

Investigation of Ionospheric Irregularities Over Nigeria Using The Global Navigation Satellite System -I

ABSTRACT

We investigated the occurrence of ionospheric irregularities using the Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) total electron content (TEC) and rate of change index (ROTI) over Nigeria during the period of 2011 - 2016. The TEC (total electron content) data was obtained from the fourteen stations of Nigerian permanent GNSS Network (NIGNET, www.nignet.net). Data from the network were for the year 2011- 2016. MATLAB and GOPI GPS-TEC analysis application software version 2.9.2 was used to extract vertical total electron content (VTEC), time, azimuth and elevation angles, latitudes and longitudes from the raw GPS data. The elevation cut - off mask of 45° was used to reduce multipath error. The irregularities were quantified using the 30 s rate of change total electron content (ROT) and 5 min rate of ROTI, which detect irregularities with scale sizes in the range of 400 m - 2.5 km. The ROTI threshold for an ionospheric irregularity to have occurred was set at ≥ 0.4 . Result shows latitudinal differences in the rate and intensity of occurrence of ionospheric irregularities over Nigeria. The percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularity varies throughout the periods under study, with March and September equinoxes having the highest occurrence of ionospheric irregularities. We also observed that ionospheric irregularities mostly occur during the night-time in the March equinox and September solstice in the year 2014 because of high solar activity. These study on the variations of the ionospheric percentage occurrence and intensities of ionospheric irregularities (characterized by the mean ROTI values) in the African equatorial region can be important in the interpreting and monitoring GNSS ionospheric irregularity occurrence over the stations.

Keyword: Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS), Total Electron Content (TEC), Ionospheric Irregularities, ROTI

1. Introduction

Ionospheric irregularities are disturbances in the ionosphere which affect the propagation of radio waves between space and ground-based receiver or transmitting systems. They disrupt the transmission of satellite-based radio communication signals, and sometimes cause blackouts of the

signals for satellite navigation systems like the Global Positioning System (GPS). The ionosphere acts as a dispersive medium, slowing GPS radio signals as they travel from GPS satellites to Earth. Irregularities in ionospheric electron density cause variations in reflection, refraction and absorption (dispersion) of the electromagnetic signals [1]. Due to the irregularities in electron density, the Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS GPS) signal is drastically changed.

These changes in plasma density of the Earth's ionosphere give rise to what is called ionospheric scintillation which is believed to be the main cause in trans-ionospheric electromagnetic GNSS GPS signals fluctuation in both amplitude and phase [2, 3]. These ionospheric scintillations are primarily generated by ionospheric plasma bubbles, which are also known as small-scale ionospheric depletions [2]. Thus, the sudden change in amplitude and phase of the electromagnetic signals has great impacts on the performance of applications using trans-ionospheric radio signals [2, 3].

Several factors are involved in the processes occurring in the upper atmosphere that influence the movement of the F-layer which leads to the occurrence of ionospheric irregularities usually around the magnetic equator [2]. There is eastward electric field, which is believed to cause the movement of the F-layer after sun down, creating ambient conditions in the ionosphere for Rayleigh-Taylor instabilities. This process is believed to be influenced by the equatorial electro jet, and the penetration electric fields [4]. At the equator, the uplift caused by pre-reversal enhancement can lead to the formation of plasma bubbles [4, 5].

These ionospheric irregularities can cause radio wave signals that are travelling through the ionosphere from trans-ionospheric satellites having a frequency of Very High Frequency (30 - 1500 MHz) to have temporal fluctuations in its phase and amplitude. This is evident at the polar regions (where the fluctuations may be moderate), the low-latitude (where the fluctuations may be strong), and the equatorial region (where the fluctuations may be intense), [6, 7, 8]. These

fluctuations depend on the seasonal, diurnal, and height variations, its sampling rate, the solar activity, and the solar cycle [9].

Global Position System (GPS) which operates using radio waves from satellite is sensitive to ionospheric changes due to geomagnetic storms and signals transmitted for communication and navigation purposes must pass through the ionosphere. Ionospheric irregularities are most common at equatorial latitudes and can have a major impact on system performance and reliability, and commercial satellite designers need to account for these effects. Two propagation effects that are prominent are [10] - range error due to delay of the signal in travelling through the ionosphere, and phase and amplitude scintillation caused by irregularities in electron density distribution and total electron content (TEC). Also, pipelines and transmission lines are also subjected to geomagnetic induced currents during storm activities. The principle effects are disturbances to flow metering and maladjustments of corrosion control systems increase corrosion, distortion of field waves along the transmission lines etc. Exploration methods that measure the quiescent geomagnetic field cannot be done on days when the geomagnetic field is disturbed. The perturbed magnetic field can create signals in survey data that can be mistaken for signatures of resources. Hence, there is great need to investigate and understand the pattern of electron density variations at all sites as this will aid in the interpretation of magnetic data used in exploration [11].

