

## Influence of Political Education on Electoral Awareness of Undergraduate Students in a Nigerian University

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### Abstract

This study examined the influence of political education on awareness of the electoral process among undergraduate students in a Nigerian University. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study while final year students in Niger Delta University constituted the target population. A total of 150 students were randomly sampled from the Departments of Social Science Education and Political Science. A 20-items researchers' designed questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. The validity of the instrument was established by experts in Test and Measurement from the Faculty of Education of the Niger Delta University. A test-retest method was employed to determine the reliability of the instrument using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation in which a reliability index of 0.72 was obtained. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings indicated that most of the undergraduate students were aware of the activities of political parties. However, the results also indicated that most of the undergraduate students were not well conversant with the activities of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) especially with regards to the constitutional mandate given to it. The study concluded that an effective way of creating awareness of the whole electoral process in Nigeria especially among university students is to enhance the teaching and learning of political education contents. Therefore, it was recommended among others that a compulsory course that has in its contents, relevant political education themes be introduced and domiciled in the General Studies Unit in the universities so that students can be aware of issues relating to elections and politics in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Undergraduates, Political Education, Electoral Awareness, Political Parties, Electoral disputes

### Introduction

In John Locke's educational philosophy of human understanding, it is believed that man is born a '*tabular rasa*' (blank slate), without having the ability to process information (Duschinsky, 2012). That is, the traits that are found in humans are learnt through the process of either a formal or informal educational system. In fact, education is seen as a process that imbues in the individuals the values and traits that make people useful to themselves and the society at large.

This position is supported by the National Policy on Education which states that education is an instrument for effecting national development in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The foregoing is not only true but real in that schools do not only provide the fundamental knowledge and skills to enable one to be gainfully employed but it also develops the competence of students towards the improvement of their democratic culture. As such, education reinforces the awareness of students towards their rights and responsibilities, especially on electoral issues. The performance of this function is not exclusive to schools as even core political institutions like; political parties, election management bodies, etc, also take part in educating citizens on their rights and responsibilities in the political system.

Political parties participate in the performance of the function of political education. They educate the electorates on how to vote and why they should vote. They orient the electorate on what they should stand to gain from the activities of government (Anamgba, 2000). Parties organize rallies, campaigns, debates and symposia on the people. They provide information on candidates contesting for elective positions and they also provide avenues for electorates to vote for candidates of their choice during elections. Elections are conducted under the auspices of election management bodies (EMBs). Election management bodies are bodies charged with the duty of organizing and conducting elections, resolution of election disputes, the conduct of referendum and plebiscites in a state (Ekundayo, 2015). This body also performs the function of a political education by enlightening and educating the electorates (voters) about the processes of the election, that they should vote and the need to avoid electoral malpractices. This implies that there is a fundamental theoretical and practical connection between education and politics.

There is an argument in the literature that the political awareness of student has improved drastically over the years through education (Hamad, Qodrat & Zulham, 2001; Golombek, 2002; Barwari, 2006). Others argue that despite the political education carried out by both governmental and non-governmental organizations, the political awareness of students are on the decline (Ikelegbe, 2005; Russell, 2002; Omari, 2013). This indicates that whether or not political education increases, political participation is contentious. It is on this note that this study is investigating the influence of political education on electoral awareness among undergraduate

students in a Nigeria University with attention given to undergraduates' awareness of political party activities, electoral management and disputes resolution processes in Nigeria.

### **Materials and Methods**

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to elicit relevant data on the influence of political education on electoral awareness among undergraduate students. The Niger Delta University was purposively selected as a case study. The university has massive attendance of students from all parts of the country. The targeted population was undergraduate students of the Department of Social Science Education (Political Science Programme) and the Department of Political Science (in the Faculty of Social Sciences). A random sampling technique was used to select 150 final year undergraduate students from both Departments. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed 20-items questionnaire titled "Political Education and Electoral Awareness Questionnaire (PEEAQ)". The PEEAQ consisted of two sections (A & B). Section 'A' focused on the respondents' socio-demographic variables such as gender and department while section 'B' consisted of 20 closed-ended structured items that addressed the study subject matter. The instrument was structured based on a modified 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) which were scored 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The face and content validity of the instrument was ascertained by experts in Test, Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. The expert's comments and observations were used to correct errors noticed in the instrument before administering to respondents. The test-retest technique was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. Thirty copies of the research instrument were administered twice to a population with similar attributes (among Political Science Students of the Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State) within one month and the correlation coefficient of the outcome was computed given a coefficient of 0.72 which indicated positive correlation. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of socio-demographic variables of respondents. As indicated, 59% of the respondents were male undergraduate students while 41% were female. On

the age bracket, 67% of the respondents are within the age bracket of 18-29 years while 33% were within the age bracket of 30-49 years.

