

**PERCEPTION OF ELECTION STAKEHOLDERS ON EFFECTIVENESS OF
VOTER EDUCATION METHODS OF INDEPENDENT NATIONAL
ELECTORAL COMMISSION IN SOUTH – WEST NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Voter education programme is to make the citizens better informed about elections and other activities in the electoral process. It is a sensitisation process whereby positive impact is made on voters' turnouts in an election, as well as reduction in the number of invalid votes, especially in countries with a large number of non-literate voters. This study examined the perception of election stakeholders on the effectiveness of voter education methods of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in South-West Nigeria. 1,953 participants were randomly drawn from Oyo, Lagos and Ondo States, and purposively selected along their existing senatorial districts. Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews were used to compliment the quantitative data. Findings showed that the perception of election stakeholders on effectiveness of INEC's voter education methods was low in South – West Nigeria

Keywords *Voter education programme, Independent National Electoral Commission, Electoral process, South-West Nigeria.*

1.0 BACKGROUND INTRODUCTION

The basic principle of voter education is to make the citizens better informed about elections and all other activities in the electoral process generally. The importance of voter education in a country like Nigeria, where a larger percentage of the people are not literate cannot be overemphasised. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria has recognised the profound importance of building the right perception of the Nigerian electoral process among the electorates and the commission strongly believes that nothing should be left to chance in its effort to improve the level of voter education and civic sensitisation (Adedokun, 2017).

Jega (2014), stated that civic and voter education are a core mandate of INEC and the primary objective of its voter education programme is building of election literacy among the voting population. The strategic objective of the Commission in terms of this mandate has been to produce an enlightened and practically sophisticated citizenry with the capacity to make informed choices at elections that would confer legitimacy to elected representatives and executives.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (2014), realising the importance of voter education in the electoral process, embarked on voter education programme which has the following objectives to achieve:

- (i) To create awareness of the electoral process;
- (ii) To promote mass participation in politics and high voters' turnouts;
- (iii) To reduce the number of invalid votes;
- (iv) To impart knowledge about how to participate in electoral processes, especially registration of voters and elections;
- (v) To build people's confidence and trust in the Electoral Management Body (EMB);
- (vi) To promote attitudes and behaviour that will make elections peaceful and free from violence and intimidation;
- (vii) To reduce election litigations.

To achieve the goals of voter education, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) collaborated with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and other relevant stakeholders. The INEC's voter enlightenment education programme on private and national television networks was strengthened both in content and form to function as a veritable voter enlightenment platform in support of elections and democracy. Before the commencement of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, INEC embarked on series of voter education enlightenment programmes at the Federal, State and Local Government areas of the country in line with the commission's strategic plan (2010 - 2016).

The INEC in its voter education programme activities towards the 2015 general elections, made use of the media as a means of reaching out to the Nigerian public. Radio and Television talk shows were sponsored by the commission where election processes and procedures were discussed in order to reduce the incidence of rejected votes during elections.

Printed materials such as billboards, handbills, posters and banners were used to enlighten the general public on the need to participate effectively in the election process.

Despite the INEC's voter education awareness programs in the media, the regional voters' turnouts in 2015 presidential election for example, showed that South – West Nigeria had 40.26% which was the least percentage of voters' turnouts in that election (The Centre for Public Policy Alternatives, 2015). Olurode (2015), reported that there was an increase in the number of invalid votes in the 2015 Presidential election when compared with that of 2011 Presidential election in the South – West Nigeria. One pertinent question cannot but arise as to what could have been responsible for these negative trends in the electoral process inspite of INEC's voter education programme. Could it be due to poor planning or bad methods of implementation?

Against this background, it is, therefore, the objective of this study to examine the perception of election stakeholders on effectiveness of voter education methods adopted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in South-West Nigeria. In doing this, the central focus of the researcher was the 2015 general elections.