Various articles on ionospheric irregularities have indicated that ionospheric irregularities which occur around the equatorial region are observed after sunset [12, 4, 13, 14, 15, 16]. The plasma bubble arises due to Rayleigh-Taylor instability. The Rayleigh-Taylor instability occurs in the ionosphere when plasma at the bottom of the F2-layer is accelerated into dense plasma. Usually, the Rayleigh-Taylor instability is triggered by post-sunset enhancement of eastward electric field [17].

Studies have been carried out on the ionospheric irregularities at different sectors. The frequency of occurrence of ionospheric irregularities, the local time, seasonal, latitude, longitude and the

solar activities dependence have been studied by various authors [see e.g., 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 3, 14, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28]. We point out these authors that have studied ionospheric irregularities in African region, that most of the studies on ionospheric irregularities largely consider data only during the geomagnetic storms and specific solar activity conditions.

The aim of this study is to investigate the occurrence characteristics of the ionospheric irregularities in Nigeria. We employ data from ground-based GPS receivers at different longitudes under similar condition. This strategy can improve our current understanding on the physical mechanisms responsible for the development and evolution of ionospheric irregularities in the sector, it can provide a more comprehensive picture of the spatial and temporal variations in ionospheric irregularities [29]. Furthermore, [29] suggested that such studies can help identify and differentiate between the various physical mechanisms responsible for the development of ionospheric irregularities can help improve the accuracy of models used for GNSS positioning and navigation by providing a more precise characterization of ionospheric irregularities.

In this study, we which to investigate the occurrence of ionospheric irregularities over Nigeria, using measurements from Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) with data that was obtained from the Nigeria Permanent GNSS Network (NIGNET, www.nignet.net) in the years 2011- 2016. Specifically, we which to obtain the available TEC measurements across Nigeria during the years 2011 -2016. Using the TEC values compute 30-s ROT (Rate of change of TEC) and 5-min ROTI (Rate of change of TEC Index) values to determine the occurrence or otherwise of ionospheric irregularities at the various stations for each day of year 2011-2016, and also determine which of the stations in Nigeria exhibit greater intensity of the irregularities as measured using the ROTI parameter, and to explain factors that may be responsible for the observed differences in irregularity intensities at the various stations in Nigeria. The stations covered were geographically located as shown in figure 1 and described in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the map of the stations that

was used in this study and Table 1 indicates the names and the codes of the stations with their elevation above sea level, geographical and magnetic coordinates.

Table 1. List of NIGNET GPS stations

Station Code	City	State	Days Of Available Data	Elevation (M)	GEOGRAPHIC		GEOMAGNETIC	
					LAT (N)	LONG (E)	LAT (N)	LONG (E)
ABUZ	Zaria	Kaduna	1313	706.1	11.15	7.64	-0.13	79.95
BKFP	Birni	Kebbi	1597	251.0	12.46	4.22	0.63	76.62
CGGT	Toro	Bauchi	510	917.4	10.12	9.11	-0.78	81.10
CLBR	Calabar	Cross-River	1439	61.5	4.95	8.35	-4.29	80.09
FPNO	Owerri	Imo	214	92.6	5.43	7.03	-3.89	70.85
FUTA	Akure	Ondo	181	416.0	7.30	5.14	-2.58	77.16
FUTY	Yola	Adamawa	1764	248.4	9.34	12.49	-1.28	84.31
GEMB	Gembu	Taraba	154	1348.0	6.92	11.78	-3.00	82.95
HUKP	Katsina	Katsina	738	566.0	12.92	7.59	-1.50	79.77
MDGR	Maiduguri	Borno	280	351.8	11.83	13.13	0.49	84.03
OSGF	Abuja	FCT	1052	533.6	9.02	7.48	-1.51	79.49
RUST	Port-Harcourt	Rivers	303	46.6	4.80	6.97	-4.33	78.75
ULAG	Lagos	Lagos	690	45.5	6.51	3.39	-3.03	75.45
UNEC	Enugu	Enugu	907	255.4	6.42	7.50	-3.23	79.37

