Assessing Public Enterprise Reform in Nigeria: A case study of the CCECC/NRC Lagos-Ibadan Railway Project

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the success of public enterprise reform in Nigeria by using an analytical case study of the Lagos-Ibadan Standard Gauge Railway, which was built in collaboration between the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC). The study, which is guided by Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Theory and Institutional Theory of Reform, seeks to assess whether the reform improved operational efficiency, service quality, cost-effectiveness, timeliness, and institutional performance in Nigeria's railway industry. The study uses a qualitative case study design. The population framework includes official NRC documents, project reports, policy papers, academic literature, media releases, and public response. Due to the documentary character of the study, no specified sample size was required; instead, relevant materials were purposefully chosen. Data were gathered exclusively from secondary sources, such as official papers, scholarly works, and primary sources such as social media comments. To discover prominent patterns related to project performance and stakeholder perceptions, qualitative content analysis and preponderance-of-opinion methodologies were employed. The findings reveal that the CCECC/NRC relationship considerably enhanced infrastructure delivery, expanded passenger mobility, reduced travel time, promoted skill transfer, and developed a modern rail line with expanding economic value. However, obstacles remain, including low freight patronage, high port-related logistics costs, institutional deficiencies, inadequate intermodal integration, safety issues, and sustainability hazards associated with underutilized freight capacity. The report suggests improving stakeholder cooperation, harmonising port logistics costs, raising public awareness, improving infrastructure security, expanding local technical capacity, and conducting periodic independent performance audits. It finds that, while the Lagos-Ibadan railway transformation indicates the potential for PPP-driven restructuring, long-term success necessitates deeper institutional strengthening and comprehensive transport sector changes.

Keywords: CCECC/NRC, Freight patronage, Port logistics Costs, Public enterprise reform, Railway projects, Sustainability.

1. Introduction

Public enterprises have historically played an important role in Nigeria's socioeconomic growth, particularly in providing key infrastructure, utilities, and transportation services. However, decades of ineffective management practices, bureaucratic bottlenecks, corruption, and chronic underinvestment have severely harmed the performance of these businesses (Awofeso & Irabor, 2021; Lecuna, Cohen & Mandakovic, 2020). As a result, successive Nigerian administrations have implemented a series of public enterprise reforms aimed at increasing efficiency, lowering fiscal burdens, and improving service delivery. Public enterprise reform, whether through commercialization, privatization, restructuring, or public-private partnerships (PPPs), has emerged as a critical policy intervention for promoting national development and infrastructure modernization (Whiteside, 2020; Kaletnik & Lutkovska, 2021).

Nigeria's current reform program has been heavily influenced by worldwide trends pushing for the state to shift from a direct operator of businesses to an enabler of private-sector engagement (Ololube, 2025). PPPs have emerged as a means of decreasing the financial and operational load on the government while utilizing private-sector knowledge, finance, and managerial discipline (Olugbenga, Bali, Olutoye & Ibitoye, 2025). This strategic shift is evident in Nigeria's transportation sector reforms, with railways serving as a showcase for PPP innovation. The Lagos-Ibadan Standard Gauge Railway, built by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and operated in conjunction with the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC), is one of the country's most significant transportation reform initiatives.

The Lagos-Ibadan Railway, which opened in 2021, is West Africa's first double-track standard gauge railway, connecting Lagos, Nigeria's commercial hub, to Ibadan, a significant industrial city in the southwest (Olojede, Akinosun, Oluborode, Afolabi & Oladeji, 2023; NRC, 2024). Its strategic relevance arises from its ability to decongest roadways, improve freight mobility, shorten passenger journey times, promote port-to-inland connectivity, and stimulate regional economic growth (Kunambi & Zheng, 2025). By 2024, the railway had reportedly transported over two million passengers and functioned securely for more than 1,000 days, demonstrating its expanding importance in Nigeria's mobility environment (Chinonso & Jonah, 2023).

The NRC's recent decision to offer CCECC a three-year license (2024-2027) to run freight services on the Lagos-Ibadan rail route demonstrates the development of the PPP model in Nigeria's railway reform. This is the first time a private operator has been formally licensed to operate standard-gauge freight services in the country (Odima, Obosi & Jonyo, 2023). This structure poses major reform problems, including: Is the CCECC/NRC cooperation a truly viable model for public enterprise restructuring? Has the cooperation increased operational efficiency, service quality, cost-effectiveness, and timeliness when compared to previous performance? What are the institutional, administrative, and governance limitations that the partnership faces, and how do these limits influence the overall outcomes of the reform initiative?

These questions are critical because the Nigerian Railway Corporation has long struggled with weak institutional capacity, aging infrastructure, insufficient funding, and poor service delivery - challenges that previous reform efforts failed to fully address (Ojo, 2025; Omotayo, 2020). As a result, the Lagos-Ibadan project offers a unique opportunity to test whether current PPP-based reforms can bridge these historical gaps and deliver long-term improvements. Furthermore, the success or failure of this project has broader implications for current national reforms, such as the planned restructuring of NNPC refineries, federal divestment from joint-venture oil assets, and new inter-state railway PPPs envisioned by the 2023 Railway Act (Iheukwumere, 2022).

Despite the project's high profile, scholarly research into Nigeria's railway improvements is scarce. Existing research has primarily focused on infrastructure funding, technical performance, and economic implications (Ojo, 2025; Ogunbiyi, Abalubu & Steve, 2024), with minimal attention on determining the effectiveness of public enterprise reform models in railway operations. Few studies have examined the Lagos-Ibadan project's impact on public business reform outcomes such as efficiency improvements, institutional transformation, stakeholder satisfaction, and long-term viability. Furthermore, empirical evidence on the operational dynamics of the CCECC/NRC partnership - including its governance structure, decision-making modalities, contract enforcement methods, and value-for-money implications - is limited. This study seeks to close these gaps by conducting an analytical evaluation of the reform results related to the Lagos-Ibadan railway cooperation.

