

An Analysis of Users'/Customers' Perceptions of the Nigerian Rail Transport Services

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Abstract: Rail transport has and continues to play a key role in the movement of goods and passengers in many countries around the world including Nigeria. However, while rail transport continues to enjoy relative importance in terms of investment, growth and contribution to the national economy in several countries, it has suffered and declined (in terms of modal share contribution which has led to decreased patronage) in Nigeria. However, there are new developments and investment on rail and some measures are being put in place to revive the Nigerian rail transport system. As these new developments and rehabilitations are going on, it will be imperative to know what the users/customers think as well, so that they are not left out because under normal circumstances, customers need transport services and not rail transport services. Therefore, if they were not satisfied with rail transport services they would simply turn to other modes of transport. As part of an on-going PhD research project, this paper focuses on the perceptions of Nigerian rail transport users/customers regarding the quality of rail services provided. Data was collected by the use of structured/semi-structured questionnaires, which were distributed, to the respondents. The study sample included 474 respondents between the age range of 20-70 out of which just 21 (4.4%) have used rail transport; this low patronage figure is as a result of the long time neglect of the Nigerian rail transport system while 474 (100%) of the correspondents use road transport daily which has led to an increasing pressure on road transport and infrastructures. Data was collected respectively from the following cities: Lagos, Warri, Ughelli and Benin.

Key words: Rail transport, railway, transport service.

1. Introduction

Rail transportation has continued to play a key role in the movement of goods and passengers in many countries of the world. In most countries such as the European and North American countries, rail transport has and continues to play an important role in bringing about socio-economic development. It contributes substantially to the movement of passengers and freight. The building of railways brings about the creation of jobs and helps spread information faster. It helps reduce the cost of transporting or moving goods from one place to the other thereby making the sale of goods cheaper and affordable. When integrated with other modes of transport such as road, air and water, it brings about a reduction in heavy traffic [1-4].

However, while rail transport continues to enjoy relative importance in terms of investment, growth and

contribution to the national economy in several countries, it has suffered neglect and relegation in Nigeria, resulting in a decline in its modal share contribution. The railway transport system in Nigeria is inefficient and has barely developed over the years following independence in 1960, compared to railways in other countries [1, 4-7].

Nevertheless, there have been some efforts at reviving the Nigerian rail transport system. Old and unused railways are being commissioned and brought into service, new locomotives have been bought. The Port Harcourt-Maiduguri rail line is being rehabilitated. Under the modernisation phase, the construction of the Itakpe-Ajaokuta-Warri and Abuja-Kaduna standard gauge lines are in progress. A light rail system is being developed in Lagos sponsored by the Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA) [8, 9]. The construction of the Lagos-

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Ibadan standard gauge double track would soon commence following the award of the contract by the federal government [4].

As these new developments and rehabilitations are going on, it will be imperative to know what the users/customers think as well, there have been quite a number of research/articles on rail transport in Nigeria, the problems and ongoing developments but none is been focused on the users'/customers' perspectives and as such, it seems they are been left out. Sometimes companies are misguided by the notion that customers depend on them; the truth of the matter is that companies so much depend on the customers. The level of satisfaction a customer has with a company has profound effects. In other words, the level of customers' satisfaction has a positive or negative effect on patronage and profitability. Such is the case with the Nigerian Rail transport system, hence the need for a users'/customers' perception survey because under normal circumstances, customers need transport services and not rail transport services. Therefore, if they were not satisfied with rail transport services they would simply turn to other modes of transport.

2. Brief History of the Nigerian Rail Transport

The railway transportation system in Nigeria has been considered as the oldest and perhaps has the greatest carrying capacity in overland transport modes in Nigeria. Railway development in Nigeria began in 1898 with the Lagos – Ibadan line that was completed in 1901 [10-12]. The single-narrow-gauge rail line that was constructed during the colonial era was the only mode of freight movement for a long period of time. The Lagos – Ibadan line was extended to Jebba in 1909, and this line later joined the Kano – Baro line in 1915. In the East of Nigeria, the Port Harcourt line reached Enugu in 1916. Between 1916 and 1966, the rail line was connected to towns and cities like Jos, Kaduna, Zaria, Namoda, Nigwu, Ifo, Maiduguri and Gombe. Alesa Eleme oil refinery to Eleheruwa in Port- Harcourt

was connected to Enugu line in 1966 [1]. The Nigerian railway network comprises 3,505 kilometers of narrow gauge (1.067m), single track running parallel through northwest to southwest and from southeast to northeast of the country. 1788km of this network is on 1,600 sharp curves between 4 and 10 degrees, and this has reduced the maximum permissible speed to 65km/h [4, 6].

