STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ELECTORAL ISSUES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The study investigated Senior Secondary students' understanding of elections in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. Specifically, the study identified students' conceptions of the purpose, process and problems of elections. The descriptive approach was adopted for data gathering and analysis. One hundred and twenty senior secondary school students responded to a questionnaire from five (5) secondary schools in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. The study revealed that; the students understood the meaning of election as choosing, voting for and selecting leaders. They also gave reasons for conducting elections to choose leaders. They were aware of the types of election as direct, indirect, bye election, open ballot system, primary election, secret voting and election by proxy. They recognized materials for election as voters' register, ballot box, ballot papers, and indelible ink. The students saw the problems of election as rigging, violence, votes selling, bribery, missing results multiple voting, falsification of results and low turnout of registered voters. The research recommended that government as a matter of priority should put in place an adequate legal framework by ensuring elections are managed in a credible and appropriate manner and conducted only within such framework. Steps should be taken by the electoral body to ensure that quality participation of citizens is guaranteed, without any fear of victimization, violence, and insecurity.

Keywords: *Election, Violence, Ballot box, polling booth, Perception*

Introduction

Election is the formal process of selecting a person for public office or of accepting or rejecting a political proposition by voting. Elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century. Elections may fill offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary, and for regional and local government. Ajayi (2012) opined that election involves a set of activities leading to the selection of one or more persons, out of many, to serve in position of authority in a given nation. It is the process by which the people select and control their representative, i.e elections give an electorate the sovereign power to decide who will govern. This process is also used in many other private and business organizations, from clubs to voluntary association and corporations (Andrew, 2011). Wall, Catt, Ellis, Maley and Wolf (2005) said that elections matter for many reasons. First, elections are not just elections; they are part of a process. Second, elections determine leadership and either continuity or change in this leadership. Third, even flawed elections may have value in institutionalizing electoral integrity, provided that subsequent electoral cycles reinforce key democratic or electoral principles. Lawrence (2016) refers to Ajayi, (2012) that in any society, elections and democracy cannot be separated because election serves as the bedrock of any democratic setting.

Britannica (2009) explained that election is useful and basic indicator of democracy. An election is a formal decision-making procedure through which people choose individuals for public office. It expatiates further that elections are generally considered to be the principal means through which citizens can influence their leader. In other words, it is through the systems of election that the generality of people express their wish of who should govern or lead them. Thus, election is basically a democratic and legitimate process change of leadership. Osalusi and Yemi-Fadipe refers to Ajayi (2011) where it was asserted that the concept of

election itself is not alien to African, in general, and Nigeria, in particular. However, the modern concept of election has to do with the universal adult suffrage system, in which people directly elect their leaders through the ballot box in the polling booths so designated. These forms of election and their modes of operation vary from one country to another.

The representative form of government could historically be identified as the father of elections; which, in political parlance, connotes selection of people, by qualified adult voters into public office. At the beginning of this century, the mode of managing affairs of the state chosen by a great majority of countries on the planet is democracy. Whether it is the direct form practised in the city-state of ancient Greece or its current representative form, citizens have always resorted to elections to implement democracy without elections; also there is now the opportunity of holding regular, reasonably competitive and transparent elections with democracy. For parties or groups to acquire power and for elections to exist, there must be office to hold, people willing to choose representatives, qualification to take part in voting and rules governing how the representatives will be chosen. That is why election has become the main method of choosing representatives. The election is, therefore, a process involving eligible candidates' franchise, voting procedures, delimitation of constituencies, candidates and the rules of the game. In developing nations generally and Nigeria in particular, the conduct of elections has been one of the major snags of the democratization process. Nigeria's recurrent efforts at endurable democracy have not been successful because of its inability to conduct free, fair and transparent elections and this has hindered its effective democratic development (Lawrence, 2016).