This study was embarked on because of Nigeria's increasing reliance on private-public partnerships (PPP) as a strategy of public enterprise reform to verify whether this reform strategy has yielded any significant impacts in the form of enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services. The Lagos-Ibadan Railway project provides a convenient frame of reference. The current infrastructure finance crisis in Nigeria has increased the government's reliance on private cash and technical skills, emphasizing the significance of this study. As population expansion and economic diversification drive up demand for efficient mass transit and freight logistics, measuring the effectiveness of PPP-driven reforms becomes critical for evidence-based policy-making (Kim & Kwa, 2020). Furthermore, the growing trend of foreign-led partnerships, notably with Chinese state-owned businesses, needs a thorough analysis of how such collaborations impact local capacity development, technology transfer, and institutional sustainability (Lauria, 2025).

The purpose of this study is to examine the success of public enterprise reforms undertaken on the Lagos-Ibadan railway line through the CCECC/NRC partnership. It evaluates the project's performance in terms of operational efficiency, cost-effectiveness, timeliness, service quality, and institutional strengthening. It also discusses the challenges faced during implementation, such as financing limits, managerial tensions, security concerns, and stakeholder collaboration, as well as potential improvements. The report focuses on the Lagos-Ibadan railway project as a sample example of Nigeria's larger railway reform plan.

Overall, this introduction lays the groundwork for a thorough investigation of how successfully Nigeria's public enterprise reforms are working in the railway sector, if the Lagos-Ibadan PPP model is repeatable, and what lessons may be learned for future national infrastructure reforms. By delving deeply into this case, the study hopes to contribute both conceptually and practically to the increasing discourse on public enterprise reform in developing economies.

2. Literature Review

This section presents a review of related theoretical and empirical literature on public enterprise reform and public-private partnerships, especially in railway infrastructure. Issues on public enterprise reform concepts, theories, operational performance, service quality, institutional strengthening, and public-private partnerships as well as a few empirical studies, in general, are analyzed in this study. In this section, knowledge gaps that need to be filled and justify this present study, is presented, along with theoretical grounding that would facilitate the appraisal of the Lagos –Ibadan Railway Project under the Public Private

Partnership of CCECC-Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC).

2.1 Theoretical Review

This section examines the theoretical perspectives underpinning the study of public enterprise reforms and public-private partnerships in infrastructure development. It reviews relevant theories like the Public-Private Partnership Theory, and the Institutional Theory of Reform. These theories provide the conceptual basis for understanding the CCECC–Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) partnership and guide the interpretation of the study's findings on the effectiveness of the Lagos-Ibadan railway reform initiative.

2.1.1 Public–Private Partnership (PPP) Theory

The intellectual foundation of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Theory can be traced back to the works of Hodge and Greve (2007), as well as Grimsey and Lewis (2017), who defined PPPs as long-term contractual relationships in which government and private-sector actors share responsibilities, risks, financing, and operational obligations in the delivery of public infrastructure and services. According to PPP Theory, public-sector inefficiencies caused by bureaucracy, limited funding, and a lack of technical capacity can be eliminated through structured collaboration that leverages private-sector experience, innovation, and management discipline. The approach also proposes that the government retains regulatory and supervisory powers, while the private partner ensures efficient construction, maintenance, and service delivery through performance-based agreements.

PPP Theory emphasizes several principles, including risk sharing, which assigns financial and operational risks to the party best positioned to manage them; value for money, which requires partnerships to produce better results than traditional public procurement; and long-term contractual commitments, which ensure sustainability and service quality (Grimsey & Lewis, 2017). The idea also emphasizes transparency, performance monitoring, and stakeholder involvement as necessary factors for successful partnership outcomes.

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2.1.2 Institutional Theory of Reform

Meyer and Rowan (1977) developed Institutional Theory, which was further expanded by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), who stated that organizational behavior and performance are influenced not just by internal decisions but also by external institutional constraints. According to the notion, organizational innovations are frequently driven by legislative requirements, societal expectations, professional norms, and political pressures. Institutions, which include formal structures, legal frameworks, cultural norms, and governance systems, impact how reforms are begun, executed, and perpetuated. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified three mechanisms by which institutions shape organizations: coercive pressures (laws, regulations, government directives), normative pressures (professional standards, industry expectations), and mimetic pressures (emulating successful global models to reduce uncertainty).

Institutional Theory explains why public enterprise changes in many developing nations, including Nigeria, are frequently motivated by calls for efficiency, accountability, and modernization. It also emphasizes the importance of institutional capability in reform outcomes, including governance quality, management competency, transparency, and regulatory independence. Where institutions are weak, changes confront implementation challenges such as corruption, political interference, inadequate coordination, and opposition to change (Panya & Awuor, 2023).

In this study, Institutional Theory helps to explain the circumstances surrounding the Lagos-Ibadan railway reform. The CCECC/NRC cooperation arose as a result of a combination of coercive pressures (government transport policies and legislative reforms), normative pressures (international railway modernization standards), and mimetic forces (African replication of China-supported railway models). The theory sheds light on how Nigeria's institutional context, which is characterized by developing regulatory frameworks, low technical ability, and governance issues, influences the partnership's effectiveness. It also serves as a lens for assessing whether railway reform has resulted in greater institutional performance, stronger accountability mechanisms, and increased public-sector capability. Thus, Institutional Theory is critical for understanding the larger systemic elements that influence public enterprise reform results in Nigeria.

2.2 Conceptual Review

This section reviews the major concepts relevant to the study and explains their meaning within the context of public enterprise reform and railway infrastructure development. It discusses key concepts such as nature of reform, public-private partnerships, privatisation versus concession, and the implication for Lagos State.