After independence in 1960, there was no major track extensions made by the government. In essence, the existing network is the one constructed by the colonial administration. The total neglect of the railway system by successive governments had plunged the Nigeria railway system into an unconscious state. After twelve years of independence, both the volume of passengers and goods carried by the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) started dropping and the NRC began recording financial loss, a trend that has not only continued but has increased in enormity. In 1981 alone, the corporation recorded a huge loss of millions of naira and it has been a continuous loss and a persistent downward trend in Nigerian railway's fortunes. The rapid increase in the use of motorized transport has led to an abrupt decline in railway patronage both in passengers and freights [11-13]. The consequence of the poor performance of the rail subsector is the undue pressure being mounted on the road transport, which has led to lots of damages to roads and frequent road traffic accidents.

3. Sampling and Data Collection

Data was collected by the use of structured/semi-structured questionnaires, which were distributed, to the respondents. The study sample included 474 respondents comprising both male and female between the age range of 20-70 out of which just 21 (4.4%) have used rail transport; this low patronage figure is as a result of the long-time neglect of the Nigerian rail transport system while 474 (100%) of the correspondents use road transport daily which has led to an increasing pressure on road transport and

infrastructures. Data was collected respectively from the following cities: Lagos, Warri, Ughelli and Benin. According to the data collected, most of the rail transport

services were rated “POOR” which identifies the need for more improvement. The responses have been presented in Figs. 1-15.

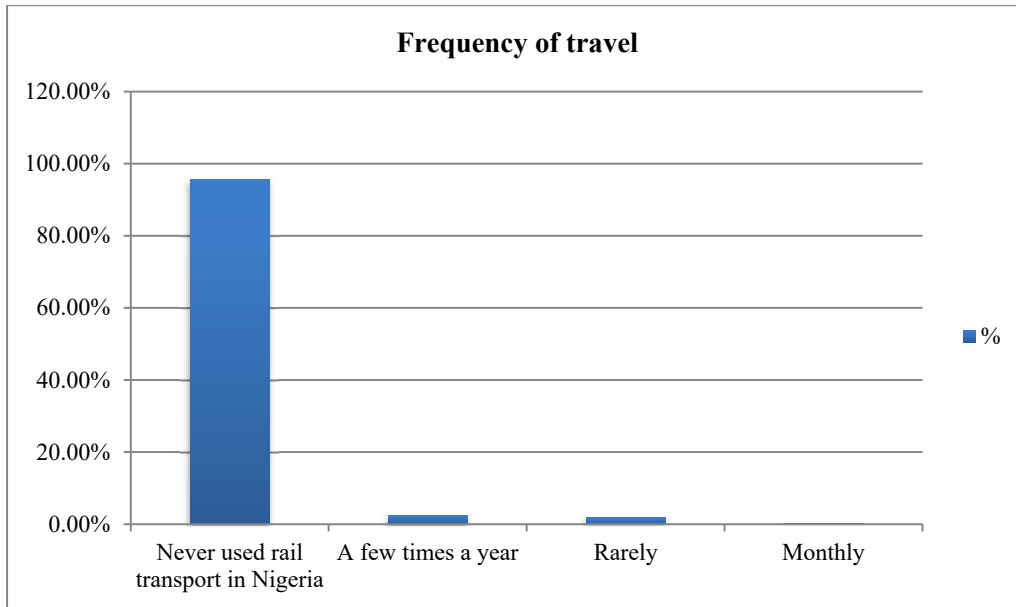


Fig. 1 Frequency of travel.

