

Original Paper

Safety Perception and Implications for Sustainable Air Transport Business

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to understand travellers' perceptions of safety provision at one of the local airports in Nigeria, and the resultant effect on the airport patronage. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to compare the opinions of male and female travellers at the airport. The study was conducted prior to the closure of the airport in late 2019. The result shows that travellers perceived available safety provision at the airport to be average in efficiency and that this has resulted to average patronage at the airport. This is completely the opinion of travellers. The study was also able to understand that there are some challenges deterring the airport from getting the needed level of safety provision. However, observations at the airport revealed that the Federal Government of Nigeria is currently revamping the standard of the airport to meet international best practice in airport management. The airport has been closed (shortly after this study) for some months now (still closed as at June 2020) to enable for timely and successful completion of the ongoing renovations and upgrading at the airport. The study has implications for safety contribution to airport management and efficiency in developing nations.

Keywords

safety provision, airport safety, travellers, air transport patronage, sustainable business

1. Introduction

Since the turn of the 21st Century, safety issues have been among the major discussions in air transport industry globally. This may not have been unconnected with the industrial boom the industry is witnessing. The concern of investors, experts and other actors in the industry has revolved around the issue of safety which is expected to guarantee industrial sustainability if adequately checked (Page, 2009;

Kovari & Zimanyi, 2010). To this regard many safety provisions, policies, designs, among others, have been put in place to guarantee safety of facilities, visitors, passengers, flights, and other investments in the industry (Gray, 2012; Kolesar & Petrof, 2012; Gures, 2017).

However, airline management and airport management are among the major sectors in the aviation industry. For instance, while the effort of the airlines is to guarantee safety of passengers on board in their flights, airport managements are much concerned with the general safety provisions at the airport. Fortunately these managements are expected to work towards ensuring conformity to the industry's operational guidelines as stipulated by International Air Transport Association (IATA) (Martin-Cejas, 2006; Oster, Strong, & Zorn, 2013).

Most airports make necessary safety provisions to ensure safety of passengers, visitors and airport facilities. These safety provisions are among the motivators of travelers to patronize the airport (Ploch & Zihla, 2016; Set, 2018). It has been argued that satisfaction on the efficiency of safety provisions is effectively done in the mind of travelers through their perceptions. Also the level of safety provisions as believed by travelers is manifested in the level of patronage at the airport. There have been debates on the level of safety at local airports in most developing nations. This background motivated this study to sample one of the local airports in Nigeria (Akanu-Ibiam Airport Enugu) to understand travelers' perception on the level of safety provisions in the airport and the implication of this on the airport patronage.

2. Method

On the method of the research, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were employed coupled with detailed observations. Under qualitative approach, thirty travellers who arrived or about leaving the airport and ten management staff of the airport were conveniently sampled for the interview sessions. Convenient sampling technique was found useful due to the busy nature of the airport. This took place concurrently with the detailed field observations. From the quantitative approach, there was a random distribution of 100 questionnaires to conveniently located travellers (59 males and 41 females). While descriptive analysis was used to analyse qualitative data, simple mean and standard deviation was used in analysing the quantitative data. The study is expected to have unravelled the travellers' perception on the level of safety at local airports.

3. Review of Previous Studies

This aspect of the study is aimed at conducting an empirical review of related studies to ascertain the areas of lacuna with the existing research. To this regard, Aghahowa and Enoma (2009) studied airport redesign for safety and security in three Scottish airports, and informed that safety and security issues are airport specific and can be understood and managed within these peculiarities. Also, Gures (2011) examined safety perception of Turkish and European passengers in Turkish airport and were of the

view that there are differences in passengers' perception and level of satisfaction with respect to safety provision at the airport. A similar study was conducted by Gray (2012) to understand tourist perception on travel risk factors. The study observed that although safety considerations are central, travel decision-making differs among tourists due to variations in culture backgrounds (Gray, 2012).

Moreover, Oliver, Ferrer, and Parsurnan (2012) examined the impact of delay on customers' safety perceptions and behavioral intentions. Their findings show that passengers' behavior is influenced by perceived safety threats and unnecessary delays which were attributed to operational practices of the airport (Oliver et al., 2012). In a related study, Gures (2017) studied satisfaction levels of passengers for security services at the airport. He observed that high level of satisfaction perceived by tourists and other travelers have much positive impact on the overall patronage at the airport (Gures, 2017). This result was supported by Ceccato and Masci (2017) who studied airport Environment and Passengers' Satisfaction with Safety. They informed that high level of safety satisfaction among travelers is translated to improved patronage at the airport (Ceccato & Masci, 2017). Also, Ploch and Žihla (2016) infer that level of safety perception at airports among travelers, impacts greatly on the sustainable tourism development in a particular region.