2.2.1 Nature of reform

Reforming public enterprises is a multifaceted process that extends beyond single policy acts (e.g., asset sales) to include governance redesign, regulatory re-framing, institutional restructuring, and changes in managerial practice and accountability mechanisms Janssens & Steyaert, 2025). Modern reform literature emphasizes both functional and normative aspects: functionally, reforms aim to improve allocative and productive efficiency, financial viability, and service delivery; normatively, reforms seek transparency, accountability, and legitimacy in public service provision (Adekoya, 2023; Jayasundera, 2021).

Reforms in developing nations are usually triggered by budgetary stress, poor operational outcomes, international conditions, or political agendas to encourage private investment and technical transfer (Kaiser, Kamal & Zafarullah, 2025; Ocansey, Oppong & Antwi, 2025). Scholars emphasize that reforms are path-dependent: historical institutions, vested interests, and administrative capability influence not just the choice of reform instruments but also the likelihood of successful implementation (Williams, 2021). Empirical studies from Nigeria show varied results - while some sectors experienced efficiency gains following restructuring, others showed limited improvements due to poor execution, political involvement, and capacity limitations (Alley, Hassan, Wali & Suleiman, 2023; Erumebor, 2025).

2.2.2 Partnership consideration (PPPs, contractors, joint operations)

Almeile, Chipulu, Ojiako, Vahidi, and Marshall (2024), partnerships, particularly Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), have emerged as the preferred delivery method for significant infrastructure projects in fiscally restricted environments. PPP literature emphasizes three rationales: mobilizing private funding, transferring certain risks to private agents (construction/operational risk), and leveraging private-sector efficiency and innovation while maintaining public oversight for social goals (Odhiambo, 2023; Tilde, 2023). However, the literature warns that PPPs are not cure-alls: their success is dependent on clear legal and regulatory frameworks, transparent procurement, realistic risk allocation, credible contracting/enforcement mechanisms, and effective public capacity to manage complex contracts (Sendra Pons, Comeig, Mas-Tur, & Garzón, 2022). In the context of rail projects, research identifies additional technical and governance risks—interoperability, maintenance funding, safety oversight, and coordination between infrastructure owners and operators—that necessitate strong institutional arrangements and ongoing political commitment. Nigeria-focused research emphasizes governance obstacles (policy inconsistency, inadequate procurement institutions, political favoritism) that can undermine PPP gains unless reform initiatives simultaneously build public institutions. The Lagos-Ibadan case, where CCECC built and provides operational support to the NRC, demonstrates both the promise (Ezedinachi, 2025; Ezeani, & Ngoka, 2022) and partnering complication (licensing, freight operations, institutional coordination), recorded in the literature.

2.2.3 Privatisation versus concession: concepts and empirical insights

The literature distinguishes between privatisation (the transfer of ownership from the state to private owners) and concession (giving private parties the right to operate and administer a public asset for a specific length of time while ownership remains public). Privatization is associated with structural ownership changes, potential one-time fiscal gains, and long-term shifts in public control (Chen & Lu, 2024; Howell, Jang, Kim & Weisbach, 2022); concessions are contractual arrangements that emphasize time-limited operational control, performance obligations, and regulatory oversight without immediate asset title transfer. According to comparative literature, the policy choice between these instruments is determined by sector characteristics (natural monopolies vs. contestable markets), public policy goals (universal access, affordability), political economy considerations, and the state's desire to maintain long-term strategic control (Bulfone, 2023; Özveren, 2025).

Empirical assessments from Nigeria and other contexts show mixed results: full privatization has sometimes resulted in efficiency but has also raised concerns about service access and regulatory capture; concessions and PPPs have provided flexible ways to exploit private expertise while preserving public stewardship, but they necessitate robust contracting and monitoring to avoid poor value-for-money (Mohamadi, 2021). Concessions are preferred in many transport and utility cases where the government wishes to retain strategic ownership (Almarri, 2023) while attracting private operators to improve operations—a pattern mirrored in Nigeria's use of concession and licensing models for transportation infrastructure.Critical literature also demonstrates that the apparent success of privatisation/concession is heavily reliant on pre-transaction restructuring, competitive bidding, transparent selection, and post-award supervision—factors that are frequently lacking in low-capacity governance environments, resulting in suboptimal reform outcomes.

2.2.4 Synthesis and implications for the Lagos–Ibadan case

Across these strands, three intersecting themes emerge that are particularly pertinent to the Lagos-Ibadan railway study: (1) institutional readiness—

effective reform necessitates capable public agencies capable of designing, procuring, and supervising complex partnerships; (2) instrument fit to objective—concession/licensing models are frequently more appropriate than outright privatization for strategic transportation assets when public control is desired; and (3) design and enforcement—value for money is dependent on realistic risk allocation, transparent procurement, and ongoing regulatory oversight. These topics serve as the framework for this study's empirical issues, which include whether the CCECC/NRC collaboration has provided sustained efficiency and service outcomes, if the licensing/concession method is consistent with policy goals, and how institutional restrictions affect reform success.

2.3 Institutional readiness—effective reform necessitates capable public agencies capable of designing, procuring, and supervising complex partnerships

Chezue and Mrope (2024) investigated how procurement planning methods and regulations affect value for money in public works projects at Ardhi University. The study employed a case study design with a purposively selected sample of 100 respondents. Primary data were gathered through questionnaires and interviews, with secondary data sourced from journals and papers. The study demonstrated a positive and substantial association between procurement methods and value for money ($r = .723$, $p < .001$).