## Results

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Socio-Demographic Variables of Respondents**

| Variables         | Levels                   | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>     | Male                     | 89            | 59             |
|                   | Female                   | 61            | 41             |
|                   | <b>Total</b>             | <b>150</b>    | <b>100</b>     |
| <b>Age</b>        | 18-29                    | 101           | 67             |
|                   | 30-49                    | 49            | 33             |
|                   | <b>Total</b>             | <b>150</b>    | <b>100</b>     |
| <b>Department</b> | Social Science Education | 50            | 33             |
|                   | Political Science        | 100           | 67             |
|                   | <b>Total</b>             | <b>150</b>    | <b>100</b>     |

Meanwhile, the distribution of respondents also indicated that 33% of them were drawn from the Department of Social Science Education (Political Science option) in the Faculty of Education while 67% were drawn from the Department of Political Science in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Results of the socio-demographic variables of respondents revealed that male students still account for the majority of those admitted for undergraduate programmes in most Nigerian universities. In other words, most Nigerian universities including the (Niger Delta University) are yet to achieve gender parity in general enrolment and into specific degree programmes. This also implies that the contributions of the universities in Nigeria in meeting the goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which aims to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls; may not be highly felt when it is measured in relation to school enrolment.

Results also proved that majority of students running undergraduate programmes in most Nigerian universities falls within ages 18 and 29 years. This is an indication that as of today, students within the 18-29 years age bracket remains the most active population offering undergraduate programmes in Nigerian universities in terms of demographics.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistical representation of responses on the influence of political education on undergraduates' awareness of political parties' activities. The result indicated that

47% of the respondents agreed that to be a member of political party activities is voluntary while 10% of them strongly disagreed to the view that to be a member of political party activities is voluntary. This is also confirmed by the mean statistic result of 2.90 with a corresponding standard deviation of 2.89 indicating that indeed, being a member of a political party in Nigeria is voluntary.

**Table 2: Influence of Political Education on Undergraduates' Awareness of Political Parties' Activities**

| S/N | ITEMS   | SA          | A           | D           | SD          | $\bar{X}$                      | Std. Dev.   |
|-----|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| 1   | To be a member of a political party in Nigeria is voluntary.  | 40<br>(27%) | 70<br>(47%) | 25<br>(17%) | 15<br>(10%) | <del>2.90</del><br><b>2.90</b> | <b>2.89</b> |
| 2   | Political parties in Nigeria are usually formed without clear-cut ideology.   | 10<br>(7%)  | 20<br>(13%) | 40<br>(27%) | 80<br>(53%) | <b>1.73</b>                    | <b>1.72</b> |
| 3   | To secure the party nomination during primary elections in Nigeria is the exclusive preserve of political godfathers. | 60<br>(40%) | 75<br>(50%) | 10<br>(7%)  | 5<br>(3%)   | <b>3.27</b>                    | <b>3.24</b> |
| 4   | Funding for political parties in Nigeria is not usually done by every card-carrying member of the party.              | 40<br>(27%) | 80<br>(53%) | 20<br>(13%) | 10<br>(7%)  | <b>3.00</b>                    | <b>3.98</b> |
| 5   | Several of the political parties do not engage the electorates on voter education before elections                    | 70<br>(47%) | 50<br>(33%) | 15<br>(10%) | 15<br>(10%) | <b>3.17</b>                    | <b>3.15</b> |
| 6   | Political campaigns in Nigeria are generally lacking in issue-based politics especially during campaigns.             | 50<br>(33%) | 85<br>(57%) | 5<br>(3%)   | 10<br>(7%)  | <b>3.17</b>                    | <b>3.15</b> |

**Decision:**  $\bar{X} = \text{or } \geq 2.50$

On whether political parties in Nigeria are formed without clear cut ideology, 7% strongly agreed while 13% of the respondents agreed to the assertion whereas 53% of them strongly disagreed. This could mean that, for the majority of respondents, political parties in Nigeria have some form of ideology that drives their quest for the capture of state power.