2.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of election stakeholders on effective use of the electronic media as a method of INEC's voter education programme?
2. What is the perception of election stakeholders on effective use of printed materials as a method of INEC's voter education programme?
3. What is the perception of election stakeholders on effective use of public procession and road shows as a method of INEC's voter education programme?
4. How frequent were the messages of INEC's voter education on the electronic media to make voter education effective?
5. What is the perception of election stakeholders on effective use of dialogue / town hall meetings as a method of INEC's voter education programme?

3.0 CONCEPTUAL EXPLANTIONS

3.1 The Concept of Voter Education

The submission of Administration and Cost of Election Network (2013), is that voter education at its core, is an enterprise designed to ensure that voters are ready, willing and are able to participate in electoral politics. It has been assumed that this entails election literacy and confidence that the electoral process is appropriate and effective in selecting governments and promoting policies that will benefit individual voters.

In every election, voter and civic education are necessary to ensure that all constituents, that is men and women alike understand their rights, their political system, the contests they are being asked to decide, and how and where to vote. For an election to be successful and democratic, voters must understand their rights and responsibilities, and must be sufficiently knowledgeable and well informed to cast ballots that are legally valid and to participate meaningfully in the voting process (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2014).

Voter education typically addresses voters' motivation and preparedness to participate fully in elections. It pertains to relatively more complex types of information about voting and the electoral process and concerned with concepts such as the link between basic human rights and voting rights; the role, responsibilities and rights of voters; the relationship between elections and democracy and the conditions necessary for democratic elections; secrecy of the ballot, why each vote is important and its impact on public accountability, and how votes translate into seats (International Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2006).

Voter education as submitted by Okungbowa and Stanley (2012) is a very focused and deliberate undertaking. It is targeted at eligible voters and addressed a specific electoral event as well as the general electoral process. Such enlightenment campaign programmes as: who can vote from outside the country? Are citizens residing outside the country allowed to participate in the election? How do electors cast their votes? Are ballots manually made? And what are the legal qualifications to become a candidate at legislative elections? These are some of the questions answered by voter education. The education campaign comes with desired messages through various media platforms to effectively and efficiently educate and mobilise citizens for elections.

Voter education is a public education aimed specifically at meeting the technical needs of all stakeholders in the electoral process. According to the Electoral Institute (2012), voter education encompasses a detailed presentation of the basic voter information that every voter must have to enable him arrive, prepare, at the polling station and vote. Voter education focuses primarily on the electoral rights and responsibilities of citizens and ensures that citizens understand those rights and responsibilities and are able to exercise them within the electoral process.

Better understanding of the election procedures is an area where voter education plays a critical role. Voters are made to know the date, the time, the venue where elections are to take place and the requirements for eligible citizens to participate as a voter or as a candidate to contest an election. The knowledge of what constitutes electoral offences and penalties to be awarded are part of voter information which are transmitted through voter education.

The following are the benefits of voter education as highlighted by Ujo (2012):

- (i) The electorates become sufficiently knowledgeable and well informed because such voters are able to cast votes that are valid.
- (ii) People are enabled to participate effectively in the electoral process by making informed choices at the polls.
- (iii) Members of the public are able to identify the political parties and candidates.
- (iv) General apathy and fear are broken in the polity.
- (v) Citizens are enlightened on their powers to choose or recall their representatives.
- (vi) Voter education promotes the growth and strengthening of democracy.

3.2 METHODS OF VOTER EDUCATION

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as an Electoral Management Body (EMB) in Nigeria adopted different methods in the dissemination of its voter education information. The methods of voter education such as the use of electronic media, the use of printed materials, the use of public processions and the use of town hall meetings or dialogue were mainly used by INEC and shall be discussed in turn.

3.2.1 The Use of Electronic Media

Television and Radio talk shows were organised by INEC in previous elections to make information about electoral process available to the general voting public. Expressing his views on methods and instruments of mobilisation, Imhabekhai (2009), asserts that radio and television have the added advantage of immediate transmission of messages in different languages to cater to the interest of those who may not understand the original language. The media of both radio and television in their programmes, generate further fruitful discussion among the group members. The people critically analyse the information received, evaluate the ideas or information and take rational decisions that would offer mutual benefits to the people.