Alamu et al. (2024) investigated the effectiveness of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in alleviating Nigeria's infrastructure deficit. The study used a desk-based review strategy, pulling participants from existing empirical studies, policy documents, and PPP case reports. The authors used purposeful sampling of relevant publications to evaluate secondary data via qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that PPP implementation is hampered by corruption, financial deficits, a lack of political will, and low institutional capability. However, PPPs still offer prospects if governance frameworks are reinforced.

Casady et al. (2020) sought to rethink Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) under the New Public Governance (NPG) paradigm by investigating how institutional maturity influences PPP use. The study used a conceptual-analytical approach, building on existing PPP theory, institutional frameworks, and US PPP market instances. The authors used purposeful sampling of scholarly literature and sector examples to conduct institutional analysis on three capabilities: legitimacy, trust, and capacity. The findings revealed that PPP effectiveness is dependent on the development of these institutional aspects.

The study sought to investigate the strategic internationalization, entrance strategies, and competitive behavior of Global Terminal Operators (GTOs/ITOs) in the constantly changing container port business. Using a doctoral-level longitudinal study design, the population included large international terminal operators, with purposive sampling of enterprises defined by Drewry (2020). The study used quantitative time-series analysis and strategic management frameworks to evaluate integration tactics, ownership arrangements, and joint venture trends. The findings revealed that institutional ownership, governance styles, and market globalization all have a significant impact on entry and expansion strategies.

Casady et al. (2019) wanted to assess how institutional maturity influences the public sector's governance capabilities while developing infrastructure PPPs. The study employed a conceptual-analytical approach with a population gathered from international PPP literature and institutional case studies, with major sources on PPP governance purposefully selected. The chapter used institutional maturity analysis to determine how norms, regulations, and coordination mechanisms influence PPP effectiveness. The findings revealed that weak legitimacy, limited trust, and insufficient institutional capability impede PPP development.

Opara (2018) investigated how value for money (VfM) is achieved in public-private partnerships by analyzing Alberta's P3 projects completed since 2003. The study's population was drawn from P3 stakeholders, and 35 participants were purposefully selected for in-depth interviews. The research used qualitative theme analysis to evaluate VfM evaluation processes, risk transfer assumptions, and political impacts on procurement decisions. The findings revealed that, while risk transfer is critical to VfM development, it is frequently overstated—particularly in terms of planning risks—while concerns about openness and legitimacy undermine evaluation quality.

Burger and Hawkesworth (2011) sought to compare PPPs and traditional public procurement by investigating how value-for-money (VfM) assessments influence government procurement decisions. The study surveyed all OECD and selected non-OECD countries using a structured questionnaire as the sampling instrument, supplemented by four carefully chosen country case studies—France, Germany, Korea, and the United Kingdom. The data were analyzed using comparative policy analysis and cross-country benchmarking. The findings revealed that political incentives, accounting restrictions, and uneven ex-ante/ex-post VfM testing frequently affect procurement decisions.

Klijn and Teisman (2000) attempted to explain the rise of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) as a "third way" institutional arrangement between pure market provision and conventional government production. Using a conceptual and analytical assessment, the study's population was drawn from European public-sector reforms, policy documents, and theoretical literature. The authors used purposive sampling of significant PPP examples and governance studies to conduct interpretive institutional analysis to investigate how PPPs combine governmental control with market efficiency. According to the findings, PPPs are driven by economic challenges, social service demands, and the need for collaborative governance.

2.4 Gaps in Literature

Despite a growing body of literature on public-private partnerships, infrastructure delivery, and public enterprise reform, significant gaps remain about the Lagos-Ibadan railway and the CCECC/NRC partnership. Existing research rarely conducts performance-based evaluations of railway changes in Nigeria, notably in terms of operational efficiency, cost-effectiveness, punctuality, service quality, and institutional strengthening—the primary characteristics of this study. While previous research has identified difficulties such as corruption, insufficient institutional capacity, inconsistent rules, and political influence in PPP projects, there is no empirical information on how these factors influence outcomes in Nigeria's growing rail industry.

More importantly, no published work provides a comprehensive assessment of the success of public enterprise reforms implemented through the CCECC/NRC partnership, nor does it examine the Lagos-Ibadan project's unique implementation challenges (financing constraints, managerial tensions, security risks, stakeholder coordination). Furthermore, studies have not linked project-level results to Nigeria's overall railway reform plan. The absence of integrated, context-specific, and performance-based analysis is the gap that the current study aims to fill.

3. Methodology

This chapter discusses the research approach, justification of the use of the Lagos-Ibadan railway project as the case study, the procedures involved in data collection and analysis. It explains the justification for documentary data from academic works, government publications, and social media comments. It further discusses background to the partnership between CCECC and the Nigerian Railway Corporation, as well as scope, timing, budget, operating progress, and analytical methods utilized for the appraisal of the performance of the Lagos-Ibadan railway.

3.1 Research Design: This study takes a case study approach, which is appropriate for in-depth investigation of complicated, real-world phenomena within their context. The case study technique enables the researcher to do a thorough analysis of the Lagos-Ibadan railway project, considering a variety of factors such as operational efficiency, cost-effectiveness, punctuality, service quality, and institutional strengthening. The study's concentration on a specific project allows for precise evidence and nuanced insight that broader survey methodologies may not capture. Given time and resource restrictions, this design is especially appropriate since it allows the researcher to thoroughly assess existing information without requiring considerable primary data gathering while yet delivering rich, evidence-based findings.

3.2 Rationale for choosing the Lagos-Ibadan railway project: The Lagos-Ibadan railway project was chosen as the subject of this study because of its strategic importance in Nigeria's transportation infrastructure and the high-profile public-private partnership between the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC). This project is one of Nigeria's largest contemporary railway rehabilitation initiatives, with the goal of increasing operational efficiency, reducing travel time, and improving service quality. Evaluating this project sheds light on the success elements and obstacles connected with public enterprise reforms, particularly in the context of large-scale infrastructure initiatives.