Results further show that 50% of the respondents agreed to the statement that to be nominated for an election is the exclusive preserve of political godfathers of the party while 3% strongly disagreed to this statement. A further check from the mean statistic result of 3.27 with a corresponding standard deviation of 3.24 also attests to the fact that the overbearing influence of godfathers is still very much present in the selection and nomination of party's candidates during

primary elections in Nigeria. On whether or not political parties in Nigeria usually engage the electorates on voter education before elections, 47% strongly agreed that several of the political parties in Nigeria do not engage the electorates before the election on voter education while 10% thought otherwise. This also reflects in the mean and standard deviation results of 3.17 and 3.15 respectively.

In terms of funding of political parties' activities, 53% of the respondents agreed that the responsibility of funding the parties is not usually done by every card-carrying member of the party while 7% strongly disagreed to this statement. Of course, this may not be far from reality because the way most political parties are structured in Nigeria, not every member of the party is allowed to contribute financially. In most cases, those who may have won elective positions or get appointed may in one way or the other contribute in funding party's activities such as campaigns. The table also shows that 57% of the respondents agreed that political campaigns in Nigeria are usually lacking in issue-based politics especially during electioneering campaigns while 7% of the respondents disagreed to this statement.

**Table 3: Influence of Political Education on Undergraduates' Awareness of Election Management Process**

| S/N | ITEMS   | SA          | A           | D           | SD          | $\bar{X}$   | Std. Dev.   |
|-----|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 7   | Election can better be managed by INEC if the entire process is automated and digitized in order to minimize electoral fraud. | 45<br>(30%) | 70<br>(47%) | 20<br>(13%) | 15<br>(10%) | <b>2.97</b> | <b>2.95</b> |
| 8   | INEC's power to conduct elections in Nigeria is clearly defined in the Electoral Act.   | 82<br>(55%) | 50<br>(33%) | 8<br>(5%)   | 10<br>(7%)  | <b>3.36</b> | <b>3.33</b> |
| 9   | Voter registration can only be done by INEC   | 40<br>(27%) | 90<br>(60%) | 12<br>(8%)  | 8<br>(5%)   | <b>3.08</b> | <b>3.06</b> |
| 10  | Voter education is the sole mandate of INEC   | 20<br>(13%) | 15<br>(10%) | 70<br>(47%) | 45<br>(30%) | <b>2.07</b> | <b>2.05</b> |
| 11  | Voter apathy usually experienced in Nigeria is caused by INEC alone   | 16<br>(11%) | 5<br>(3%)   | 89<br>(59%) | 40<br>(27%) | <b>1.98</b> | <b>1.97</b> |
| 12  | The capacity of INEC to deliver on free, fair and credible elections is hampered by weak electoral laws                       | 45<br>(30%) | 73<br>(49%) | 20<br>(13%) | 12<br>(8%)  | <b>3.01</b> | <b>2.99</b> |
| 13  | INEC ought to be empowered to conduct all elections including Local Government Elections.                                     | 45<br>(30%) | 70<br>(47%) | 20<br>(13%) | 15<br>(10%) | <b>2.97</b> | <b>2.95</b> |

**Decision:  $\bar{X} = \text{or } \geq 2.50$**

Table 3 shows the statistical analysis of the influence of political education on undergraduates' awareness of election management process. From item-by-item analysis and using the two extremes in the response options alongside the mean and standard deviation, results for item 7 revealed that 47% of the respondent agreed that election in Nigeria can better be managed by INEC if every electoral procedure is automated and digitized in order to minimize the incidence of electoral fraud while 13% disagree to this statement. Additionally, with 2.97 mean and a corresponding 2.95 standard deviation; it can be inferred that the management process of elections in Nigeria could be enhanced if every electoral procedure is automated and digitized in order or minimize incidences of electoral fraud. Also, from the result, as shown in item 8, there is no doubt that the respondents are aware that apart from the constitution, INEC's powers to conduct elections in Nigeria are further amplified in the Electoral Act. That is, 55% of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement that INEC's power to conduct an election in Nigeria is well defined in the Electoral Act while 7% of the respondents strongly disagreed. There is no ambiguity on what is expected from the electoral umpire (INEC) and almost everybody in Nigeria is aware of this fact. This also explains why in item 9 which addresses the issue of voters' registration, 60% of the respondents agreed to the statement that registration of potential voters in Nigeria can only be done by INEC while 5% of the respondents strongly disagreed to this statement. Additionally, the mean result of 3.08 also attests to the fact that by group response, majority of the respondents believed that it is the constitutional responsibility of INEC to periodically carry out Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) exercise.