3.2.2 The Use of Printed Materials

Other conventional method of voter education is the use of printed materials such as posters, banners, handbills, billboards, fliers and leaflets to disseminate information. Posters containing different messages can be pasted in strategic places and locations to provide information about elections and other electoral activities to the general public. Such posters must be large enough to easily catch the attention of the public. The language must be clear and exact without containing any form of ambiguity. Despite that posters have the advantage of being exposed to many readers in different places, the life span of posters is limited by rainfall and other climatic conditions.

3.2.3 The Use of Public Processions and Road Shows

This method or strategy in the form of mobile street cinema theatre can be used to convey simple messages. As the word implies, it is a movable or procession of people to stage shows or drama to disseminate information on voter education along the street in a particular community, city or town. Such a street or road procession can be used to distribute handbills and pamphlets that carry voter education messages to members of the public. The process can also be used to demonstrate and practise skills which can provoke debate and dialogue between the players and the audience. Usually, sound trucks and vehicles could be considered for areas where mass media are not adequate or available. It is possible to use the audio from radio spots supplemented with local announcements during road shows.

3.2.4 The Use of Town Hall Meetings

The use of town hall meetings as a method of voter education is also called community dialogue whereby the voter education addresses and engages members of the community in a dialogue in order to convey voter education messages. Often times, community heads or leaders are the main source of information for villages and so, they are usually targeted and can be very instrumental in the dissemination of voter education messages. Town hall meetings/community dialogue usually affords members of the community the opportunity to ask questions on a particular aspect of the electoral process that is not clear to them.

3.2.5 Frequency of the Voter Education Messages on the Electronic Media

The voter education programme of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria utilises the electronic media of both the radio and television to transmit voter education messages to the voting public. Writing on the use of radio and television, Imhabekhai (2009), submitted that the two media are quite effective for mobilising people since they can reach the people all over the world with the messages as soon as they are broadcast. In voter education, radio and television messages can easily be understood especially where the language in which the people are most conversant is used. The frequency of the messages on the electronic media is the number of times such messages are aired or broadcast on the air waves. The extent to which the audience or listeners get the messages would depend on how frequent such messages are aired.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

A descriptive survey research was adopted for the study. Since the event had already taken place and the researcher could not control any of the variables, descriptive survey design of ex-post facto was adopted.

4.2 Participants

The participants were mainly the election stakeholders, who were involved in the 2015 general elections in the South – West Nigeria. These were (i) voters; (ii) Electoral Officers in the Local Government Areas (LGAs); (iii) Officials of media organisations; (iv) State Officials of the National Orientation Agency (NOA); (v) Local Government Information Officers; (vi) LGAs NOA Officers.

The total sample from the total population in the three states of Oyo, Lagos and Ondo was 1,953. The sample was purposively drawn from the existing senatorial districts in the three states.

4.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

Multi-Stage Sampling technique comprising simple random, cluster and purposive was adopted based on World Health Organisation '30 by 7 (WHO) cluster sampling.

4.4 Instrumentation

Questionnaire was the major instrument used, which was complemented with Key Information Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

4.5 Procedure

The instrument was personally administered by the researcher with the help of nine trained research assistants.

4.6 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics based on percentage, mean and standard deviation for the quantitative aspect and content analysis for the qualitative data.

5.0 RESULTS

Table 1: The perception of Election Stakeholders on effective use of electronic media as a method of voter education programme.

S/N	ITEM	VH	%	H	%	A	%	VL	%	Mean	SD
1	The use of electronic media such as radio and Television to disseminate voter education information	8	22.2	3	8.3	11	30.6	14	38.9	1.81	1.06

Interpretation

The result in table 1 above showed the perception of respondents on effective use of electronic media as a method of voter education programme. The effective use of radio and

television was rated as very high (22.2%), high (8.3%), average (30.6%) and very low (38.9%). The mean value (\bar{x} = 1.81) was respondents' perception of the use of electronic media to disseminate voter education information. This means that the use of electronic media to disseminate voter education messages was low.