3.3 Data Collection Methods: The qualitative character of the design prioritizes understanding processes, perceptions, and consequences over numerical measurement alone. The study incorporates both objective and subjective viewpoints on the project by relying heavily on secondary data sources such as official reports, media publications, academic literature, and primary data such as social media comments. The case study approach also allows for triangulation, which involves evaluating information from many sources to validate conclusions and provide detailed insights into project success factors and implementation issues. Given time and budget restrictions, this study mostly collects primary data. The data sources include:
Document analysis includes official reports from the Nigerian Railway Corporation, project feasibility studies, media coverage, and government publications about the railway project. Literature review: Academic and industrial studies on public-private partnerships, infrastructure project performance, and railway development in Nigeria. Nforums provide information about public perception, user experiences, and stakeholder feedback on the Lagos-Ibadan railway project. These sources are especially important for gathering real-time feedback and identifying concerns that are not completely covered in official papers. Although primary data collection (interviews or surveys) could provide direct stakeholder perspectives, the use of

secondary data assures practicality while still giving valuable information for analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques: The collected data will be evaluated using qualitative content analysis and preponderance of opinion approaches. Specifically:

Document and literature analysis: Key themes about project performance, problems, and triumphs will be identified and classified.

Social media analysis: Public comments will be sorted to show common feelings and concerns about service quality, timeliness, safety, and operational efficiency.

Preponderance of Opinions: In situations where opposing viewpoints exist, emphasis will be put on the majority or dominant viewpoint, complemented by illustrative examples of contrasting opinions to provide context.

This combination of analytical techniques ensures that the study captures both quantitative indicators (e.g., project timelines, costs) and qualitative insights (e.g., public satisfaction and perceptions), offering a comprehensive assessment of the Lagos-Ibadan railway project.

3.5 Justification for Using Social Media Comments as Data: Social media platforms offer a wealth of real-time, user-generated content that represents public perceptions, happiness, and concerns about infrastructure projects. In the case of the Lagos-Ibadan railway project, comments, reviews, and discussions on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and online news forums provide information about service quality, punctuality, safety, and overall user experience that may not be fully captured in official reports or academic studies. Recent study has shown that social media data can be a valuable secondary source for evaluating public initiatives since it includes spontaneous and unedited opinions from a varied community of stakeholders (García-Galera et al., 2023; Ojo et al., 2024). By methodically examining these remarks, the study can combine data from official papers and literature, resulting in a more comprehensive picture of project outcomes and public opinion.

3.6 Case Study Background: Overview of the CCECC / NRC Partnership: History and Objectives

The CCECC-NRC partnership is part of Nigeria's initiative to modernize railway infrastructure, replacing the obsolete narrow-gauge network with a modern standard-gauge system. In 2012, the Nigerian federal government granted CCECC a contract to construct the standard-gauge railway stretch linking Lagos and Ibadan for US$1.5 billion (Vanguard News, 2012, August 29). According to the agreement, part of the finance would be given through a concessional credit facility from the China Export-Import Bank (EXIM) (PM News, 2012; August 29).

The goal was to build a double-track standard-gauge line between Lagos, Nigeria's commercial hub, and southwestern industrial centers (e.g., Ibadan) to improve passenger and freight transportation efficiency and safety (Wikimedia, 2025).

The cooperation so represents Nigeria's determination, through the NRC, to modernize its rail transportation system, improve connectivity, relieve traffic congestion, and foster economic integration among major urban and industrial centers. For CCECC, the alliance represented a significant overseas construction and infrastructure project, demonstrating its ability to produce large-scale railway infrastructure to international standards.

3.7 Lagos-Ibadan Railway Project: Description, Scope, Timeline, and Budget

Scope and Description: The project comprises constructing a standard-gauge railway line between Lagos and Ibadan to replace existing narrow-gauge tracks and then renegotiated again in 2016 before construction officially began in March 2017 (Vanguard News, 2012; August 29). The design calls for a double-track standard gauge, resulting in two parallel tracks throughout the stretch (Vanguard News 2012; August 29). When operational, the railway can reach speeds up to 150 km/h, meeting current railway standards (Zhang, & Zhang, 2021). Length/ Stations: The main segment covers around 156-157 kilometres (Vanguard News, 2012; August 29). According to some reports, the railway also has a 7-kilometer branch line (Nairametrics, 2025, March 8). The finished double-track is quoted as 312 kilometres (double formation for the 156 km section), representing the total infrastructure installed for the line (Lechini, Dussort & Marchetti, 2023).

Timeline: The contract was signed in 2012 (Vanguard News; August 29). The official groundbreaking took place in March 2017 after money was acquired (https://www.projectstoday.com/News/Track-laying-work-accomplished-for-Lagos-Ibadan railway-line-project?utm_source=chatgpt.com). The project was delayed due to a variety of issues. The standard gauge network had delays in 2018 because to severe rains, security concerns, and disruptions with the 2019 general elections (Wikipedia, 2025). Despite delays, passenger trial operations commenced in late 2020, with the route formally opening in June 2021 (https://www.projectstoday.com/News/Track-laying-work-completed-for-Lagos-Ibadan-railway-line-project?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

Budget / Cost: The awarded contract for the Lagos–Ibadan railway was approximately US $1.5 billion (US$1,487,782,196 inclusive of taxes) under the 2012 agreement (Vanguard News; August 29). Another source — reflecting the full double-track infrastructure — estimates the cost at about US $1.53 billion (https://www.projectstoday.com/News/Track-laying-work-completed-for-Lagos-Ibadan-railway-line-project?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

3.8 Operational Details and Recent Developments: CCECC built the railway line, which will open to passengers in June 2021 (Olujobi, 2025; April 7). According to a CCECC release, the railway will have safely transported over 2 million people by March 5, 2024, after 1,000 days of operation (Obiowo, 2025; March 28). The Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) recently granted CCECC a three-year license (valid from October 14, 2024 to October 13, 2027) to operate freight services on the Lagos-Ibadan standard gauge railway. This makes CCECC the first company licensed for standard gauge rail freight in Nigeria (Akinfenwa & Alade,2025; March 31). The freight service was formally opened in March 2025, creating a cargo freight corridor connecting the Ajuba Bonded Terminal and Apapa Port in Lagos via the Lagos-Ibadan route (Ayansina, 2012; August 29).