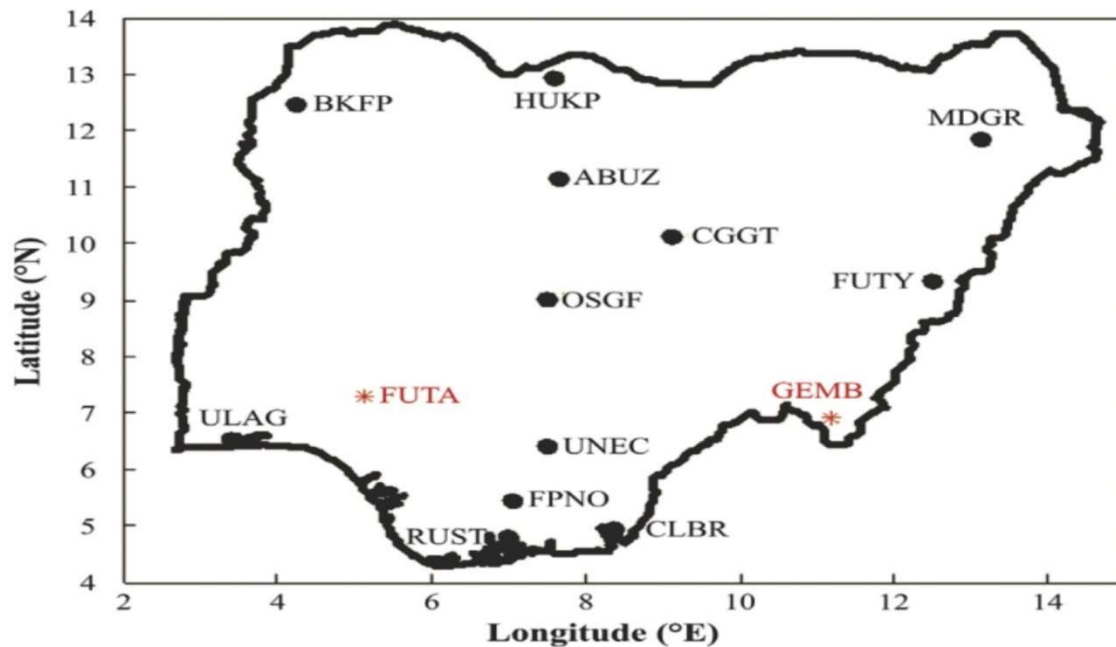


Figure 1. Geographical map of the GPS stations, (Generated with Matlab).

The theory of the Rate of change of TEC (ROT) and the Rate of change of TEC Index (ROTI) that were used for studying the occurrence of irregularities in the ionosphere are well described in [30, 31 – equations 1-4, 32, 29 – equations 2.1-2.3]. To estimate the percentage of ionospheric

occurrence, If the *ROTI* along the ray paths to any of the visible GPS satellites meet the aforementioned conditions, it is counted as one irregularity event and the percentage occurrence of irregularity is given by [32] $\frac{N(ROTI \geq threshold)}{N_{tot}} \times 100\%$, where N_{tot} number of total events.

2. Data and Method of Data Analysis

The data used in this work were obtained from the Nigerian permanent GNSS Network (NIGNET, www.nignet.net), for the period of 2011- 2016. We used the GNSS-VTEC (vertical total electron content). MATLAB and GOPI GPS-TEC analysis application software version 2.9.2 was used in the analysis of TEC data in this research work. The raw GPS data at 30 second sampling rate using GPS-TEC software (GOPI software - developed by Gopi Krishina Samela) to extract VTEC), time, azimuth and elevation angles, latitudes and longitudes from the raw GPS data. To eliminate multipath effects an elevation cut-off mark of 45° was used. The methods used to develop the GOPI software were illustrated in [33]. The TEC data was obtained from the fourteen stations (NIGNET, www.nignet.net) for the year 2011- 2016. The stations are geographically located as shown in figure 1 and as described in Table 1.

The months in the year was grouped into four seasons: March Equinox (February, March, April), June Solstice (May, June, July), September Equinox (August, September, October) and December Solstice (November, December, January). We identified the occurrence of ionospheric irregularities throughout the year 2011-2016 over the stations, based on GNSS irregularity index $ROTI \geq 0.4$, which indicates the occurrence of irregular ionospheric activities relevant to ionospheric scintillation [34]. The percentage occurrences of ionospheric irregularities at various stations throughout the year (each day, month & season) was also obtained.

3. Result and Discussion

In Table 1, we show the elevation of each station and the number of days data were available for the station in the period under study. GEMB station is at highest elevation of 1348 m above sea

level, while RSUT and ULAG are at the lowest elevation of 46.6 m and 45.5 m respectively. ABUZ with 1313 days of data, BKFP with 1597 days of data, OSGF with 1052 days of data, FUTY with 1764 days of data and CLBR with 1439 days of data, were stations with highest number of days of available data within the years under this study, while FUTA with 181 days of data, GEMB with 154 days of data and FPNO with 214 days of data were the stations lowest numbers of days of available data.

Figure 2 illustrates specific occurrence of ionospheric irregularities at the various stations on daily basis during year 2011 - 2016. In Figure 2, the red colors represent instances and locations of occurrence of irregularities, the blue colors represent non-occurrence of irregularities, and the white spaces represent days with no available data. The criteria used to determine the occurrence of irregularity for a given day and station is that the values of $ROTI \geq 0.4$ after local sunset for the day.

There were lots of gaps in the data (especially in some station due to breakdown of the instrument. FUTA instrument function briefly in 2012 and 2013, many stations instrument were not functional from 2014 - 2016), but we believe that the amount of data we have is adequate for the presentation of significant conclusion from our analysis. HUKP, GEMB,, FPNO and FUTA instruments recorded no data in 2012. MDGR and UNEC instruments were not functional 1n 2012 and in 2014, CGGT, FUTA, GEMB, ULAG, UNEC and RSUT instruments did not record any data, while in 2015 only HUKP, BKFP, FUTY, CLBR had records but not throughout the year. In 2016, all stations had no record in the last quarter (October - December), while BKFP, ABUZ, FUTY, OSGF, UNEC FPNO and CLBR instruments were functional for some of the months of 2016.

