't bring bill but come for disconnection. (Respondent 37).

Figure 2: Respondent views on Customers Perception and the state of Nigeria Power Sector

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICES AND CHALLENGES: IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNANCE AND 2030-SDGSPOLICY ATTAINMENT IN NIGERIA

No doubt, the 17 SDGs; all directly or indirectly, need an effective public service for successful implementation. This is because, the entire 17 SDGs, 169 targets and 231 indicators require the provision of public goods or the implementation of a public sector policy and, therefore, depend on public service to coordinate, mediate or directly provide (Ukeje, et al., 2020b). The Nigeria government policy-making approach lacks sustainability indicators and impact due to the influence of politics, patrimonialism and weak institutional framework in the public bureaucracy (Ukeje, et al., 2020c), hence, continued policy failure. The nature of patrimonialism in the context of public sector governance, underscore a system of government based on 'nepotistic networking where reward channels and motivation reflect personal interests of certain principals and their agents in the allocation of public wealth and opportunities. Leading to the personalization of public office by a principal and the distribution of gains accruing thereto in such a manner aimed to maintain tenure, attract loyalty, and sustain service from the agent' (Ukeje, et al., 2021, P.1). The attainability of stable power supply in Nigeria on or before 2030 is quite uncertain. Going by the trend of social and technical events globally and Nigeria in particular, one will not but admit that the SDG vision 2030 is a mirage. Available records shows that previous policy interventions (Ukeje & Chukwumeka, 2021) was aborted due to erratic power supply, corruption, financial misappropriation, technological obsolescence, shortage of skilled manpower and lack of human capital capability development among others (Idike, et al., 2020; Ukeje, et al., 2020a). The above poses a threat to the 2030 SDGs, especially as one considers that the sole aim of the electricity distribution companies is to make their money and enrich themselves without commensurate efforts to satisfy the customers (consumers). Hence, EEDC graduated from postpaid billing system to prepaid billing system, where they get their money before considering the level of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction of the citizens (customers) services that is required. Obviously, distribution companies

Questions Interview	Customers perceptions
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(EEDC) should collect their bills unarguably. But the question remains, what efforts do they put in place to ensure their customers' satisfaction.

5. LESSONS LEARNT: CUSTOMERS' SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS OF POWER SERVICE DELIVERY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DYNAMIC PPPS POLICY REFORM AND GOVERNANCE

Customers' satisfaction is a global issue that defines the efficiency and competitiveness of any organisation or company. It has been noted as a veritable tool for measuring organisational performance and relevance (Ndukwe, et al., 2022). For example, let's take a look on some of the respondent views below:

General perceptions/impression about EEDC performance and Customers satisfaction in the state:

Power supply is far from satisfaction in Nigeria. I just came back from Germany where I spent my one year sabbatical leave. During my stay, I was surprised that within the first three months of my stay, I never experienced any power failure. Thinking back home, Nigeria, I doubted whether it was still power and in order to convince myself, I deliberately switched off the light in my room. When the light went off, I said to myself that it was indeed electricity but in another level (Respondent 2).

It is glaring that the major concerns of the senior lecturer and a veterinary doctor is epileptic power supply. Hence, he is not satisfied. When asked the role of the government to ensure access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy for all in Abakaliki, an entrepreneur, a pastor and a social activist blamed everything on the government. In his words: "There are other sources of energy but the powers that be, the cabals, the authorities are frustrating them". Let me site just two examples for you:

(a). One Engr Ezekiel (a technician) manufactured a generator that worked with permanent magnet. He spent 35 years to produce what he called Izuogu motor. He was interviewed by the Federal Government in 2006 but until today, nothing has been heard about him and his invention. Instead, his moulds were stolen.

(b). The CEO of EEDC gave 12 billion naira to the federal Government to fight covid-19 and in the same month, a customer that pays about #4000 bill was billed #14,000. It seemed he wanted to recover his money within the same month but neither the government nor her agencies said anything about it (Respondent 11).

The respondent above was direct and emphatic on blaming the government. He agrees with Brinkerhoff that corruption persists because of shallow political will to attack it (Brinkerhoff, 2000). Unarguably, when the headaches, the body cannot be comfortable. Similarly, no sector can boast of any level of efficiency beyond that of the government of the time.

When asked about the attitudes of EEDC staff towards customers- especially the field workers, a mother, an entrepreneur and a resident of Abakaliki, voiced out her heart thus:

Their attitude is very poor. They are nuisance, inconsiderate, mad dogs and hooligans. I, have seen a lot and have suffered a lot in the hands of EEDC. My food has soured several times. I have paid my bills but I was disconnected just because a neighbour in the yard did not pay. That was injustice and unfair treatment (Respondent 4).

The respondent (4) uncontrollably voiced out her high level of unsatisfaction with the services of EEDC. What the field workers have failed to understand is that their "offices" are with their customers who patronize them. The more customers they have is the more relevant they become to the society.

6. CONCLUSION AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The researchers are not in anyway antagonizing the EEDC as a service delivery body in the power sector in Nigeria or their field workers (employees), but based on their antecedents and empirical studies, deduced a perennial cold-war between the EEDC and the electricity consumers. Based on this research, the following are possible solutions to the EEDC service delivery and customers' satisfaction in Nigeria.

1. EEDC field workers should be trained to treat their customers with respect

2. Field workers should not see their work as an opportunity to extort the public.
3. EEDC bosses should not over use the junior workers – who are often used as field workers.
4. Estimated billing system should be abolished
5. There should be EEDC service delivery/ customers satisfaction interface.
6. here should be a medium for customers to rate EEDC staff (especially field workers) and effective use of such rating to promote concerned staff members /giving of awards.
7. EEDC should employ qualified /certified staff, who have been socially and academically polished.
8. The staff should be well paid to encourage them serve the public well and attach value to their jobs, etc.

If the above suggestions are implemented, the EEDC customers will become satisfied with their service delivery and the case of vandalization of electricity, unwillingness to pay bills, wastage of power, fighting the field workers, etc will become a story of the past.

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