However, on the question whether or not voter education can only be carried out by INEC, 13% of the respondents strongly agreed that voters' education is the sole mandate of INEC alone while 47% of them strongly disagreed. What this means is that with a mean score of 2.07 and standard deviation of 2.05, INEC alone cannot solely assume responsibility to carry out regular voter education as this is also the responsibility of political parties. Also noticeable from item 11 in Table 3 is that 11% of the respondents strongly agreed that voter apathy experienced in Nigeria is caused by INEC alone while 59% of them disagreed to this statement. What this represents is that, with a mean score of 1.98 and standard deviation of 1.97, INEC alone cannot be blamed on the high level of political apathy observed in most eligible voters as several other



factors such as bad governance, unfulfilled electioneering promises, etc are implicated on being a cause of voter's apathy experienced especially during elections in Nigeria.

Similarly, on whether or not INEC as presently structured can conduct free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria as shown in item 12, 49% of the respondents agreed to the statement that the capacity of INEC delivers free, fair and credible election in Nigeria hampered by electoral laws while 8% of them strongly disagreed to this statement. Also, by simple majority, 47% of the respondents agreed that giving the way and manner most local government elections are conducted in Nigeria, INEC ought to be empowered to conduct elections including Local Government in Nigeria.

**Table 4: Influence of Political Education on Undergraduates' Awareness of Electoral Disputes Resolution Process**

| S/N | ITEMS  | SA          | A           | D           | SD          | $\bar{X}$   | Std. Dev.   |
|-----|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 14  | Political parties in Nigeria lacked effective internal mechanisms for resolving disputes.                              | 70<br>(47%) | 60<br>(40%) | 15<br>(10%) | 5<br>(3%)   | <b>3.30</b> | <b>3.28</b> |
| 15  | The best way to resolve electoral disputes is to approach the election petitions tribunals and regular courts.         | 65<br>(43%) | 60<br>(40%) | 15<br>(10%) | 10<br>(7%)  | <b>3.20</b> | <b>3.17</b> |
| 16  | Election related-disputes can best be resolved through violence  | 10<br>(7%)  | 20<br>(13%) | 35<br>(23%) | 85<br>(57%) | <b>1.70</b> | <b>1.69</b> |
| 17  | Election-related disputes could be avoided if the entire management process is seen to be transparent.                 | 75<br>(50%) | 40<br>(27%) | 25<br>(17%) | 10<br>(7%)  | <b>3.20</b> | <b>3.17</b> |
| 18  | Elections in Nigeria could be violence-free if every stakeholder plays by the rules.                                   | 70<br>(47%) | 45<br>(30%) | 20<br>(13%) | 15<br>(10%) | <b>3.13</b> | <b>3.11</b> |
| 19  | Maintaining neutrality and professionalism by INEC and security agencies could help resolve election-related disputes. | 80<br>(53%) | 60<br>(40%) | 5<br>(3%)   | 5<br>(3%)   | <b>3.43</b> | <b>3.41</b> |
| 20  | No matter what has been put in place, election-related disputes are inevitable.  | 65<br>(43%) | 70<br>(47%) | 10<br>(7%)  | 5<br>(3%)   | <b>3.30</b> | <b>3.28</b> |

**Decision:**  $\bar{X} = \text{or} \geq 2.50$

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of responses on the influence of political education on undergraduates' awareness of electoral disputes resolution process. The result indicated that 47% of the respondents agreed that most political parties in Nigeria lacked effective internal



mechanisms for resolving conflicts while 10% of them strongly disagreed to the statement. This is also confirmed by the mean statistic result of 3.30 with a corresponding standard deviation of 3.28 indicating that indeed, the lack of effective ways of managing and resolving conflicts is one of the reasons why most pre-election disputes are taken to conventional courts. This explains why most pre-election cases in Nigeria linger in courts even after a winner has been sworn into office. On whether or not the best way to resolve electoral disputes is to approach the election petition tribunals and regular courts, 43% strongly agreed while 40% of the respondents agreed to the assertion whereas 7% of them strongly disagreed. This could mean that, for the majority of respondents, rather than resorting to violence, the best way to settle disputes arising from elections is for the aggrieved parties or actors to go to the civil courts or the election petition tribunals specifically set up to settle electoral disputes. This can further be cross-checked from the mean score of 3.20 with a corresponding 3.17 which that by group response, the majority agrees with the statement in item 2.