Table 2: The perception of election stakeholders on effective use of Printed materials as a method of voter education programme.

S/N	ITEM	VH	%	H	%	A	%	VL	%	Mean	SD
2	The use of printed materials such as posters, billboards, handbills, fliers and banners.	19	52.8	10	27.8	2	5.6	5	13.9	2.86	1.17

Interpretation

The result in table 2 above showed the perception of respondents on effective use of printed materials as a method of voter education programme. The effective use of printed materials such as posters, billboards, handbills, fliers and banners was rated as very high (52.8%), high (27.8%), average (5.6%) and very low (13.9%). The mean value (\bar{x} = 2.86) was respondents' perception of the use of printed materials to disseminate voter education information. This means that the use of printed materials as a method of voter education was low.

Table 3: The perception of election stakeholders on effective use of public procession and road shows as a method of voter education programme.

S/N	ITEM	VH	%	H	%	A	%	VL	%	Mean	SD
3	The use of public procession and road shows.	11	30.6	13	36.1	9	25.0	3	8.3	1.11	1.95

Interpretation

The result in table 3 above showed the perception of respondents on effective use of public procession and road shows as a method of voter education programme. The effective use of

public procession and road shows was rated as very high (30.6%), high (36.1%), average (25.0%) and very low (8.3%). The mean value (\bar{x} = 1.11) was respondents' perception of the use of public procession and road shows as a method of voter education. This means that the use of public procession/road shows as a method of voter education was low.

Table 4: Perception of election stakeholders on frequency of voter education messages on the electronic media.

S/N	ITEM	VH	%	H	%	A	%	VL	%	Mean	SD
4	Frequency of voter education messages on the electronic media (Radio and Television)	8	22.2	2	5.6	18	50.0	8	22.2	1.72	1.06

Interpretation

The result in table 4 above showed the perception of respondents on frequency of voter education messages on the electronic media to disseminate information to prospective voters. Frequency of radio and television messages was rated as very high (22.2%) high (5.6%), average (50.0%) and very low (22.2%). The mean value (\bar{x} = 1.72) was respondents' perception of frequency of voter education messages on the electronic media. This means that frequency of voter education messages on radio and television was low.

Table 5: Perception of election stakeholders on effective use of dialogue/town hall meetings as a method of voter education.

S/N	ITEM	VH	%	H	%	A	%	VL	%	Mean	SD
5	The use of Community dialogue/town hall meetings	14	38.9	9	25.0	1	2.8	12	33.3	2.31	1.31

Interpretation

The result in table 5 above showed the perception of respondents on effective use of community dialogue/town hall meetings as a method of voter education. The effective use of dialogue/town hall meetings was rated as very high (38.9%), high (25.0%), average (2.8%) and very low (33.3%). The mean value (\bar{x} = 2.31) was respondents' perception of the use of community dialogue / town hall meetings as a method of voter education. This means that the use of dialogue/town hall meetings as a method of voter education was low.

6.0 DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

RQ1: What is the perception of election stakeholders on effective use of the electronic media as a method of INEC's voter education programme?

The perception of election stakeholders was that the use of electronic media (radio and television) was not effective as a method to disseminate voter education messages. This perception was in line with that of Imhabekhai (2009), that the use of electronic media especially television is both costly and mostly used in urban areas. He also claimed that radio and television programmes don't usually last long. Once the broadcasts have been made and people who were not available at home may not get the message back.

This opinion corroborates the views of KII and FGD:

Radio and television would have been very effective in disseminating voter education programme information, but the use of electronic media is very low due to erratic power supply (KII male participant, Lagos State).

Another respondent expressed his mind on the use of electronic media as a method of voter education when he said:

We don't usually know the time when INEC uses radio and television for voter education programme because most of us are farmers, we don't normally stay at home to watch television (Male FGD participant, Oyo State).