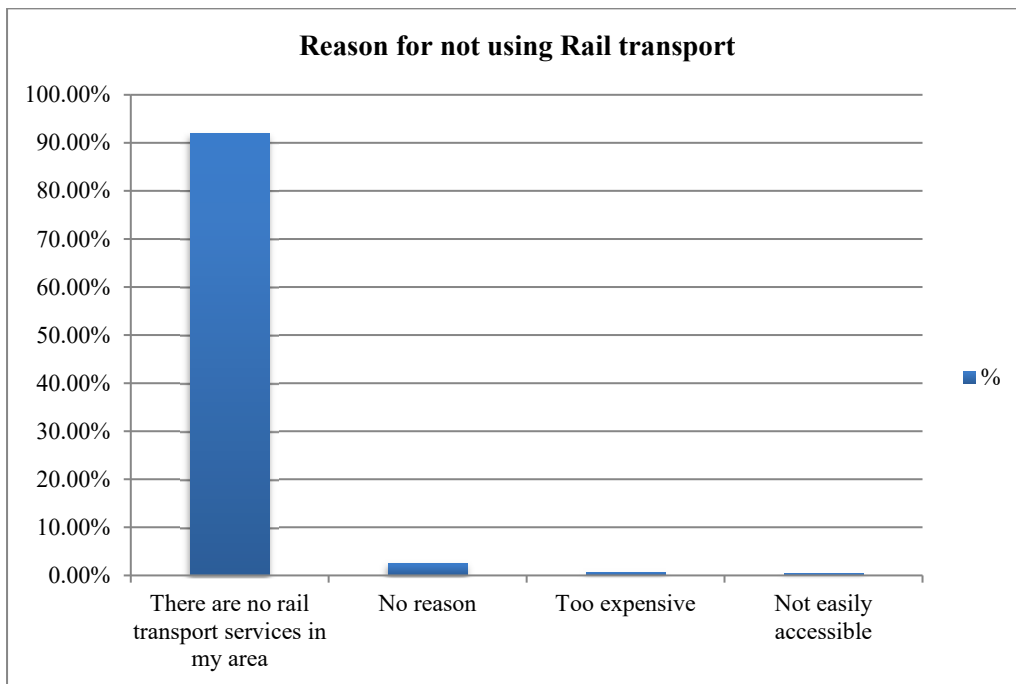


Fig. 2 Reason for not using rail transport.

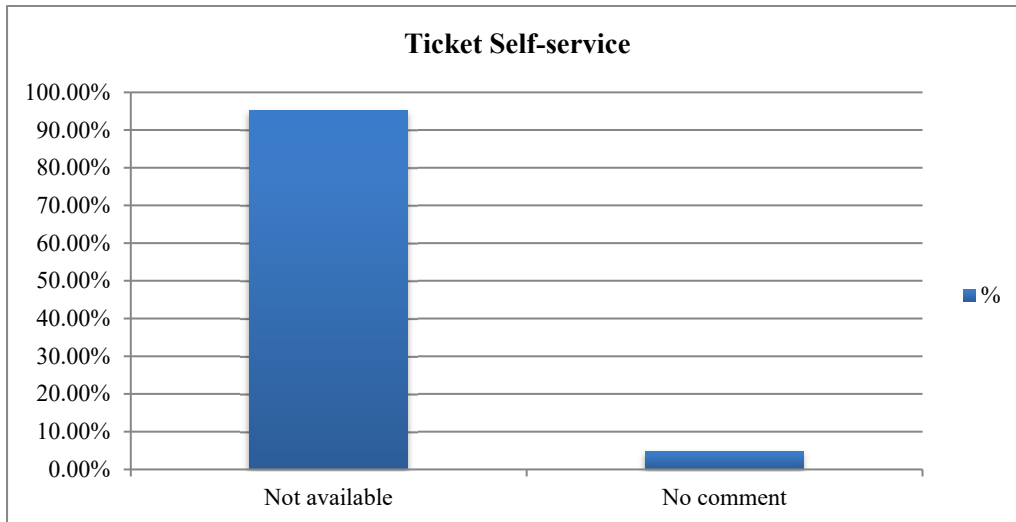


Fig. 3 Ticket self-service ratings.