More so, Oster, Strong, and Zorn (2013) in their study analysed aviation safety: problems, challenges, opportunities. They note that airport at developing nations are more prone to poor safety record unlike their counterparts from developed nations. This may be as a result capital demand for quality safety provision at airports (Oster et al., 2013). This view was supported by Set (2018) who noted that safety is among the major challenges of airports and that there is need for huge capital investment on airport safety to guarantee sustainable patronage from travellers. Also, Basnet (2015) examined air transportation and its impact on the tourism industry of Nepal and observed that adequate safety provisions at airports will not only increase positive travellers' perception but will also encourage international tourism flow to Nepal. A similar study by George (2002) who worked on tourist's perceptions of safety and security while visiting Cape Town, South Africa, revealed that there is negative perception on safety provision by visitors to Cape Town and hence the need for alternative safety measures to encourage travels to the city

In addition, Pius, Nwaogbe, Opeoluwa and Guenne (2017) investigated the effect of airport touting from the passengers' perspective in Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport Abuja, Nigeria. Their result show that touting of all kinds were perceived as safety threats by travellers in the airport, and this attitude has affected the general travellers' perception of safety at the airport. More so, Valkenburcht (2013) studied the role of safety perceptions for Airline passengers' loyalty and the influence of aviation expertise, and informed that display of aviation expertise by airport management has a long way to determine the level of safety perception on the airport by travellers; that unpleasant atmosphere at the airport may lead to the feeling of uneasiness and panic by travellers. In support of this view, Chang and Liao (2010) informed that airports' management display of expertise in the area of cabin safety educational

programs will boost the positive perception of travellers on airport safety guarantee.

Furthermore, Kôvári and Zimányi (2010) examined safety and security in the age of global tourism. Their result shows that safety and security issues are among the prerequisites for sustainable travel and tourism industry and that there is need to ensure positive travellers'/tourists' perception on safety during travels. In line with this, Lauderdale, Yuan, Goh and Fowler (2011) infer that safety and security considerations are vital in travellers'/Tourists' decisions on travels and visits in United States of America; and hence their level of perception is vital in policy making in travel and tourism industry. Also Pennington-Gray and Schroeder (2013) were of the view that the social media has a role to play in boosting safety perception on travel and tourism among travellers/tourists.

In conclusion, these studies have been able to reveal that perception of safety among travellers/tourists has a huge role to play in airport business; also that the efficacy of safety provisions in a given airport is determined by the travellers' perception or view point. This background motivated the current study to investigate the level of travellers' perception of safety provision at Akanu Ibiam Airport, Enugu Nigeria and how this has motivated patronage at the airport.

4. Brief Background Information

Air transport business was said to have commenced in Nigeria during the Second World War (1939-1945) to facilitate air lifts. This was followed with the establishment of the defunct Nigerian Airways in 1958. This later gave rise to the construction of the nation's first international airport, the Murtala Muhammed Airport Lagos between 1975-1980, at a whopping cost of 240 million naira. Six other airports were later commissioned by the federal government of Nigeria. Nigerian Aviation training Centre was established coupled with other aviation logistics to facilitate the operations of the new industry (Filani & Ikporukpo, 2000; Ileoje, 2003 in Suleiman, 2012).

However, the Enugu International Airport Enugu was said to have been commissioned in 1976. It was later renamed Akanu Ibiam International Air port in 2004, in honour of Late Dr Akanu Ibiam, the Premier of former Eastern Region of Nigeria. The Airport has gone through series of renovation works since established. It currently has five functional airlines (i.e., Aero Contractor, Air Peace, Arik, Med-View and Ethiopian Airlines). The airport is heavily populated with domestic flights with few international flights. The Akanu Ibiam Airport is currently situated within Emene community in Enugu metropolis (see Figure 1). This study was conducted in 2019 shortly before the closure of the airport for renovations. The airport is currently undergoing renovations to boost its industrial relevance, efficiency and safety standard. The study was conducted about five months before the closure. It is expected that the result of this study will motivate the ongoing renovations at the airport.