RQ2: What is the perception of election stakeholders on effective use of printed materials as a method of INEC voter education programme.

FGD and KII participants expressed their opinions about the use of printed materials to propagate voter education programme as stated below:

Even when posters are used and handbills are distributed, many of us cannot read what is written on them. We are not literate enough to read posters (Female FGD, Ondo State).

The use of posters and billboards are meant for the literate ones, otherwise, why should INEC waste money on printed materials that cannot be read by illiterate majority (Male KII participant, Oyo State).

The opinions being expressed above have been further supported by Imhabekhai (2009) and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2014), that through the use of conventional method of voter education which involves the use of printed materials such as posters, banners, handbills, fliers and leaflets can be effective, but these materials have limited life span as posters for example, can be washed away by rainfall and other climatic conditions.

RQ3: What is the perception of election stakeholders on effective use of public procession and road shows as a method of INEC's voter education programme?

On the use of road shows or public procession as a method of voter education, the following FGD respondents have this to say:

I have never seen INEC using road shows to mobilise us in their voter education programme. We have never seen road shows in our village here, may be they do it in the town (Male FGD participant, Oyo State).

Another FGD participant expressed her views in this way:

*What do they call road shows?
I can't understand it. INEC's Officer only invites us to meetings to talk to us when elections are very near (Female FGD participant, Oyo State).*

A KII participant had this observation about public procession or road shows when he said:

Organising road shows or public procession may be hampered in big cities where there is usually heavy traffic on the road. Even, local communities may not get the message clearly because of those funny things associated with public processions (Male KII participant, Ondo State).

Ejue and Ekanem (2011), submitted that security threats especially in a volatile democracy like Nigeria, may not allow an effective use of public procession as a method to propagate voter education messages to the public, and will necessitate the use of other available means to mobilise the citizens for political participation.

RQ4: How frequent were the messages of INEC's voter education on the electronic media to make voter education effective?

The low ratings given to the frequency of the electronic media on messages of voter education by the respondents have been buttressed by KII participants that the degree of frequency of voter education messages on radio and television would have to do with availability of funds.

KII respondents expressed their feelings in the following manner:

There can be low frequency of voter education messages on the electronic media because this depends on whether or not fund is available (Male KII participant, Oyo State).

Another KII participant offered his comments as presented below:

Everything about voter education publicity requires funding. Low funding would mean low frequency of voter education information messages (Male KII participant, Ondo State).

RQ5: What is the perception of election stakeholders on effective use of dialogue / town hall meetings as a method of INEC's voter education programme?

The opinion of Kamp (2011), about lack of community dialogue as a method of disseminating voter education information especially at the grassroots level is that there will be limited opportunities for open interaction and discussions to get active involvement of the local citizens. He further stressed that in a highly traditional context at grassroots level, there might be barriers for the participation of marginalised groups in voter education activities where there is lack of community dialogue.

KII and FGD participants made the following statements about lack of community dialogue in voter education programme:

One disadvantage of lack of community dialogue in voter education programme is that the grassroots people may be excluded from active participation in the electoral process which may not be good enough for democracy to thrive (KII Male participant, Oyo State).

INEC should give us information about elections because we are far away from information. Those of us at the grassroots level should be carried along so that we can have information about elections (FGD Female participant, Lagos State).

7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, election stakeholders have indicated that INEC's voter education methods were not effective enough in South-West Nigeria going by their low ratings. In view of this, the methods employed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to deliver voter education programme should be improved upon. Radio as a medium of communication should be adequately used to disseminate voter education messages across to the grassroots people. The radio is capable of penetrating both the literate and non-literate segments of the rural population in view of its cost effectiveness over the use of other media. There is the need to increase the frequency of voter education programme messages on electronic media

(radio and television). This can be done by making fund available. The use of community dialogue / town hall meetings is essentially required so as to carry the grassroots people along in voter education mobilisation activities. It has to be noted, that greater output in terms of effective implementation of voter education programme shall be realised if INEC as an election management body in Nigeria can improve on its voter education methods.

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