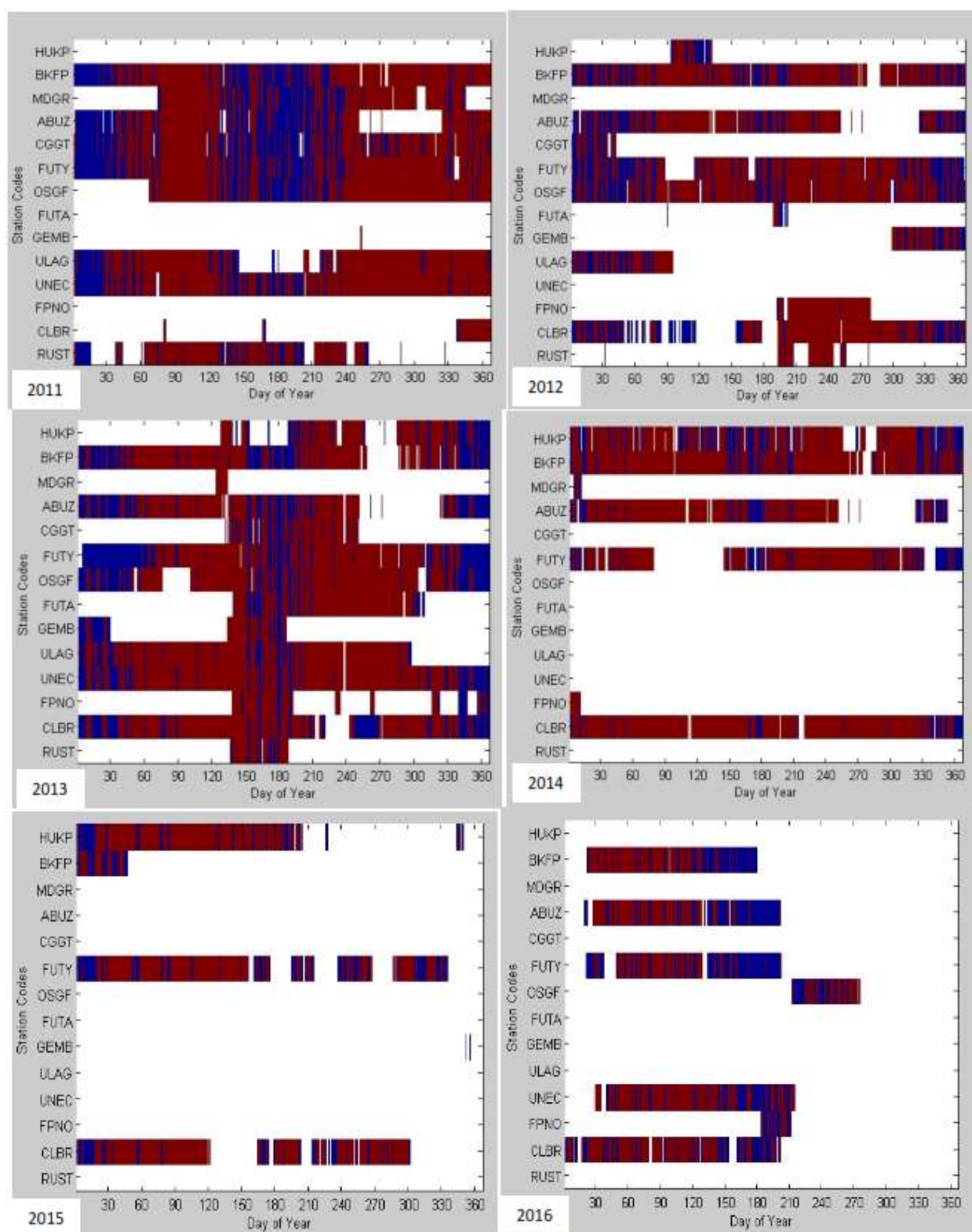


Figure 2. Occurrence of ionospheric irregularity at the Nigerian stations during the days of year 2011-2016. The red colors represent instances and locations of occurrence of irregularities, the blue colors represent non-occurrence of irregularities, and the white spaces represent days with no available data

Generally, figure 2 shows that irregularities typically occur during the months of the year. February/March/April is March equinox while August/September/October is September equinox. The analysis of figure 2 shows that irregularities rarely occur during the months of December/January and June/July which are solstice months, November/December/January is December solstice while May/June/July is the June solstice. To explain why irregularities are more likely to occur during the equinoxes than the solstices in this region, it is already known that the TEC is greater during the equinoxes than during the solstices in the equatorial region [35, 36] and the occurrence of irregularities is known to be more frequent during seasons of the years when TEC magnitudes are higher [32].

