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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH AMONG SOME SELECTED NIGERIAN TERTIARY STUDENTS	Aliu Yetunde Olatokunbo	1-9
INFLUENCE OF SELF-EFFICACY ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ECOLOGY IN ABEOKUTA METROPOLIS	Adeniji Ajibola Abidemi; Dr Banjoko Sunday & Dr Akintoye Hakeem	10-18
SANDWICH-POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE USE OF BLENDED LEARNING IN KWARA STATE UNIVERSITIES	ATTAH, J. Ojoma & ABDU, Danyaro	19-29
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA	Adisa S. A. (PhD) & Sakirudeen Buhari A	30-40
SOCIO-LINGUISTIC STUDY OF YORUBA/FRENCH BILINGUAL IN TOGO: AN EXAMPLE OF CODE-MIXING	Ajani Akinwumi Lateef (Ph.D)	41-49
ASSESSMENT OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE FACTORS ON SOCIAL STUDIES STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN JIGAWA STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION GUMEL	Mudathir Haruna	50-59
LITERATURE AS ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT TOOL FOR NIGERIAN ADOLESCENCE: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SOME PROVERBS USED BY ODEWALE IN "THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME"	Lawal, Safi Ph.D; Sidikat Bola Mohammed (Mrs) Ph.D & Ahman, Amina Ph.D.	60-66
AWARENESS AND UTILISATION OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES FOR PROMOTING THE USE OF ARCHIVAL RESOURCES IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVE OF NIGERIA	Kabiru Ubale CLN	67-78
CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN ACQUIRING MATERIAL RESOURCES FOR HISTORY INSTRUCTION IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: INTEGRATION OF ICT AS A MITIGATING FACTOR	Lazarus Luka Maigoro, Ph.D; Sanda Yakubu Yusufu, Ph.D; Sadiq Mohammed Doro & Monday Adzu	79-85
INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY ON STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN LEARNING SOCIAL STUDIES IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA	Adam, Buba Aishatu & Odediji, Iyabo Elizabet	86-90
AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHING SCIENCE SUBJECTS IN NIGERIAN ARMED FORCES SECONDARY SCHOOLS	MARAFI, Murtala Ph.D.	91-100
BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION AND PRACTICE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA	Andy Edim, Assam & Sunday Abimbola, Abodunrin (Ph.D)	101-109
ASSESSMENT OF FRESH AND RETURNING UNDERGRADUATES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNING OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA.....	Olokooba, Issa Nasiru (Ph.D.) & Abdulsalam, Alliyu Ayodele (Ph.D.)	110-118
ASSESSMENT OF PERCEIVED RELEVANCE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES CURRICULUM OF ISLAMIC ONLINE UNIVERSITY TO NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM	Dr. Ahmed Nafiu Arikewuyo	119-126

- UTILIZATION OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN LEARNING AND TEACHING OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE IN OGUN STATE NIGERIA Bolarinwa, K. K; Ayinde, F. O & Bolarinwa, H. K 127-137
- IMPACT OF BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY ON THE OPERATIONS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE ENTERPRISES IN BORNO STATE Modu Korimi & Uba Rabiu 138-149
- INFLUENCE OF ACADEMIC STAFF QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY COMPLIANCE FOR EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM DELIVERY IN FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, ZARIA Lawal Garba Sani (Ph.D) & Adamu Mohammed Ashiru 150-156
- RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION: POLICY, PRACTICES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT Dr. OTTAN, Jamiu Olatunji & Mr. JIBRIL, Mas'ud Shabani 157-164
- ROLE OF COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT MANGEMENT IN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES Busari Suebat Ajoke 165-171
- EFFECTIVENESS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION TOWARDS JOB CREATION AMONG STUDENTS OF FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ZARIA: COUNSELLING IMPLICATION Aliyu Bako Abdullahi 172-178
- MEANING AND DISCIPLINE OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO NIGERIAN EDUCATION SULYMAN, Abdulganiy Aremu; YUSUF, Saleh Sadau & ELIASU, Surajudeen Ajao 179-186
- GENDER AND LOCALITY ON SOCIAL STUDIES STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN GUIDED-INQUIRY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY OF ZARIA EDUCATION ZONE Jamilu Ja'afar Salihu; Sulaiman Buhari Yusuf & Adama Sani Shu'aibu 187-195
- A SURVEY ON THE AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF TEACHING-LEARNING FACILITIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ZARIA EDUCATION ZONE, KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA Suleiman Tanimu & Shamsuddeen Jaafar 196-205
- SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES FOR REMOTE LEARNING IN THE ADVENT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA: UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE Semiu Olawale Makinde, PhD. 206-216
- ADOPTION OF VIRTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS Ojo, Azeez O 217-226
- A MULTIMODAL STUDY OF SELECT NIGERIAN POLYTECHNIC LOGOS Abiodun Gabriel ABIOYE & Olufunke Damilola DEGBORO 227-239
- THE FUTURE ELECTION IN NIGERIA: INTERROGATING THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTION Isiaq Atanda Abdulwaheed; Oyekunle, Tajudeen Olufemi & Fatai A. Aremu, PhD 240-246