Objectives:

i. Upgrade Nigeria's railway infrastructure with standard-gauge double tracks to improve capacity, speed, dependability, and safety.

ii. Provide faster, more efficient, and cost-effective passenger transportation between Lagos and Ibadan, two key economic and industrial hubs, therefore increasing connectivity and lowering journey time.

iii. Facilitate freight movement, particularly between ports (such as

Apapa) and inland industrial or commercial zones, to reduce road congestion, minimize transportation costs, and improve logistics efficiency (Chilaka, 2019).

iv. Build local capacity: In addition to track construction, CCECC provided technical assistance, workforce training, and knowledge transfer to local

v. workers, all of which contributed to Nigeria's long-term railway management.

Implications for the Study: Your case study, which focuses on the Lagos-Ibadan railway project under the CCECC/NRC cooperation, provides a real-world example of public-private infrastructure development in Nigeria. The background gives a clear timetable and budget context, which aids in assessing project performance (time, cost, service delivery, and overall economic impact). The availability of concrete operational data (passenger volumes, freight licensing, and service commencement dates) provides a strong empirical foundation for study.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the discussion and the analysis of data collected. The information from the secondary data including, official documents, academic works, news media report and the social media posts, analysis was carried out on the data obtained, in accordance with qualitative analytical case study approach. Data analysis was carried out in the context of the objective of the study to assess public public enterprise reform in Nigeria with reference to CCECC-Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) collaboration, to understand the Lagos-Ibadan Railway reform project's successes and failures.

4.1 Impact of the CCECC / NRC Partnership on Public Enterprise Performance: The CCECC-NRC partnership for the Lagos-Ibadan Railway appears to have resulted in several significant improvements in public enterprise performance, particularly when compared to previous decades of decline for Nigeria's railways — though the benefits are mixed and tempered by structural and operational challenges. The underlisted showed the impact of CCECC/NRC partnership on public enterprise performance**:**

i. **Increased connectivity, passenger mobility, and transportation efficiency**: The Lagos-Ibadan rail line, encompassing 157km (plus a 7km branch) and capable of speeds up to 150km/h, provides a stable and contemporary transport link between Lagos, Nigeria's commercial hub, and Ibadan, a significant industrial centre (https://www.logisticsbusinessafrica.co.za/ccecc-granted-three-year-license-for-freight-services-on-lagos-ibadan-railway/). By March 2024, CCECC claimed that the line had successfully transported over 2 million people in 1,000 days of service (BusinessDay, 2024; November 1). This implies a significant transfer of people from the road to the train, which would likely alleviate traffic congestion and reduce travel time obstacles.

ii. **Improving logistics for freight services and transportation**: The NRC granted CCECC a three-year license (valid Oct 2024-Oct 2027) to conduct standard-gauge rail freight services, making it the first company licensed in Nigeria. The railway can provide a more efficient alternative to road haulage, particularly for port-linked cargo between Lagos (Apapa Port) and inland destinations like Ibadan (Sunrise, 2024; November 1; https://atqnews.com/news-nigerian-railway-corporation-authorizes-ccecc-to-operate-freight-services-on-lagos-ibadan-rail-line-for-three-years/).

iii. **Employment, skill development, and institutional capacity-building**: According to one assessment, the railway project generated at least 5,000 direct employment possibilities in local communities each year, as well as numerous indirect jobs (The Guardian, 2023; November 6). Furthermore, CCECC reportedly offered training and technical support to Nigerian staff during construction and initial operations, thereby aiding to the development of local railway capacity (Nigerian Inquirer, 2023; November 6). The relationship improves institutional competency within the NRC and promotes human capital development in Nigeria's rail sector.

iv. **Economic and environmental spillovers**: The railway has the ability to boost business, cut logistics costs, and relieve traffic congestion. According to a recent report, the Lagos-Ibadan line restored approximately 1.4 million "productive labour hours" to the economy in just eight months by reducing travel times, which could lead to productivity increases (https://continentaleconomy.com/ccecc-bags-landmark-license-to-operate-freight-services-on-lagos-ibadan-railway/). The project may reduce road accidents, fuel consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions associated with heavy-duty road haulage, leading to environmental sustainability. However, further empirical assessment is needed, including emissions data. According to some sources, the corridor has the potential to boost export-oriented economic activity in the surrounding communities (Ripples Nigeria, 2024; November 1). The CCECC/NRC partnership revitalized the train system by improving services, creating jobs, and establishing a more integrated logistics network.

4.2 Challenges Faced During the Reform/Implementation Process & Opportunities for Improvement

Despite remarkable progress, significant hurdles and limits continue to impede the Lagos-Ibadan rail line's optimal performance and full potential. Low freight patronage and underutilization compared to capacity. In the first 15 months of cargo-freight operations, just 7,369 containers were moved, accounting for barely 18% of the $1.5 billion freight rail investment's planned traffic capacity (Guardian, 2024; December 25). The underutilization of infrastructure indicates a fundamental inefficiency, when usage falls significantly below expectations. The reasons for high logistical costs include multiple port handling charges, offloading fees, customs escort fees, and double-handling charges (port charges plus handling fees at interior dry ports or off-loading locations) (Railway Business Magazine, 2024; January 3).