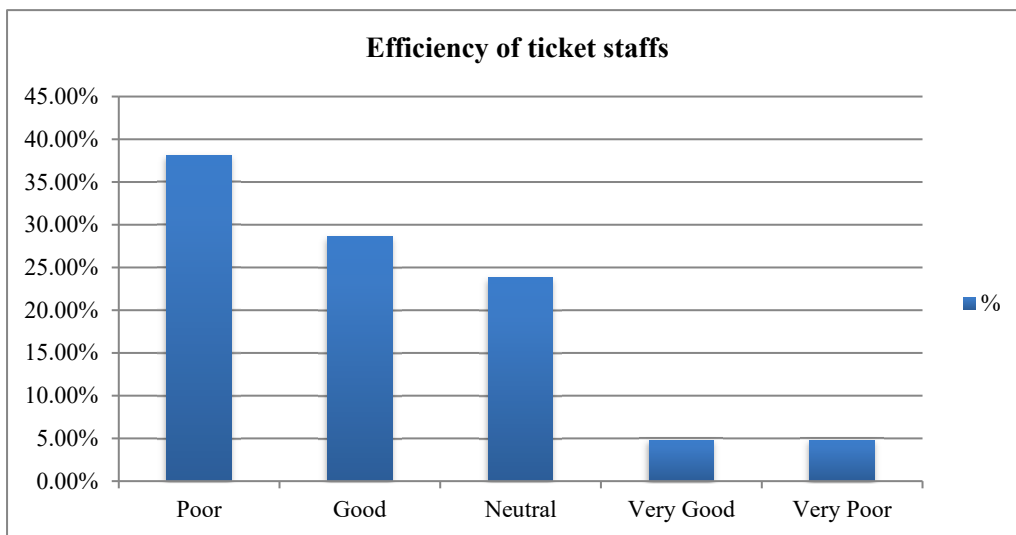


Fig. 4 Efficiency of ticket staffs' ratings.

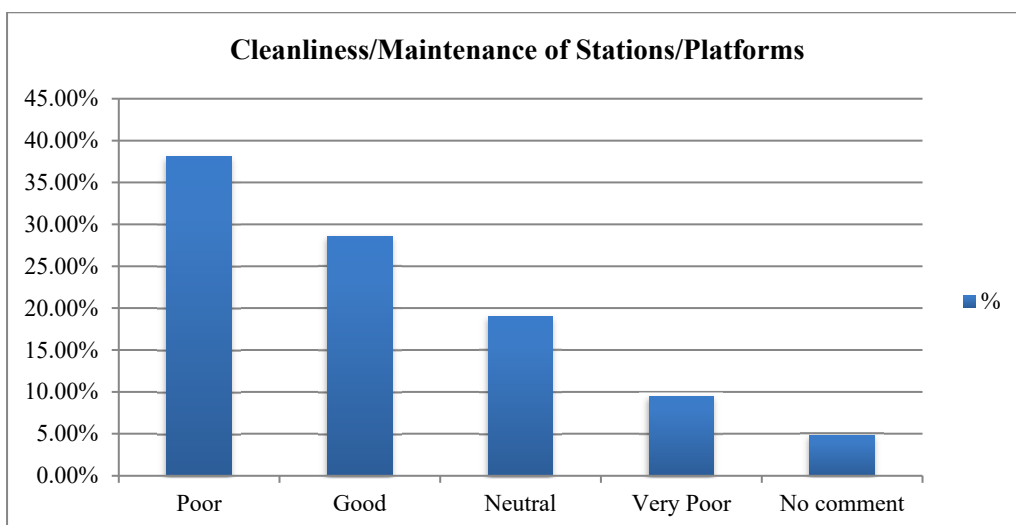


Fig. 5 Cleanliness/maintenance of stations/platforms ratings.

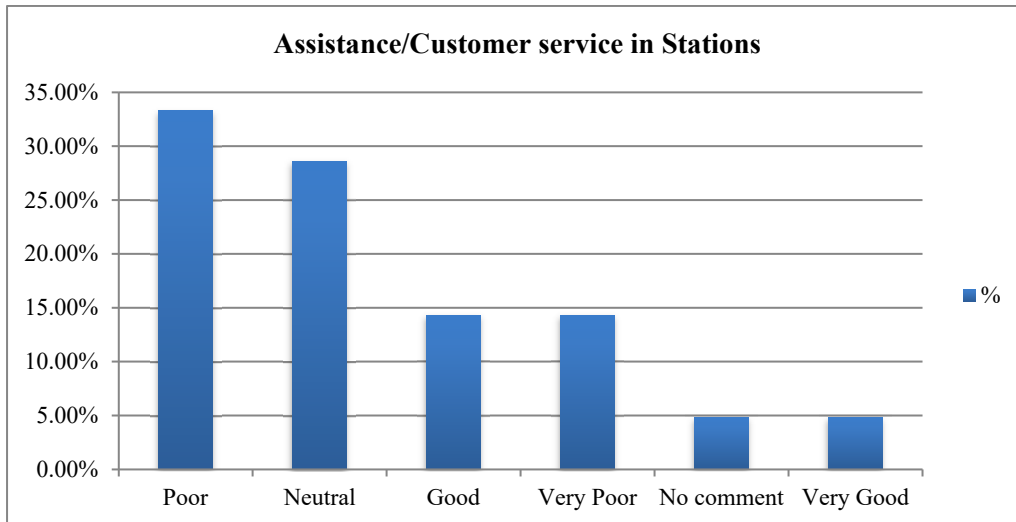


Fig. 6 Assistance/customer service in stations ratings.