For stations, as in the present study, which are located near the geographical equator, it is preferable to speak of the seasons in terms of solstices and equinoxes rather than the summer solstice, winter solstice, autumn equinox and spring equinox, the tropics do not experience significant levels of variations in the sun's intensity between the winter and the summer solstice and between the equinoxes like in the temperate region/polar regions, where remarkable differences are noticeable between the solstices (when the sun is away from the equator, on either side of it) and the equinoxes (when the sun is overhead the equator). During the June solstice, the sun is overhead the northern hemisphere, while during the December solstice, the sun is overhead the southern hemisphere. The sun is overhead the equatorial region during the equinoxes, this is why the TEC is usually greater at the equatorial region during the equinoxes. This explains why the frequency of occurrence of ionospheric irregularities and the magnitude are greater during equinoxes than during solstices in the equatorial region [35, 36].

Figure 2 shows that the frequency of irregularity occurrence is highest in 2014 (which has more intensity of red colors relative to the blue colors compared to the other years that data were available). The reason for this is that the solar activity was greater in 2014 than in the other years, therefore the variation is connected to the solar activity. Solar activity variations are long-term

variations which can be seen on year-to-year basis. This is because of the obvious reason that it takes a long term (~ 11 years) for a complete solar activity cycle to occur. Year 2011 was at the beginning of the rise of the solar cycle 24 (which from started from December 2008 and ended in December 2019, and it reached its peak in April 2014 – [37]) during which the solar activity level was slightly higher according to [38]. The TEC magnitudes are usually greater during years of higher solar activity than years of low solar activity, and this explains why the frequency of ionospheric irregularity occurrence and the magnitude were greater during high solar activity year (e.g. 2014) than during low solar activity years.

Figure 2 also support the following observations: the highest occurrence of $ROTI \geq 0.4$ were observed in April followed by March and May. It implies that the highest occurrence of ionospheric irregularities occurs during the months of April, March, May and other months show relatively low ionospheric irregularities. This result is similar to the ionospheric scintillation occurrence reported by [39, 35]. Ionospheric irregularities occurrence at Nigeria stations also show a seasonal trend. Irregularities were observed to be low around June/July but high during the months of March and September. This is clearly seen in the plots of percentage ionospheric for the months of 2011-2016.

From the analysis of the time of occurrence, we note that ionospheric irregularity happens mostly at the post-sunset time, this is due to the eastward pre-reversal enhancement (PRE) electric field [40], which is coupled with the Earth's geomagnetic field to produce an upward vertical force derived from $\mathbf{E} \times \mathbf{B}$ (the curl of electric and magnetic field). The upward vertical force derived from gradient of ion and electron densities between the upper and lower layer, thereby producing plasma bubble irregularities, arising from Rayleigh-Taylor instability process [40]. Figure 2 also shows that occurrence of ionospheric plasma irregularities are the highest throughout the month

of April. The result also matched result reported by [41]. The explanation for the high ionospheric irregularity occurrence in April is that April is an equinoctial month [42].

3.1 Percentage Occurrence of Ionospheric Irregularity

To determine whether or not an irregularity occurred at a particular station during a particular day, the ROTI values after local sunset (18:00 LT) are examined. The criterion for occurrence of irregularity is that $\text{ROTI} \geq 0.4$. The days with post-sunset $\text{ROTI} \geq 0.4$ are flagged as 1 to denote occurrence of irregularity, the days with $\text{ROTI} \leq 0.4$ are flagged as 0 to denote non-occurrence of irregularity, and the days with no available data are flagged as NaN. The percentage occurrence of irregularity for a given month is computed by dividing the number of days flagged as 1 in that month by the total number of days flagged as 0 and 1 in that month, times 100%. The days with no available post-sunset data were not included in the total number of days because no decision is taken about such days regarding whether or not irregularities occurred in them.

Table 2: Percentage Occurrence Of Ionospheric Irregularities For All The Stations For The Year 2011 With Yearly Average (Last 2 Columns) And Monthly Average Of All The Stations (Last 2 Rows)

2011	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	median	mean
ABUZ	50	88	98	55	38	28	60	99		88	92	8	60.0	64.0 ± 26.4
BKFP	60	93	98	48	42	45	72	99	99	85	95	15	78.5	70.9 ± 24.1
CGGT	60	90	99	60	80	85	70	100	100	90	88	12	86.5	77.8 ± 18.2
CLBR		100			99						99		99.0	99.3 ± 0.4
FPNO														
FUTA														
FUTY	50	82	98	60	58	31	75	99	100	85	85	10	78.5	69.4 ± 23.0
GEMB								100					100.0	100.0 ± 0.0
HUKP														
MDGR		92	88	55	50	25	50	95	100	88	100		88.0	74.3 ± 23.4
OSGF		100	100	60	35	30	70	100	100	95	90		92.5	78.0 ± 23.4
RUST	79	99	98	70	75	75	90	99				15	79.0	77.8 ± 16.9
ULAG	78	98	98	60		100	83	100	100	85	98	22	98.0	83.8 ± 16.8
UNEC	65	95	95	65	55	57	90	100	100	90	92	15	90.0	76.6 ± 21.0
Median	60.0	93.0	98.0	60.0	54.0	38.0	71.0	99.0	100.0	88.0	93.5	13.5		
Mean	62.8	93.6	97.1	58.5	59.6	52.4	71.3	99.0	99.8	88.0	93.4	13.7		