Again the president is elected through indirect elections. The election is conducted in two (2) stages; first, is the primary election in which members of a political party select electors. These electors, who are elected in the primary election, constitute the Electoral College. The Electoral College has the ultimate power of selecting the president. In other words, the government serves as a representative of the people in their process of governance which thus make it answerable to people. Ayeni (2019) analysed the roles of social media in voters' education and how INEC could make itself more active on the cyberspace for effective information dissemination and voter education. Lawrence, (2016) refers to Diamond (2008) posited that youths' voting behaviour was characterized by political violence, political apathy, and political silence during electoral processes, all seeming to jeopardize Nigeria's political development. Also, Ocholi (2012) examined elections in Nigeria with a view to highlighting challenges, electoral reforms and democratic stability in Nigeria, using the 2007 general elections and electoral reforms as case study and reference. It was suggested that political leaders should have strong political will and sincerity to ensure good governance at all levels and play the game of politics with decorum. Lawrence (2016) examined the role of elections particularly, its administration in Nigeria from 2007-2015 and revealed that democratization through election administration depended largely on the institutional foundations of the electoral processes, especially, the INEC.

Within the context of representative democracy, elections must be perceived and managed as a process and not as a one-off event that happens only on a given day or over a limited number of days. It is rather a process, known as electoral process or electoral cycle, which can evolve in a continuous manner almost without interruption between two elections. The electoral cycle can be divided into three (3) phases, namely pre-electoral phase, electoral phase and post-electoral phase. Before independence in 1960, Nigeria, which existed as an amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates since 1914, had already witnessed three several elections. The first election took place in Lagos and Calabar in September 1923, following the introduction of the Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution in 1922. The Nigerian National Democratic Party, led by Herbert Macaulay, won the three seats for the

Lagos Legislative Council while the Calabar Improvement League won the only set for Calabar; many Nigerians were disfranchised as only British citizens and British protected persons could vote or be voted for.

In the 1946 elections, it was an indirect system of election which filled seats in regional and central legislatures, following the introduction of Sir Author Richards (Lord Milverton) constitution a year earlier. By the indirect electoral system, adult males in each village chose a representative for the district level, who in turn chose a provincial representative for the district level, who in turn chose a provincial representative.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has been conducting elections since many years ago. There have always been problems of election in Nigeria. Social Studies/Civic Education has been taught in Nigeria secondary schools, so as to produce responsible citizens in Nigeria. One of the expectations is to produce citizens who understand the purpose of election and, by extension, the process of election. It is important to note that how the Senior Secondary School II (SSII) students understand election should interest any Social Studies/Civic Education teachers. This study is therefore designed to find out students' understanding of election. It is intended to know areas of strength and weakness regarding students' understanding of election.

Purpose of Study

The overriding aim of this study is to examine Senior Secondary School Two (SSII) students' understanding of election in Nigeria. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives are set to:
  i.   establish how students define elections;
  ii. examine what students consider as the purpose of elections;
  iii. assess students' understanding of the process of elections; and
  iv. assess students' understanding of problems of election in Nigeria.

Research Questions

  i.   How do Senior Secondary (SSII) students define elections?
  ii. What do the Senior Secondary (SSII) students consider to be the reasons for conducting election?
  iii. How do the Senior Secondary (SSII) students understand the types of election?
  iv. What do the Senior Secondary II students consider to be the materials for election in Nigeria?
  v.   How do the Senior Secondary (SSII) students understand the problems of election?

Methodology

A descriptive sample survey was used. It surveyed SS II students' understanding of election in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area, Ogun state. The population of the study comprised all SS II students in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area, Ogun State. This local government contains (20) twenty secondary schools, consisting of a total of 1500 SS II students, approximately. The sampled students were randomly drawn from five senior secondary schools in Ijebu-Ode local government area. Twenty-four students were selected from each school. The instrument used for the study was questionnaire on election. It has six sections. Section A of the questionnaire is on general information such as sex, parent, and political involvement, interest in politics, leadership positions and parent occupation. Section B: is on how the senior secondary II students understand the meaning of election. The students were asked to explain what election meant to them. In Section C, students were asked to give three reasons for conducting an election. In Section D, students were asked to mention types of election that they knew. In Section E, students were asked to mention five materials of election. In Section F, students were asked to mention three problems of conducting election. For data gathering, the researcher visited five (5) secondary schools in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area. Their characteristics are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1:   Sample Characteristics