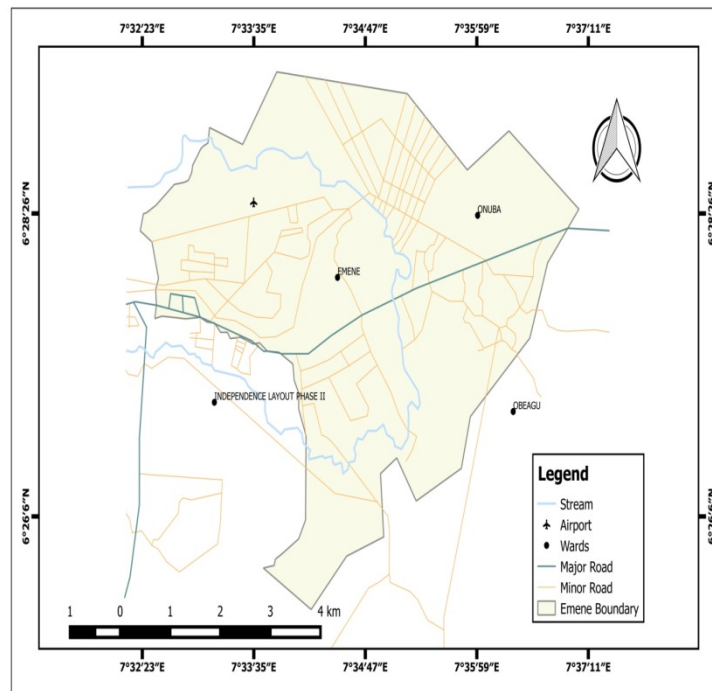


Figure 1. Map of Emene Showing Akanu Ibiam International Airport

Source: Enugu State Ministry of Land and Survey, Enugu.

5. Results

This aspect of the study looks at the quantitative data as retrieved from the field and their interpretations. The perceptions of the travellers on the three sub-objectives of the study are presented in a tabular form. The opinions of male and female travellers were compared in the item statements which were arrived at after a pilot study.

5.1 Various Safety Provisions at the Airport

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation Ratings of Male and Female Respondents to Study Various Safety Provisions at the Airport to be Agree, strongly Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

Item Statement	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
item1: There is availability of oxygen mask which helps to give life to one who is losing air.	Male	59	3.10	.84	Agree
	Female	41	3.36	.73	Agree
item2: There is availability of life jacket which helps in the state of emergency.	Male	59	3.05	.85	Agree
	Female	41	3.12	.87	Agree
item3: There is addition of intrusion/alert system which adds another level of security to the perimeter in the airport.	Male	59	3.08	.83	Agree
	Female	41	3.09	.70	Agree
item4: There is provision of first aid and medical kits at the airport.	Male	59	3.22	.81	Agree
	Female	41	3.24	.73	Agree
item5: There is provision of fire fighting equipment at the airport.	Male	59	3.37	.66	Agree
	Female	41	2.85	.85	Agree
item6: There is proper checking of all safety equipment prior to flight take off.	Male	59	3.22	.87	Agree
	Female	41	3.07	.72	Agree
item7: The exit door functions as a passage or gate for departure.	Male	59	3.03	.76	Agree
	Female	41	3.21	.72	Agree
item8: There is provision of special meal for passengers with health issues.	Male	59	2.49	.98	Disagree
	Female	41	2.41	.86	Disagree
item9: Passengers safety information cards are always available.	Male	59	2.91	.97	Agree
	Female	41	2.68	.72	Agree
item10: the airport fire and carbon monoxide detector is working very well.	Male	59	2.55	1.02	Agree
	Female	41	2.31	.93	Disagree
Overall Mean	Male	59	3.00	.50	Agree
	Female	41	2.93	.43	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2019.

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of male and female respondents on various safety provisions at the airport. It shows that the mean ratings of both male and female respondents on items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9 are more than 2.50 criterion mean. This means that both male and female respondents agree with the conclusions in the item statements. However, the mean ratings of both male and female respondents on item 8 are less than the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating that both respondents disagree with the conclusions in the item statements. The overall mean ratings of 3.00 and 2.93 show that both respondents agree with the conclusions in the item statements on the average in Table 1.