Table 3: Percentage Occurrence Of Ionospheric Irregularities For All The Stations For The Year 2012 With Yearly Average (Last 2 Columns) And Monthly Average Of All The Stations (Last 2 Rows)

2012	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	median	mean
ABUZ	38	80	98	97	62	69	90	88		62	50	45	69.0	70.8 ± 18.0
BKFP	72	90	98	75	49	75	98	85	95	84	50	49	79.5	76.7 ± 15.0
CGGT	70											55	62.5	62.5 ± 7.5
CLBR	68	100			99	91	100	100	92	70	40	49	91.5	80.9 ± 19.3
FPNO						90	100	98	100				99.0	97.0 ± 3.5
FUTA						100							100.0	100.0 ± 0.0
FUTY	35	68	82	89	78	80	95	95	85	50	30	41	79.0	69.0 ± 20.2

HUKP	95	90	100	88	86	65				65		45	87.0	79.3 ± 15.7
MDGR														
OSGF														
RUST														
ULAG														
UNEC														
Median	89	93	100	90.5	70	65	56	78	92.5	55		47	77.5	
Mean	78.5	93.7	99.3	90.5	70.3	66.0	56.0	77.5	92.5	55.0		48.8	77.5	

Table 7: Percentage Occurrence Of Ionospheric Irregularities For All The Stations For The Year 2011 With Yearly Average (Last 2 Columns) And Monthly Average Of All The Stations (Last 2 Rows)

2016	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	median	mean
ABUZ	88	78	69	39	18	8						78	69.0	54.0 ± 27.7
BKFP	90	88	71	35	19							81	76.0	64.0 ± 24.7
CGGT														
CLBR	78	90	89	78	48	62						68	78.0	73.3 ± 12.0
FPNO						60							60.0	60.0 ± 0.0
FUTA														
FUTY	60	80	72	50	30	15						25	50.0	47.4 ± 20.7
GEMB														
HUKP														
MDGR														
OSGF						100	39	75					75.0	71.3 ± 21.6
RUST														
ULAG														
UNEC	100	80	78	88	68	40	50						78.0	72.0 ± 16.6
Median	88	80	72	50	30	50	44.5	75				73	72.0	
Mean	83.2	83.2	75.8	58.0	36.6	47.5	44.5	75.0				63.0	63.0	

In Table 2, at ABUZ station in 2011, the recorded percentage ionospheric irregularities during March Equinox (February, March, April) were around 50%, 88% and 98% respectively. During June Solstice (May, June, July) our results show that the recorded percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularity were around 55%, 38% and 28% respectively. In September Equinox (August, September, October) the percentage of occurrence of ionospheric irregularity according to our result stood around 60%, 99% for the months of August and September respectively, October records were not available. For December Solstice (November, December, January (2012)), our result indicates that the percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularity stood around 88%, 92% & 45%.

Our result for ABUZ station in 2012, are as follows: in March Equinox, the percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularity stood around 38%, 80% and 98%; during June Solstice, the percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularity recorded were around 97%, 62% and 69%; in September Equinox, we have percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularity around 90% & 88% .

December Solstice (including January 2013) percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularity recorded around 62%, 50% & 45%.

Our result also indicated that the percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularity recorded at ABUZ station in 2013 were as follows: March Equinox - 50%, 89% and 94%; June Solstice - 88%, 42% and 40%; September Equinox - 82% & 87%; December Solstice (including January 2014) - 70%, 10% & 29%.

Our result also indicated that the percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularity recorded at ABUZ station in 2014 were as follows: March Equinox - 90%, 99% and 99%; June Solstice - 95%, 48% and 85%; September Equinox - 99% & 99% . December Solstice - 70% & 44%. There were no records for the year 2015. Our results for the year 2016 indicated that the percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularities at ABUZ station were as follows; March Equinox - 88%, 78% and 69%; June Solstice - 39%, 18% and 8%. Records were unavailable for the remaining months of 2016. All other stations showed similar trends, and the results are displayed in Tables 2 – 7.

The highest value of percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularities were around March Equinox and September Equinox. The result also matched with result reported by [41]. The explanation for the high ionospheric irregularity occurrence in April is that April is an equinoctial month in which the magnetic meridian is closely aligned with the solar terminator [42, 43]. This is evident in Table 8, where we used the monthly average (median and mean) for all the stations and all the for year 2011-2016, the months April and October has the highest percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularities. Using the monthly median values, the percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularities for the month of April is 98.0% (median) and $94.3 \pm 7.4\%$ (mean), while that of the month of October is 98.0% (median) and $94.1 \pm 3.3\%$ (mean); while using the monthly mean values, the percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularities for

the month of April is 97.5 (median) and $94.2 \pm 6.1\%$ (mean) while that of October is 96.3 (median) and 94.0 ± 3.0 (mean).