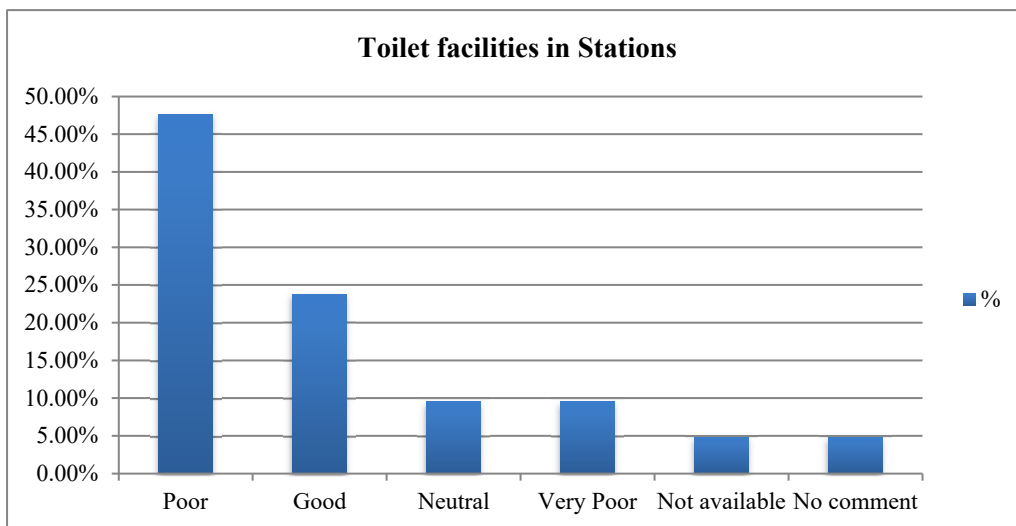


Fig. 7 Toilet facilities in stations ratings.

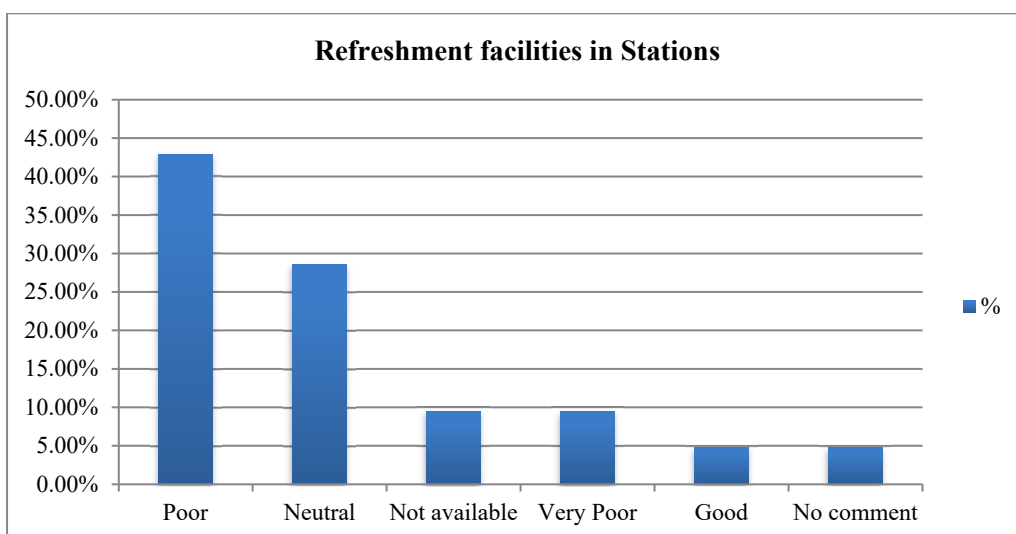


Fig. 8 Refreshment facilities in stations' ratings.