5.2 Passengers Perception of Safety at the Airport

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation Ratings of Male and Female Respondents to Investigate Passenger's Perception of Safety at the Airport to be Agree, strongly Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Item Statement	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
item11: Security staff at the airport are helpful and courteous	Male	59	2.86	.88	Agree
	Female	41	2.75	.73	Agree
item12: Waiting in the line for screening is less than 15 (fifteen) minutes.	Male	59	2.44	1.03	Disagree
	Female	41	1.97	.82	Disagree
item13: Activities of dubious staff, passengers/visitors are well checked.	Male	59	2.50	.83	Agree
	Female	41	2.56	.92	Agree
item14: Airport is well maintained accordingly.	Male	59	2.35	.94	Disagree
	Female	41	2.39	.86	Disagree
item15: There are limitations on carrying of luggage for passengers	Male	59	3.20	.73	Agree
	Female	41	3.21	.82	Agree
item16: There are functioning security devices to check activities of criminals and terrorist.	Male	59	2.79	.86	Agree
	Female	41	2.70	.90	Agree
item17: Airport passenger's safety cards are helpful.	Male	59	2.84	.73	Agree
	Female	41	2.75	.73	Agree
item18: There is functional life jacket at the airport.	Male	59	2.54	.83	Agree
	Female	41	2.51	.84	Agree
item19: Food and beverages at the airport have quality control to ensure safety.	Male	59	2.50	.87	Agree
	Female	41	2.21	.85	Disagree
item20: There is provision for easy evacuation during emergency.	Male	59	2.67	.79	Agree
	Female	41	2.46	.95	Disagree
Overall Mean	Male	59	2.67	.43	Agree
	Female	41	2.55	.45	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2019.

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of male and female respondents on passenger's perception of safety at the airport. It shows that the mean ratings of both male and female respondents on items 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, and 18 are more than 2.50 criteria mean. This means that both male and female respondents agree with the conclusions in the item statements. However, the mean ratings of both male and female respondents on item 12 and 14 are less than the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating that both respondents

disagree with the conclusions in the item statements. The overall mean ratings of 2.67 and 2.55 show that both respondents agree with the conclusions in the item statements.

5.3 Impact of Safety on Patronage at the Airport

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation Ratings of Male and Female Respondents to Find out the Impact on Patronage at the Airport to be Agree, strongly Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Item Statement	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
item21: Beverages sold at the airport are safe for consumption.	Male	59	2.89	.57	Agree
	Female	41	2.58	.70	Agree
item22: Food sold at the airport is safe for consumption.	Male	59	2.84	.63	Agree
	Female	41	2.80	.60	Agree
item23: It is safe to make use of the airport to ensure safety of lives and properties.	Male	59	2.84	.78	Agree
	Female	41	2.43	.70	Disagree
item24: Because of safety. I constantly make use of the airport.	Male	59	2.71	.76	Agree
	Female	41	2.26	.83	Disagree
item25: Safety equipment at the airport is functioning.	Male	59	2.54	.79	Agree
	Female	41	2.36	.82	Disagree
item26: I feel comfortable using the airport due to its high safety guarantee.	Male	59	2.62	.84	Agree
	Female	41	2.26	.77	Disagree
item27: The airport is among the safest airports in Nigeria.	Male	59	2.47	.77	Disagree
	Female	41	2.36	.88	Disagree
item28: Safety polices and regulations are passenger- friendly.	Male	59	2.54	.93	Agree
	Female	41	2.41	.89	Disagree
item29: The airport meets international best practices in airport safety management.	Male	59	2.16	.93	Disagree
	Female	41	1.92	.90	Disagree
item30: Quality safety guarantee makes many airlines to make use of the airport.	Male	59	2.15	.97	Disagree
	Female	41	2.12	1.00	Disagree
Overall Mean	Male	59	2.58	.48	Agree
	Female	41	2.35	.54	Disagree

Source: Field survey 2019.

Table 3 shows the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the impact of safety on patronage at the airport. It shows that the mean ratings of both male and female respondents on items 21 and 22 are more than 2.50 criterion mean. This means that both male and female respondents agree with the conclusions in the item statements. However, the mean ratings of both male and female respondents on

item 27, 29 and 30 are less than mean 2.50 criterion mean indicating that both respondents disagree with the conclusions in the item statements. Also the mean rating of male and female on the item 23,24,25,26 and 28 are more than 2.50 criterion mean. This means that male respondents agree with the conclusions in the item statements while female disagree. The overall mean ratings of 2.58 and 2.35 shows that male agree with the conclusions in the item statements. While female disagree with the conclusions in the item statements in Table 3.