Parameter	Group	f	%
Sex	Male	52	43
	Female	68	57
Parent Political Involvement	Yes	13	11
	No	107	89
Interest in Politics	Yes	21	18
	No	99	83
Leadership position	Yes	70	58
	No	50	42
Parent Occupation	Civil servant	63	53
	Artisans	11	10
	Business	43	36
	Farming	03	03

Table 1 shows that 52 male (43%) and 68 female (57%) of the total sample size responded to the questionnaires distributed on the issue relating to the parent's political involvement. About 13 (11%) of the respondents said their parents were into politics. This reveals that some of the parents were politically involved in the electoral process in the country, while 107 (89%) respondents indicated that the parents were not politically involved in the electoral process in the country. 21(18%) respondents showed that they were interested in political participation while, 99 (83%) showed that they were not interested in political participation while responding to the questionnaires on leadership position in schools, the table reveals that 70 (58%) respondents agreed that they had

actively held leadership positions in their various secondary schools and 50 (42%) respondents agreed that they had not held leadership positions in their various secondary schools. To this end, the occupational distribution of the parents revealed that 63 (53%) were civil servants, 11(10%) were artisan, 43(36%) were businessmen and women or rather petty traders, while the remaining 3% were farmers.

The descriptive statistics of students' perception on meaning of election, reasons for conducting election, types of election, materials for election and problems of election are presented below:

Research Question 1: How do senior secondary schools define election?

Table 2: Students' Understanding of Election

Election Conception	Male	Female	Total	Rank
Choosing Leader	22	26	48	1st
Voting Leader	12	28	40	2nd
Selecting Leader	09	18	27	3rd
Electing Politicians	08	07	15	4th
Electing Leader	09	01	10	5th
Changing Leader	07	02	09	6th
Appointment of leader	07	01	08	7th
Bring Good Leader	01	01	02	8th

Table 2 shows that conception of election with highest frequency is *choosing leader*. Both 22 male and female students of the total sample expressed this idea and came first with the total score of 48. The conception of election that came second is *voting new leaders* in government with a total score of 40 (12 male and 28 female), followed by *selecting leader* with the total score of 27 (9 male students and 18 female students). An example of the conception is "Election can be defined as the way which people select a person who will represent their interest in the legislative or executive position". The next idea of the meaning of election is *electing politicians* which came forth with 15 as total score (8 male and 7 female students). The table also reveals *electing leaders* as another option, and it came fifth with a total score of 10 (9 male and 1

female students). Another idea revealed by the respondents about election is *changing leader, with sixth position* (7 male and 2 female students). Example of this conception is *Election is the process of changing leader*. The next idea about election is appointment of leaders. Here 7 male, 1 female students agreed with the perception that "election means how to *appoint our leaders.* The table also reveals that election is to *bring good leader* by 1 male and 1 female student expressed the meaning of election as to *bring good leader.* The result in the table shows that students have understanding of elections in the study area.

Research Question 2: What do the SS II students consider to be the reasons for conducting an election?

Table 3: Reasons for conducting election

Reasons for Conducting Election	Male	Female	Total
To change our leader	28	63	91
To choose our leader	15	42	57
Stability in government	18	27	41
For political participation	16	22	38
Exercise civic right	09	22	31
To know our leaders	10	17	27
Legitimacy in government	04	03	07
Embezzlement of money	03	03	06