Table 8: Monthly Average Percentage Occurrence Of Ionospheric Irregularities For The Year 2011-2016 For All Stations All Taken Together (Using The Monthly Median And The Mean Values For All The Stations)

Using median value of the monthly average for each year												
Year	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
2011	60	93	98	60	54	38	71	99	95	88	94	14
2012	68	88	98	87	75	85	98	95	91	75	48	48
2013	60	94	98	97	69	71	98	100	98	80	28	29
2014	90	100	100	95	58	85	99	100	98	75	44	83
2015	89	93	100	91	70	65	56	76	92	55		47
2016	88	80	72	50	30	50	45	75				73
median	78.0	93.0	98.0	89.0	64.0	68.0	45.0	97.0	98.0	75.0	46.0	48.0
mean	75.8± 13.2	91.25± 4.8	94.3± 7.4	79.8± 16.6	59.3± 12.0	65.7± 14.7	77.8± 20.6	91.1± 9.8	94.1± 3.30	74.5± 7.8	53.3± 20.1	48.9± 19.4
Using mean value of the monthly average for each year												
Year	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
2011	62.8	93.6	97.1	58.5	59.6	52.4	71.3	99.0	99.8	88.0	93.4	13.7
2012	56.6	84.4	95.2	86.5	72.6	84.4	96.9	92.3	90.0	70.8	44.2	47.6
2013	55.2	89.2	97.8	95.1	65.2	71.8	94.0	98.5	96.3	80.3	24.4	26.9
2014	90.0	99.8	99.8	93.8	65.0	84.4	99.2	99.4	96.3	75.2	43.0	79.6
2015	78.5	93.7	99.3	90.5	70.3	66.0	56.0	77.5	92.5	55.0		48.8
2016	83.2	83.2	75.8	58.0	36.6	47.5	44.5	75.0				63.0
median	70.7	91.4	97.5	88.5	65.1	68.9	82.6	95.4	96.3	75.2	43.6	48.2
mean	71.0± 12.9	90.6± 5.0	94.2± 6.1	80.4± 14.8	61.6± 9.0	67.7± 12.5	77.0± 19.7	90.3± 9.4	95.0± 3.0	73.9± 8.8	51.2± 21.1	46.6± 17.5

We also calculated the average values of the percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularities using the median values from all the station and for all the years under study, and the values for March Equinox is 92.13% (median) & $88.40 \pm 7.6\%$ (mean); for June Solstice we have 66.83% (median) and $70.85 \pm 8.96\%$ (mean); September Equinox 93.44% (median) and $90.61 \pm 8.32\%$ (mean) and December Solstice 51.08% (median) and $57.49 \pm 11.51\%$ (mean). Similar calculation using the mean gives: for March Equinox is 91.00% (median) & $85.89 \pm 10.02\%$ (mean); for June Solstice we have 68.33% (median) and $72.03 \pm 8.28\%$ (mean); September Equinox 92.63% (median) and $89.42 \pm 6.41\%$ (mean) and December Solstice 49.70% (median) and $56.44 \pm 12.06\%$ (mean). Generally, the results indicate that during September Equinox, occurrence of ionospheric irregularities is highest and the lowest occurrence is during December Solstice.

The two peaks of irregularity seasons were observed at the stations for 2011-2016. The peaks occur around the equinoxes (i.e. one in March and September). Ionospheric irregularities responsible

for GPS scintillations at low latitude are primarily associated with equatorial spread in F region [2]. Many other authors found the maximum occurrence of ionospheric scintillation during Equinox months [44, 45].

Dividing the stations into geographical north (ABUZ, BKFP, CGGT, FUTY, GEMB, HUKP, MDGR and OSGF) and south (CLBR, FPNO, FUTA, RUST, UNEC and ULAG) of Nigeria, result indicates that ionospheric irregularities occur more in the southern than in the northern geographical locations in Nigeria. The calculated average value using the monthly median values are (in %): $78.55 \pm 10.88\%$ for the northern Nigeria and $89.83 \pm 8.21\%$ for southern Nigeria respectively; while using the monthly mean values we have $72.82 \pm 9.65\%$ for the northern Nigeria and $83.95 \pm 7.45\%$ for southern Nigeria respectively. The result we obtained the March Equinox, June Solstice, September Equinox and December Solstice when the station were divided along northern and southern geographical zone are: for northern stations - March Equinox - 82.40 ± 15.89 ; June Solstice - 64.05 ± 15.89 ; September Equinox - 89.94 ± 11.01 ; December Solstice - 56.81 ± 23.62 ; while for southern stations we have - March Equinox - 89.08 ± 9.68 ; June Solstice - 80.64 ± 14.83 ; September Equinox - 95.43 ± 5.99 ; December Solstice - 61.79 ± 25.72 . These results indicated that the ionospheric irregularities are greater during equinox than during solstice and there are greater percentage of ionospheric irregularities in the southern Nigeria than northern Nigeria. This differences in percentage occurrence of ionospheric irregularities between the geographical north and south of Nigeria might be attributed to differences in their geographical and geomagnetic longitude and latitude. The average geographical and geomagnetic longitude and latitude are: geographical longitude and latitude - 9.18 ± 2.47 and 10.47 ± 1.62 - and geomagnetic longitude and latitude - -81.03 ± 2.07 and -0.89 ± 0.94 - for northern stations while for southern station, the average geographical and geomagnetic longitude and latitude are: geographical longitude and latitude - 6.40 ± 1.4 and 5.90 ± 0.84 - and geomagnetic longitude and latitude -

76.95 ± 2.53 and $-3.56 \pm .61$. There are noticeable differences especially in both geographic and geomagnetic latitude.