6. Discussion

This discussion is based on the data from research questionnaire, interview guide, observation and opinion from other authors so as to arrive at a conclusion. The first aspect of the study as can be seen in Table One was to understand the available safety facilities in the airport from passengers' viewpoint. Quantitative data in Table 1 shows that most of the conclusions in the item statements were supported by the respondents. This implies that the airport has oxygen mask, life jacket and alert systems for emergency situations, coupled with safety cards to imbibe safety consciousness on travellers. There is also first aid box/medical kits and fire fighting facilities at Akanu Ibiam Airport Enugu. Also that confirmation on functionality of available safety provisions is done prior to the departure of flights from the airport. During the interview session there is also total conformity to these views except in the area of confirming the functionality of safety facilities prior to flight departures. Data from the respondents' response to number ten item statement shows that the airport does not provide special meals for passengers with health issues. This was also confirmed during interview sessions. Unfortunately, there is total disagreement among the two groups of informants in the quantitative survey, on the functionality of the airport fire and carbon monoxide detector (see Item Statement 10 in Table 1). During the interview sessions, a majority of the informants informed that they do not know the level of functionality of the airport fire and carbon monoxide detector. Informants also informed of some other safety equipments at the airport like screening machines and classified bomb detectors; and presence of safety agencies at the airport like Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NIMET), and the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA). However on the average, there is evident that the airport has reasonable safety equipment for the safety of travellers, facilities and airport staff and other visitors. But the functionality of these safety provisions will also be determined by the passengers' perception in the next sub-objective of the study. Some of the previous studies have noted that most of the airports are compelled by the IATA rules to provide reasonable safety provisions at their airports to avoid withdrawal of operational licenses and imminent closures by IATA (Kolesar & Petrof, 2012; Pennin-Gray & Schroeder, 2013; Basnet, 2015; Ceccato & Masci, 2017; Nwankwo, 2017). This may have informed the availability of the identified safety provisions at the airport.

Moreover, the second sub-objective of the study was to investigate travellers' perception of the functionality of safety provisions at the Akanu Ibiam Airport Enugu Nigeria. Table 2 shows that both male and female respondents in the quantitative survey concurred with the conclusions in the item statement 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, & 18 in the questionnaire. The implication of this is that security staffs at the airport are helpful and courteous; activities of dubious staff/passengers/visitors are well checked at the airport; there is strict luggage-carrying capacity; devices checking activities of criminals/terrorists at the airport are functional; airport's passengers' safety cards are helpful; and life jackets at the airport are functional. Unfortunately the respondents disagreed completely on item statements 12 & 14 in Table 2, by affirming that there are unnecessary delays during passenger security screenings and also that the airport is not well maintained accordingly. Then the respondents disagreed among themselves on the issues of food and beverages at the airport having quality control to ensure safety, and safety provision for easy evacuation during emergency. While male respondents agreed to these, their female counterparts disagreed with them. Information sourced during the interview sessions concurred with the majority of the information supplied by the respondents, but disagreed with them on the conclusions in items 11, 13, 19 & 20 of the item statements. On Item number 11, it is evident that travellers perception could vary hence it is personalised likewise Item number 13. A traveller with nasty experience on these two issues (crime and courtesy) at the airport will always have negative perception unlike some others (see also Wong & Yeh, 2003; Set, 2018; Ploch & Zihla, 2016). However, concluding on the general opinion, it can be deduced that items 11 & 13 in Table 2 are perceived positive as noted by the questionnaire respondents. On the items 19 & 20 of Table 2, interview informants agreed with the opinion of female respondents that food and beverage at the airport are not adequately checked, and also there is no provision for easy evacuation during emergency. However, it can be deduced that travellers' perception on the conclusions in items 19 & 20 of the item statement in Table 2, is negative (see also Starr, 2001; Lauderdale et al., 2011; Suleiman, 2012; Pius et al., 2017). On the overall passengers' perceptions on the items in Table 2, the study can conclude that with respect to passengers' perception of safety at Akanu Ibiam International Airport Enugu Nigeria, safety provision at the airport is below average.