Closely related to this result is the majority agreement on item 16 which states that election-related disputes cannot be resolved through violence. As it were 7% of the respondents agreed to the statement while 57% strongly disagreed to it. A further check from the mean score result of 1.70 with a corresponding standard deviation of 1.69 also attests to the fact that the use of violence as a tool to settle electoral scores is no longer desirable by the vast majority of Nigerian including the students. On whether or not elections in Nigeria could be violent-free if every stakeholder plays by the rules as shown in item 18, 47% of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement while 10% of them strongly disagreed. This also reflects in the mean and standard deviation results of 3.13 and 3.11 respectively. This means that there is a high possibility of achieving violent-free elections in Nigeria when every stakeholder whether political parties, INEC, security agencies, election observers and voters themselves strictly adhere to what is expected of them.

In item 19 which deals on maintaining neutrality and professionalism by INEC and security agencies, 53% of the respondents agreed that election-related disputes could be reduced these agencies maintain the highest level of neutrality and professionalism while 3% strongly disagreed to this statement. Of course, this may not be far from the reality because most of the

violent-related cases are recorded when in the planning and execution of elections, public agencies like INEC and security agencies are perceived to taking sides with any of the parties contesting in the elections. Finally, results in Table 4 shows that 47% of the respondents agreed that no matter what has been put in place, election-related disputes are inevitable while 3% of the respondents disagreed to this statement.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The result on the influence of political education on students' awareness of political parties' activities shows that there is a strong relationship between political education and awareness of the functions and activities of political parties by the majority of undergraduate students in Nigeria. This is in line with Ibaba (2010) stated that political socialization serves as the function of political education through campaigns, rallies, posters, workshops, seminars and manifestos and political parties, citizens are being educated. The finding also lends credence to the opinion of Ikelegbe (2005) that, political parties organize rallies, campaigns, debates and symposia on government programmes and activities educate the people. What can be deciphered here is that through formal and informal political education and enlightenment programmes, citizens become aware of what the policies, programmes, ideologies and manifestoes of political parties are. With this, citizens would be in a vantage position to hold political parties accountable for every promise made during campaigns and electioneering periods.

On the relationship between political education and undergraduate students' awareness of the election management process, the descriptive statistical analysis made shows that respondents' awareness of the variable is high. This agrees with Ekundayo (2015) who stated that one of the major functions of election management bodies all over the world is to perform the function of political education through enlightenment and education for effective delivery of free, fair and credible elections for sustainable democracy and development. Similarly, finding also revealed that political education can be used to scale up the awareness level of electoral conflict/dispute political resolution process among undergraduate students. This finding aligns with Bargiacchi and Florinder (2017) when they argued that electoral conflicts and disputes are not only inevitable in pre and post-election matters but they have the potential to undermine the integrity and outcome of elections. The fact that the political system aids in the protection of certain

values that support every electoral action and every electoral procedure also goes to underscore the fact that, while some traits found in most humans are learnt through the process of either a formal or informal education system, political education, therefore, provides fundamental knowledge and skills towards the improvement of their rights and responsibilities especially within the framework of electoral awareness.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The point has been made that political education is not only important for the survival of our constitutional democracy but it also fosters national consciousness for national development. It is vital for the socio-economic and political development of any society. Therefore, it can be concluded that political education is very important for electoral awareness and meaningful political process or participation. It also helps in the maintenance of democratic values and survival of democracy where individuals are well-positioned to be aware of their constitutional guaranteed social, economic and political rights on one hand and in having a full understanding of their civic duties and obligations to the Nigerian state on the other hand. Thus, based on the data collected and analyzed, discussions made and a conclusion drawn based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Depending on the course of study, some kind of political education should be encouraged and extended to all faculties in universities as effective political education is crucial to electoral consciousness and effective political participation. This can be done by introducing a compulsory university-wide course to be manned and domiciled in the General Studies Unit.
- ii. University managements should organize workshops, seminars and in-service training for lecturers on political education programmes to equip and improve their knowledge of teaching.
- iii. The teaching and learning of subjects such as Civic Education, Social Studies and Government should be strengthened at the primary and secondary school levels so that those who will eventually gain admission into the university would have become politically aware and conscious of the electoral process been operated in the country.

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