4.2.1 Challenges faced during reform and implementation process are as follows:

a. **Institutional weaknesses and operational impediments**: The logistics chain is complex and inefficient, even if the rail leg is efficient. High port-related charges or terminal handling expenses can outweigh the benefits of rail haulage(Railway Business Magazine, 2024; January 3). This diminishes incentives for freight customers to use rail, potentially pushing them back to road transit.

b. **Safety, infrastructure vandalism, and public safety problems**: Despite assurances from officials that the standard-gauge route is safe, allegations of vandalism, theft of rail components (on older narrow-gauge portions), and passenger safety concerns continue to weaken public faith and discourage usage (Independent Newspaper Nigeria, 2025; August 25). Some travelers report overloaded carriages and unreserved passengers filling seats, raising safety and revenue leakage concern (Nairametrics, 2025; August 2).

c. **Gaps in public understanding and use of stations and routes**: According to internal NRC reports, commuter uptake is partially hindered by lack of information, suboptimal station usage, and cultural inertia. Many potential users are unfamiliar with the train service or hesitant to change their auto travel patterns (Vanguard News, 2025; July 4). Furthermore, logistical restrictions, such as multiple road-rail crossings in Lagos, impede operations and reduce the competitive advantage of road travel for some portions (Vanguard News, 2025; July 4).

d. **Ensure financial sustainability and long-term viability**: A major structural difficulty is that, despite massive infrastructure investment (billions of dollars), actual freight consumption is minimal, and freight revenue appears insufficient to cover freight logistics costs (port charges, handling fees, offloading costs) (The Guardian Nigeria, 2024; December 25; Railway Business Magazine,2024; January 3). Furthermore, if freight patronage stays low, debt servicing obligations — particularly if foreign loans supported the project — may become a financial burden for the public enterprise or federal government, jeopardizing sustainability (Nigeria234.com, 2025; August 21; Guardian Nigeria, 2024; December 25).

e. **External dependencies and systemic restrictions**: Even with a contemporary rail line, systemic flaws such as fragmentation in port operations, inconsistent policies, costly port terminal/handling fees, and poor intermodal integration decrease the rail line's usefulness as a comprehensive logistics solution (Railway Business Magazine, 2024; January 3) **Institutional inertia and public behavioral constraints**: Overdependence on foreign financing and contractors, historical suspicion of rail safety and reliability, cultural adaption lags, and infrastructural vandalism are all examples of systemic and institutional problems that limit optimal performance (Nigeria234.com, 2025; August 21).

4.2.2 Opportunities for Improvement: Harmonizing freight logistics costs can enhance patronage by reviewing and streamlining port charges, terminal handling fees, and transportation-related surcharges. Reducing double-handling charges and making rail freight cost-competitive with road transport is likely to increase usage. Improved integration between multimodal transport and last-mile logistics: Create inland dry ports, container handling facilities, and efficient links between rail, road, and warehousing to guarantee that rail cargo can transit smoothly to final destinations without incurring significant re-loading expenses. Public awareness campaigns and rider promotion: Increase publicity and sensitization to educate populations along the corridor about station locations, schedules, and ticketing procedures. Community outreach can assist overcome inertia and a lack of awareness. To maintain rail infrastructure, strengthen community-based surveillance, raise public awareness of its importance, and implement deterrent measures to prevent damage and theft. This helps to maintain usability and public trust. Expand training programs and local technical ability to reduce reliance on foreign contractors. Encourage domestic maintenance, operations, and rolling stock production (e.g., steel wheels). This was previously somewhat envisaged by the cooperation. To ensure long-term sustainability, governments must support regulatory reforms, subsidy schemes, infrastructure investment (e.g., roads connecting stations), and maintenance funds.

i. **Stakeholder Insights**: Public transportation and passengers. Evidence reveals that many passengers like the Lagos-Ibadan rail line's dependability, speed, and modern standards. The migration of millions of commuters to rail in just a few years demonstrates the public's need for efficient transportation alternatives (Nairametrics, 2024; November 1). However, safety and comfort worries remain: recent news indicates that "unreserved tickets" and overcrowding in coaches have sparked worry regarding safety, seat allocations, and income leakages. These issues could undermine public trust and escalate under-the-radar patronage (Independent Newspaper Nigeria, 2025; August 2025). Government (via the NRC and regulatory organizations). The NRC regards the line as key to its rail-sector reforms and long-term master plan. The granting of a freight-service license in 2024 and public declarations agreeing to "rail sector reforms in five years" demonstrate institutional recognition of rail as a vital public enterprise for economic development (Casady et al., 2023). Government officials appear to understand that rail may relieve traffic congestion, reduce logistics costs, and boost economic activity (Rowangould, 2013). The task for the government is to ensure that the system is sustainable by consistent policy, funding, and regulation.

ii. **CCECC (Private partner/contractor).** CCECC's performance is important because it built the line and currently operates it as a freight operator. The effective completion and commissioning of the line indicates strong project delivery capacity (Klijn & Teisman, 2000). The company also coordinated skill transfers, trained local staff, and built operational frameworks, all of which helped to develop human capital and reinforce institutions in Nigeria's rail sectorn (Chezue & Mrope, 2024). For CCECC, freight licensing is a positive operational milestone that provides a commercial path to repay investments if freight traffic increases.