The number of months with irregularities centered around the equinoxes was observed to increase with solar activity. The average percentage ionospheric irregularities calculated using the using the monthly averages for the whole stations for the years are: 2011 -2016 are (in %): 73.05, 78.22, 75.67, 85.52, 75.53 and 62.77 respectively. This result shows that ionospheric irregularities in Nigeria for the year 2011-2016 started to increase from 2011, reached its peak in 2014 and started to wane from 2015. This observed trend closely follow sunspot number trend for solar cycle 24 which began in 2008, reached its maximum in 2014 [46]

4. Conclusion

In this study, we have carried an investigation of ionospheric irregularities over Nigeria, an equatorial region using global navigation satellite system. We have used 5-min ROTI and 30-s ROT from 30-s RINEX data to study the occurrence of ionospheric irregularities over large-scale ionospheric irregularities over Nigerian stations. The GPS receiver at Abuja is from the Nigerian permanent GNSS Network (NIGNET, www.nignet.net). The data covered a period of six years, i.e., 20011 - 2016 at 14 stations.

Our result revealed significant latitudinal differences, we observed consistent occurrence of irregularities across all the stations, with particularly strong and consistent occurrence at the CLBR station in Calabar, Nigeria. The station is located farther from the geomagnetic equator and closer to the southern anomaly crest, exhibited a higher occurrence of irregularities. Its clearer that TEC variability is greatly influenced by the geographical location of the Earth's magnetic field, while the patterns of variability are modulated by the Earth's diurnal rotation.

Our results exhibited a level uniformity with the previous studies that have used different methods and indices to study the ionospheric irregularities over an equatorial region, Nigeria. We summaries our findings below.

- This study reveal difference in the strength of ionospheric irregularities over stations located within the same equatorial region in Nigeria. This was attributed to the difference in the geomagnetic latitudes of the stations.
- The variability of TEC is greatly influenced by the geographical location of Earth's magnetic field, while its spatial patterns of variability are modulated by the Earth's diurnal rotation [47]. At equatorial stations located on the north side of the magnetic equator, there is a significant depletion of TEC. These variations affects the accuracy of satellite-based communication and navigation systems [48].
- Seasonal equatorial TEC irregularities (as shown in high values of ROTI) were observed during 2014. It exhibited a bimodal feature showing equinoctial asymmetry in the strength of ionospheric TEC irregularities confirm observations from earlier studies in other (near) equatorial regions in Africa [e.g., 49].
- The seasonal TEC irregularities were characterized by stronger TEC irregularities in the March equinox and September equinox season. The reduction of ROTI and ROT during the September equinox could be attributed to the suppressing role of the dynamo electric field. This requires further investigation.
- The percentage occurrences of ionospheric irregularities vary throughout the period, March and September equinoxes has the highest occurrence of ionospheric irregularity. We also observed that ionospheric irregularities mostly occur during the night- time in the March equinox and September solstice in the year 2014 because of high solar activity.

Conclusively, we found out that ionospheric irregularities which are disturbances in the ionosphere which can affect propagation of radio waves between space and ground-based systems, by disrupting the transmission of satellite-based radio communication signals, and sometimes cause blackouts of the signals for satellite navigation systems like Global Positioning System (GPS).

These irregularities ionospheric can occur randomly, but increased in frequency of occurrence during the months of equinoxes and follow solar cycle in the frequency and magnitude of occurrence. Interestingly, these satellite navigation systems have provided avenue to investigate the structure of the ionosphere and the associated ionospheric irregularities in the ionosphere. We could also conclude that ionospheric irregularities occur more in equator-ward region than at the magnetic equatorial and the poleward EIA regions.

In estimating the magnitude of ionospheric irregularities using ROTI, there were some drawbacks/limitations and advantages in ROTI calculation. The ROTI index does not contain information about the scale size or frequency of irregularities, only that irregularity exists within the range limited by the sample rate and measurement interval. Assuming that the density irregularities do not change within a short time as they pass the receiver-to-satellite line-of-sight, the irregularities may be converted to spatial gradient of TEC [9, 30, 50]. One advantage of using ROTI to estimate ionospheric irregularities is that, the calculation of ROTI is quite straightforward, can be calculated based on data from normal GNSS receivers, there is a lot of data available, with global coverage, though the equations for ROTI uses the rate-of-change of the geometry-free combination, the biases and ambiguities that often complicate analysis of GNSS data are eliminated.

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