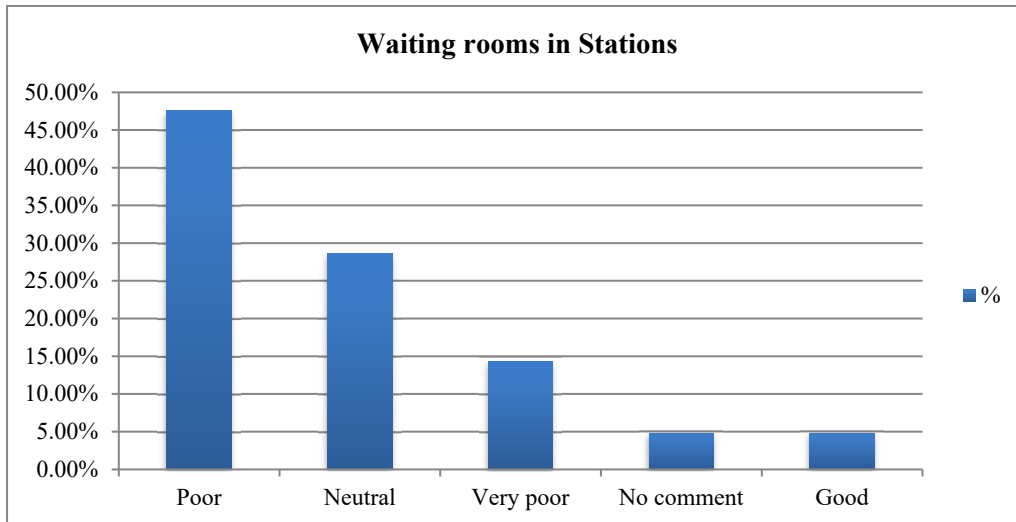


Fig. 9 Waiting rooms in stations' rating.

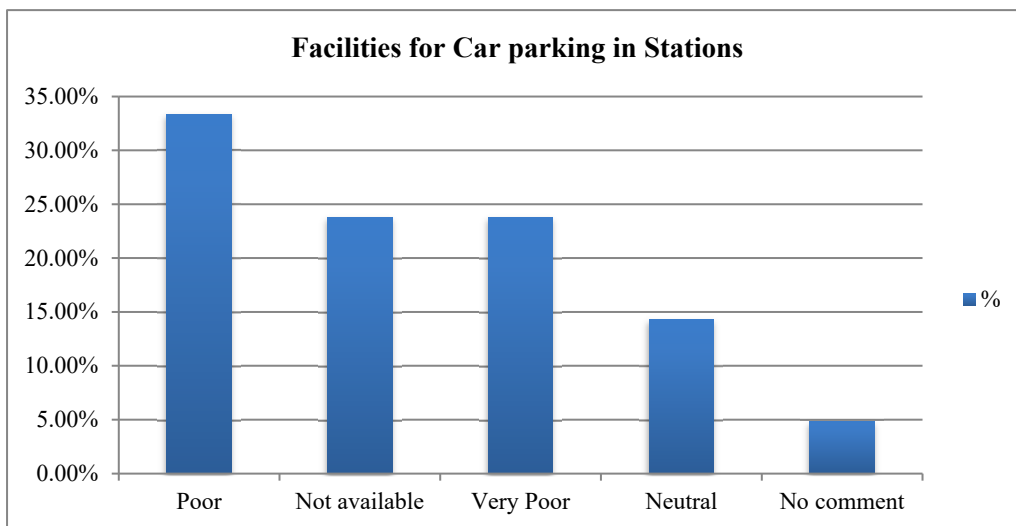


Fig. 10 Facilities for car parking in stations' ratings.

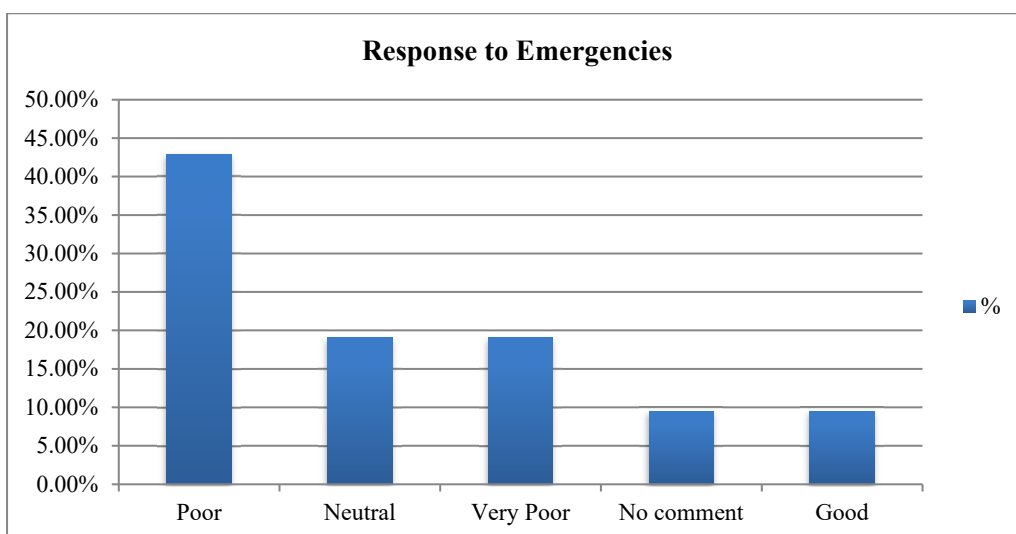


Fig. 11 Response to emergencies ratings.