Table 3 shows that the students perceive the reason for conducting election as *choose and change government, stability in government, political participation exercise civic right, know our leaders, Legitimacy in government and Embezzlement of money.* In support of this, Aderibigbe (2002) stressed further that peaceful conduct of the election would allow the electorate determine the choice of their legitimate leader. From the data therefore, it is clear that the larger number of students, comprising 63 female and 28 male students, understand the reason for conducting election as changing our leaders, closely followed by 42 female and 15 male students with the conceptions of *choosing our leaders*. The next idea about reasons for conducting an election is

*stability in government, (*23 female and 18 male students agreed to this reason). While lower numbers of 3 male and 3 female respondents agreed it was *embezzlement of money,* 4 males and 3 female students in the study area agreed it is *legitimacy in government*, as 10 male and 17 female students agreed it was to *know our leaders*. The result on the table indicates that the number of students that understand reasons for conducting election in the study area are more than those that cannot give reasonable ideas.

Research Question 3: How do the senior secondary 2 students understand the types of election?

Table 4: **Types of Election**

Types	Male	Female	Total
Direct Election	25	57	82
Indirect Election	22	45	67
Bye Election	25	25	50
Open Ballot System	15	23	38
Primary Election	10	13	23
Secret Voting	13	09	22
By Proxy	10	09	19

The result in table 4.3 shows the conceptions of students on types of election as *direct and indirect*, *bye election*, *open ballot*, *primary*, *secret*, and election *by proxy* are various types of election they understand. The table shows that a large number of students (82, both male and female), mentioned *direct election,* while 67 students suggested indirect election followed by *bye election* as the types of election they know. On the other hand, open ballot election was raised by 38 students, opinion on primary election was suggested by 23 respondents, while secret voting was agreed by 13 male and 09 female students and election by proxy raised by 19 respondents as the type of election they know.

Research Question 4: What do the senior secondary II students consider to be the materials for election?

Table 5: **Materials for Election**

Materials	Males	Females	Total
Ballot Box	44	70	114
Voters card	45	62	107
Ballot Paper	39	62	101
Voters Register	34	36	70
Indelible ink	17	26	43
Ink pad	13	19	32
Writing materials	04	12	16
Computer	04	07	11
Polling Booth	03	05	08

Result in table 5 shows that 114 students identified ballot box as one of the materials used for election, followed by voter's card, mentioned by 107 respondents, next to ballot paper, identified by 101 students, while 70 respondents mentioned voters register. About 43 respondents also mentioned indelible ink as one of the materials for election, while 39 male and 62 female students in the study agreed it is polling booth, comprising 3 male and 5 females students in the study area. The computer was chosen by 4 male and 7 female students and writing materials (such as ink, pen, e.t.c) was expressed as the materials used for election by other students.

Research Question 5: How do senior secondary II students understand the problem of conducting elections?

Table 6: Problems of Election

Problem of Election	Male	Female	Total
Rigging	15	39	54
Violence	19	30	49
Bribery of voters/Agent	19	19	38
Security	13	21	34
Multiple Voting	09	20	29
Poor Management	06	15	21
Falsification of result	03	07	10
Low turnout of voters	07	03	10
Fake Ballot Papers	03	05	08

Table 6 indicates students' understanding of election problems, such as "rigging, violence, bribery, security, shortage of materials, multiple voting, poor management, falsification, low turnout and fake ballot papers" as the problems of conducting elections. The result in table 6, on the problems of conducting elections, reveals that a majority of the students (15 males and 39 females) agreed on rigging, and 19 male and 30 female students agreed it was bribery. In order of frequency, security problems came third, with 13 male and 21 female students supporting security problems. In the order of frequency, it was fake ballot paper, with 3 male and 5 female students supporting, while 7 male and 3 female students said it was low turnout of voters and 3 male and 7 female students agreed it was falsification of result in that order. The National Democratic Institute (2011) traced the history of election, from 1951 (the colonial period), up to the latter part of 2011. They did a comparative analysis of election in Nigeria and discovered that major issues are violence and insecurity, poor management of the election. They suggested that Independent National Electoral Commission should embark on massive education of the masses so as to limit the extent of the negative impact of the major issues. The result on the table further reveals that a large number of students in the study area understand the problems of election better.