iii. **NRC (Public Enterprise Operator/Regulator)**. For NRC, the agreement signifies an attempt to revitalize Nigeria's railway sector after years of neglect. The line is a prime illustration of what modern rail can achieve. However, NRC confronts hurdles in terms of institutional capabilities, such as maintaining safety, preventing vandalism, coordinating port and intermodal logistics, and reconciling numerous stakeholder interests. To safeguard infrastructure, NRC should prioritize investments in security, public safety awareness, and community participation, according to recent reports (Almarri, 2023; Zhang & Zhang, 2021). The NRC must also pursue reforms forcefully (as publicly announced) if rail is to serve as the backbone of national transportation in the next years.

iv. **Interpretation and Implications for Public Enterprise Performance.**

a. The CCECC/NRC relationship indicates that public-private collaboration, combined with foreign technological competence, may successfully resurrect a dormant public enterprise (Nigeria Rails), at least in part. The Lagos-Ibadan line demonstrates better service delivery (both passenger and freight), job development, skill transfer, and strategic infrastructure that promotes economic activity.

b. However, performance remains unequal. Underutilization of freight capacity, structural inefficiencies in port operations, security hazards, and institutional shortcomings — particularly in maintenance, patronage generation, and stakeholder coordination — all limit the full realization of benefits.

c. Sustainability remains unknown. Reforms such as cost-cutting, stronger logistics integration, more public awareness, continuous maintenance and security, and supportive policy frameworks are necessary to ensure the railway remains financially viable despite its huge capital investment.
d. The project's fate teaches a larger lesson about public enterprise reform in Nigeria: infrastructure alone is insufficient. Success is equally dependent on institutional capacity, regulatory framework, stakeholder participation, and ongoing investment in maintenance and operations.

5. Conclusion

This study looked at the performance of the Lagos-Ibadan railway under the CCECC/NRC partnership as a key public enterprise reform program in Nigeria. The findings show that the collaboration made a significant contribution to enhancing public enterprise outcomes, particularly infrastructure delivery, operational efficiency, and service quality. The advent of contemporary standard-gauge rail operations has increased passenger mobility, cut travel times, and provided a safer alternative to vehicle transport, which has historically been congested and prone to accidents. Evidence also demonstrates that freight operations, while still underutilized, have begun to improve port-to-hinterland cargo transit and provide long-term economic benefits such as lower logistical costs, job creation, and environmental benefits.

However, the study also finds many difficulties that prevent optimal functioning. These include coordination gaps between the NRC, port operators, and freight forwarders; underutilized freight capacity; passenger safety and ticketing concerns; and infrastructure vandalism and security risks along the corridor. Financial sustainability remains an issue, as operational revenues do not yet match investment levels. Despite these limitations, significant opportunities exist to expand institutional capacity, streamline logistics, and improve stakeholder collaboration—opportunities that, if taken advantage of, can considerably raise the partnership's long-term value.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings have far-reaching implications for public enterprise reform in Nigeria. First, they support the notion that public-private partnerships (PPPs) can be successful tools for rejuvenating large-scale, complex public companies that have historically underperformed under full government ownership. The CCECC/NRC approach demonstrates how private partners' technical, financial, and operational capabilities may speed up project delivery and raise operating standards.

Second, the study is timely given the Federal Government of Nigeria's current disengagement from oil and gas asset equity, restructuring of NNPC refineries with private participation, and interest in commercializing interstate rail connections. The example of the Lagos-Ibadan line implies that similar industries could profit from hybrid partnership arrangements in which the government retains ownership of strategic infrastructure but operations, maintenance, and finance are outsourced to competent private or international partners. This method can help the government decrease its financial constraints while increasing service delivery and accountability.

Third, the findings underline the importance of improved institutional coherence and regulatory frameworks. For example, the poor performance of freight services on the Lagos-Ibadan corridor indicates flaws in port logistics coordination, cost harmonization, and intermodal integration—issues that, if not addressed, will have an impact on changes in the oil, gas, and refinery sectors. As a result, reforms must extend beyond asset transfers to include comprehensive sector restructuring, such as regulatory clarity, stakeholder coordination, and transparent operational processes.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for the study:

i. Improve stakeholder coordination and intermodal integration: Successful freight operations necessitate coordinated collaboration among the NRC, port authorities, freight forwarders, and logistics corporations. The government should form a joint coordination task group to standardize charges, eliminate bottlenecks, and synchronize operations between rail and port systems.

ii. Improve Financial Sustainability through Commercial Reform: The NRC should implement commercial service models such as dynamic pricing, enhanced ticket reservation systems, and several revenue streams (advertising, station leasing, and freight consolidation services). This will help reduce reliance on government subsidies while increasing operational autonomy.

iii. Expand PPP models into other public enterprises: Based on lessons learned from the CCECC/NRC collaboration, the FGN should extend comparable PPP frameworks to:
a. NNPC refineries (operational and maintenance concessions)
b. Nigerian Gas Infrastructure
c. Additional interstate rail routes (e.g., Abuja-Kaduna modernization and Port Harcourt- Maiduguri repair)
d. Such models should emphasize openness, competitive bidding, and performance-based contracts. Enhance infrastructure security and community engagement.

iv. Security threats, like vandalism and theft, can be significantly decreased by: Community policing partnerships, surveillance technologies (CCTV, drones, tracking devices), Local employment for corridor communities creates shared accountability.

v. Increase public awareness and passenger safety measures: The NRC should conduct focused public sensitization initiatives to encourage train use and educate passengers. The introduction of an obligatory seat reservation system, clearer safety protocols, and enhanced station administration will all address the traveling public's concerns.

vi. Increase local technical capacity: To lessen reliance on foreign expertise, CCECC and NRC should broaden the scope of technology transfer programs, invest in railway training colleges, and provide advanced learning opportunities for local engineers and technicians.

vii. Conduct periodic performance audits: Regular operational, financial, and customer-service audits will allow for evidence-based changes and increased accountability. The audit findings should guide future policy changes and improve sector governance.

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