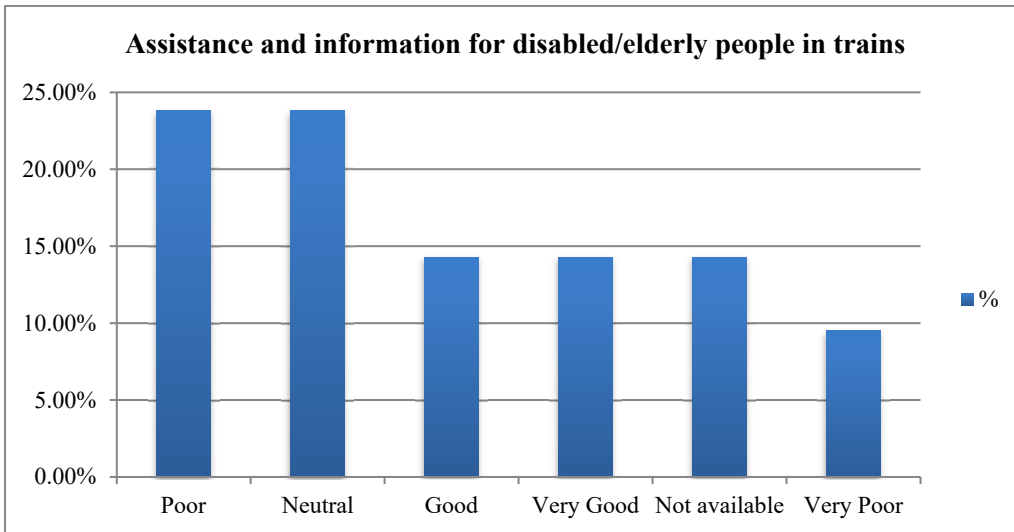


Fig. 12 Assistance and information for disabled/elderly people in trains' ratings.

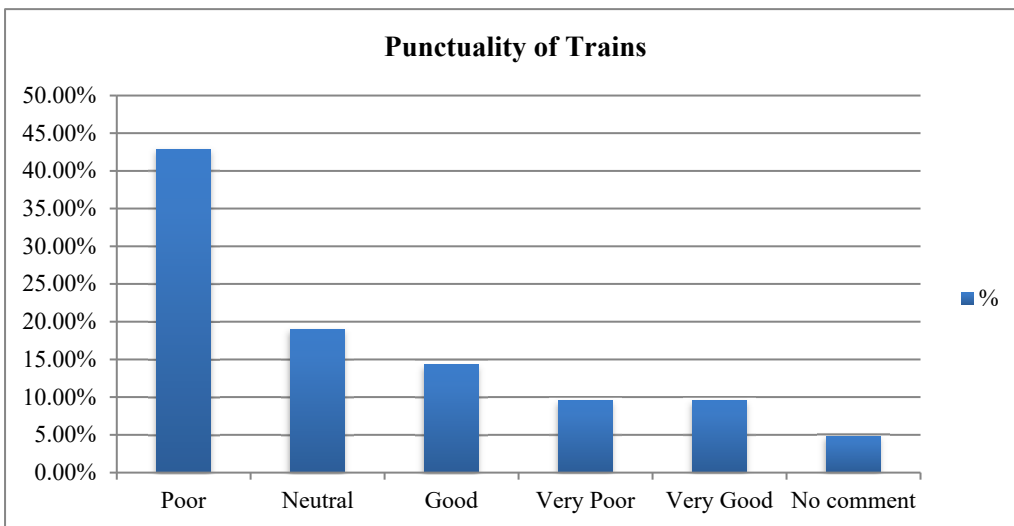


Fig. 13 Punctuality of trains' ratings.