Discussion
The findings, regarding the first research question show that students conceive or understand election as choosing leader, voting leader, selecting leader, selecting politician, selecting leaders, changing leaders, appointment of leader, bring good leader because these might be as a result of students' belief that; citizens have always resorted to democratic means to choose their leaders. The result presented in second research question shows that while some students understand reasons for conducting an election as to change leader, other students gave other important reasons such as to choose leader, stability in government, political participation, exercise and rights, to know our leaders, legitimacy in government and embezzlement of money. This shows that a larger percentage of the students understand the meaning of electoral process and the reason for conducting election. Findings concerning third research question show that both male and female students understand types of election and get the answers right as direct, indirect, bye election, open ballot system, primary election, secret voting and by proxy

because it is the method to choose representative and also to express their preferences for how they will be governed. The findings in fourth research question reveals that students conceive or understand materials used for election as ballot box, voters card, ballot paper, voters register, inedible ink, thumb printing pad, writing materials, computer, and polling booth, because students understand these from the Social Studies classes. In conclusion, the result reveals both the male and female students understand materials used for election. This understanding might be attributed to knowledge gained from the Social Studies classes and participation in a school election during their (students') school careers.

The last result presented shows that students understand problems of election as rigging, violence, Bribery, Security, and Shortage of materials, Multiple voting, poor management, fortification of election result, low turnout of voters and fake ballot paper because they believe that voting systems must be tamper-resistant. The results indicate that students understand election and are anxious to learn about future political career. Australian Electoral Commission (2010) recognized this fact, when it stated that electoral materials are significant items in the electoral system, and these include ballot box, ballot paper, indelible ink, computer, and trained personnel. These are the major variables that determine the rate of election success of a given country.

Assessing the students' perception on reasons for conducting election, it was revealed that elections are to change our leader, to choose our leader, stability in government, Political participation, exercise our civic rights, know our leaders, legitimacy in our government and prevent embezzlement of public money. Again, the study found that the students' perception on the types of election shows that the students understand it as direct election, indirect election, bye election, open ballot system, primary election, secret voting, and by proxy. The study also found that the students understand materials used for election as ballot box, voter card, ballot papers, voters register, indelible ink, computer and polling booths. The

study found that the students understand problems of election as rigging, violence, bribery of voters, security, shortages of materials, multiple voting, poor management, falsification of result, low turnout of voters, and fake ballot papers. Ayeni (2019) stated that elections have become the most acceptable means of changing leadership in any democratic system. Election ordinarily, in most democratic states is usually conducted by an institution set up by law in a given society. Ocholi (2012) submitted that elections in Nigeria are characterized by rigging, thuggery and unbridled display of incumbency hence the legitimacy of the government which emerges from such controversial circumstances, becomes easily challengeable.

Conclusion

The study showed that election has become very frequent in Nigeria since the nation's return to democracy in 1999. Since then, there have been local, state, and federal elections. This study shows that most of the students have democratic process awareness that election is generally a means to elect credible leaders. They are anxious to be grown adults in the future, poised to change the political systems in Nigeria. Looking at the various political problems facing the country, most of the students believe that these problems could be solved completely when office holders are transparent in the positions they are voted in for. In conclusion, the degree of understanding the meaning of election is quite appreciable and there is room for understanding, more especially, skill and intellectual development and civic education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made for policymakers and stakeholders

i. Government, as a matter of priority, should put in place an adequate legal framework by ensuring elections are managed in a credible and appropriate manner and conducted only within this framework.

ii.   Steps should be taken by the electoral body to ensure that quality participation of every citizen is guaranteed without any fear of victimization, violence and security.

iii.   To ensure quality management of the electoral process, the federal government needs to pay attention to the body or bodies in charge of the organization of electoral body in Nigeria.

iv.   Government, as a matter of urgency, should take concrete steps to minimize malpractices, deficiencies and procedural inconsistencies in the democratic process.

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