In addition, the last sub-objective of the study was to ascertain travellers' perception on impact of safety on the level of patronage at the airport. Out of the ten item statements, respondents disagreed with the conclusions in items 27, 29, & 30 of the item statements by insisting that the airport is not among the safest airports in Nigeria, does not meet international best practices on airport safety management, and that many airlines do not make use of the airport due to poor safety guarantee. The respondents only concurred with the conclusions in items 21 & 22 of the item statement in Table 3 that beverages and food sold at the airport are safe for consumption. Unfortunately, the two groups of respondents differ in their perceptions in most of the items in Table 3 (items 23, 24, 25, 26 & 28). The implication of this is that level of patronage at the airport is negatively affected due to below average

safety guarantee. This was the same with the informants who concluded that level of patronage at the airport is not commensurate with some other neighbouring airports due to insufficient safety provisions. Hence high safety guarantee breeds high patronage (Rust, Zahorik, & Keiningham, 1995; Bassi & Guido, 2006; Martin-Cejas, 2006; Correia & Wirasinghe, 2007). However, from the quantitative and qualitative data, it can be concluded that patronage at the Akanu Ibiam Airport is below average due to the insufficiency of safety provisions at the airport according to travellers' perceptions. This is in consonance with the existing literature that level of safety assurance impacts greatly on the level of patronage (Anderson et al., 1994; Fodness & Murray, 2007; Kovari & Zimanyi, 2010; Gures, 2011; Gray, 2012; Oster et al., 2013; Valkenburchte, 2013; Ploch & Zilha, 2016).

7. Conclusion

This study attempted to understand travellers' perception on the quality of safety provisions at Akanu Ibiam International Airport Enugu Nigeria, and how this is translated to quality patronage at the airport. Trying to understand the true state of a system from customers' viewpoint is among the trending ways of improving the tourism industry (Pyo, 2003; Lauderdale, 2011; Oliver et al., 2012; Valkenburchte, 2013; Penning-Gray & Schroeder, 2013, etc.). Results from the first objective shows that there are adequate safety provisions at the airport from travellers' viewpoint but in the second sub-objective, it is evident that most of these safety provisions are either not in good shape or not adequately utilised to the satisfaction of travellers. And this gave rise to the cumulative response on the third sub-objective that there is below average level of patronage at the airport as a result of inadequate functional safety provision. Raghavan and Rhoades (2005), Page (2009), Nwankwo (2017) and Set (2018) had earlier noted that safety as a concept is among the determinant factors of level of patronage in the tourism industry. Revisit intention is a child of the first or perceived experience. The study concluded that judging from travellers' perception, there is insufficient safety provision at Akanu Ibiam International Airport Enugu, Nigeria. This background has negatively affected the level of patronage at the airport. However, during the study it was deduced that the airport has some limitations and challenges that have affected the level of travellers' perception of safety provision at the airport. While some of these challenges are government induced, some are internal management issues and some are policy issues. For instance, it was gathered that the airport lack coherent airport policy, experience series of poor management policies, incessant poor public funding, have decaying facilities, peddled with loose security network, and incessant closures by the government. These factors have greatly affected the sustainability of the airport and its safety provision (Correia & Wirasinghe, 2007). Observations showed that the airport has all it takes to measure up with its class from other parts of Africa if the following recommendations can be put in place: there is need for the reinforcement of the safety unit at the airport to design and manage safety policies at the airport in line with international best practices; relevant and periodic trainings for staff on airport safety is recommended to check safety lapses and be

in the know of trending safety direction in airport management; adequate funding and sustainable policy issues from the government is recommended towards ensuring the sustainability of the airport; trending and best practices on airport security should be encouraged. These recommendations will improve that quality of safety provision at the airport and at the same time support to a greater extent, sustainable tourism development, if well implemented (George, 2002; Kovari & Zimanyi, 2010; Basnet, 2015; Amadeus, 2016). Incidentally the airport was closed five months after this research, to undergo serious renovations to boost its safety standard and international acceptance; many thanks to the Federal Government of Nigeria in conjunction with the Enugu State Government for their giant strides in repositioning the airport in line with the global best practices. We hope to see a rebranded airport with quality safety guarantee for travellers with consequential improvement on patronage at the airport.

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