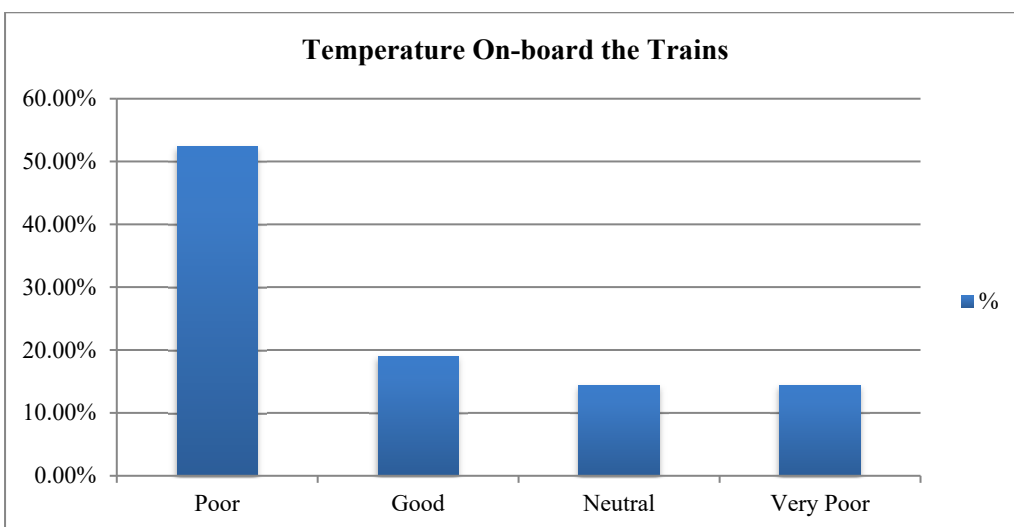


Fig. 14 Temperature on-board ratings.

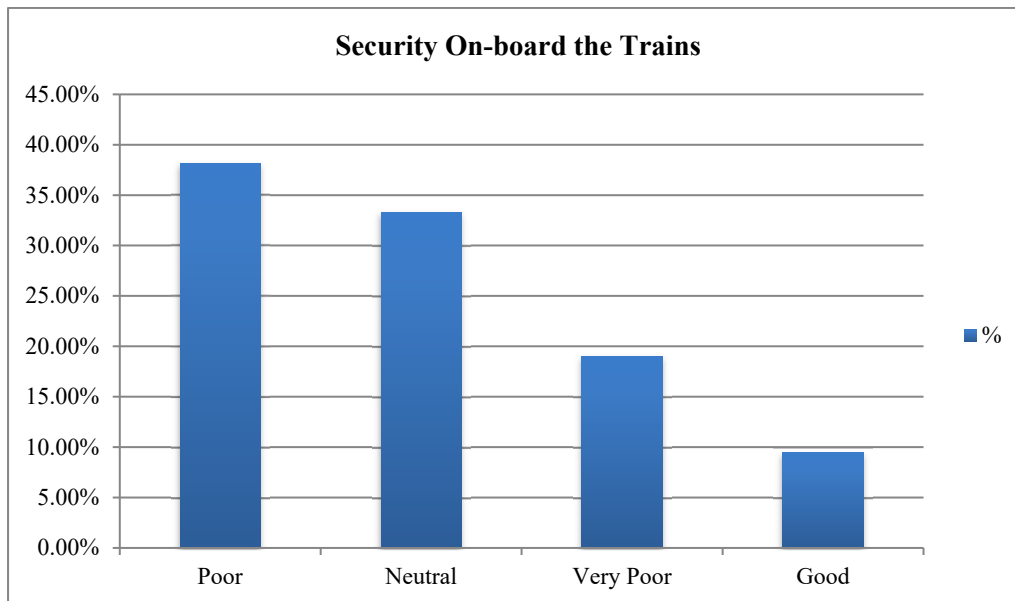


Fig. 15 Security on-board ratings.

4. Conclusion

In view of the fact that rail transport plays an important role in the development of the economy, the importance of a users'/customers' perception survey cannot be undermined since the level of satisfaction a customer has with a company has profound effects. From the survey response, most of the services such as: ticket self-service, efficiency of ticketing staffs, cleanliness and maintenance of stations/platforms, assistance/customer service in stations, toilet facilities in stations, refreshment facilities in stations, waiting rooms in stations, facilities for car parking in stations, responses to emergency, assistance and information for disabled/elderly people, punctuality of trains, temperature on-board, security on-board were rated as been "POOR", thereby identifying the need for expansion and better improvement of the Nigerian rail transport system.

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