THE FUTURE ELECTION IN NIGERIA: INTERROGATING THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTION

BY

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Abstract

The administrative efficiency of INEC restored confidence into the electorates in Nigeria's 2015 general elections. The introduction of permanent voter's card (PVCs) and smart card readers (SCRs) were effective in increasing the reliability of the voters register and reducing opportunity for fraud, but their impact had been limited by the seemingly poor quality of biometric data capture and subsequently weak finger-print recognition rate during polling. This study examines the 2015 general elections as conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Despite the general acceptance of the 2015 general elections as free, fair and transparent, there were observed institutional lapses or structural procedural weaknesses that berated the election especially during collation. Content Analytical Approach was adopted from an institutional perspective while qualitative-descriptive and ex post facto survey design was adopted as the research methods.

Keywords: Election, eVM, INEC, i-voting, m-Voting, and Technologies

Introduction

Undoubtedly, election is the only mechanism that makes a system to be democratic, and election itself is not qualified to be democratic without being free and fair. Election is a process in which voters select their representatives and express their choices on the manner in which they will be governed. In this regard, voting refers to the actual process of casting ballots on the Election Day, and subsequently, the local and foreign observers looked at the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) authentication equipment and all the litigation after the election. Therefore, correctness, robustness to fraudulent behaviours, coherence, consistency, security, and transparency of voting are all key requirements for the integrity of an election process. Also, integrity, impartiality, transparency, professionalism, gender sensitivity are principle guiding the election officials to conduct free and fair election (INEC, 2015).

Nigeria's democracy is the most populous democracy in Africa with population of about 180 million and therefore, much is expected from Nigeria in all ramifications. "On 28 March 2015, after four years of planning, Nigerians experienced their first 'Semi-Electronic' General Election, in which the country partially benefited from a revolution in information and communication technology." The 'Semi-Electronic' election process in this context is the act of using an electronic device for verification of eligibility of voters, vote with the use of ballot paper-based

system. "The use of the e-collation application (INEC, 2015) can be achieved by counting manually and then compiling at the top level"(INEC, 2015). However, the thrust of this paper is to interrogate the new method introduced, and some other issues that visited the conduct of 2015 general election in Nigeria. The undisputed powerful emblem of democracy is the citizen's total involvement in the free and fair election of representatives to govern them. Voting is seen as an act that currently determines social bonds, governments and democracy. After the Independence period, elections in Nigeria have been characterized by a high scale of electoral malpractices, money politics, Electoral abuse and the use of ethno-religious differences to manipulate the electorate's voting habits.

Electoral abuse during the election cycle is one of the tactics employed by Nigerian politicians. Desperate and power-drunk politicians also sponsor unemployed young people and extreme illiterates to carry out assaults on their political understanding. Today the Internet has been a part of the everyday life of many people around the world; no one could have expected how it would change the society three decades later (Omolaye, 2014). Since the 1959 elections, which were the last to be controlled by the colonial government, the outcome of all but one election has been disputed. The only exception to this pattern was the June 12 1993 presidential election won by Chief M. K. O Abiola which was annulled by the Ibrahim Babangida military administration (Animashaun, 2008b).

All the previous elections from 1999 till 2011 were purely manual but that of 2015 embraced some elements of ICT in action. General Muhammadu Buhari, who contested the 2003 presidential polls on the platform of All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), described the election as "*a dark period in our history*" (Buhari, 2006; Akume, 2006). Akume (2006) insists that the polls, were "characterized by large-scale malpractices, including rigging at all stages" Given the massive irregularities that attended the 2003 elections and the consequent legitimacy crisis they engendered, the 2007 and 2011 polls presented an opportunity for both the government and the election authorities to restore public confidence in the election process (Amuta, 2008; Egwu, 2007).

There are various voting technologies that had been developed and used over the years. These include;

- a. *E-Voting*: Electronic voting encompasses both electronic means of casting votes and counting of votes which can include punched cards, optical scan voting systems and specialized voting kiosk, transmission of ballots via telephones, private computer networks or the internet (Keller, Dechert, Auerbach, Mertz, Pearl, and Hall, (2005). There are various forms of electronic voting systems since the introduction of technologies to deter electoral fraud, such as paper-based electronic voting.
- b. *Direct Recording Electronic Voting System (DRE)*: Direct Recording Electronic Voting System (DRE): This voting machine registers votes by means of a ballot display equipped with mechanical or electro-optical components that can be triggered by the voter - typically buttons or a touch screen (Kohn, Stubblefield, Robin, and Wallach, 2004); that processes data with computer software; and that records voting Data and ballot photos in memory modules that generate tabulation of the voting data contained in the disposable memory portion and as a printed copy.

- c. *Public network DRE voting system*: Digital network DRE voting system: Internet voting networks have been used internally in many modern countries and officially in the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Estonia. The public DRE voting system is an election system that uses electronic ballots and transmits voting results from the polling place to another location through a public network. Voting results may be distributed as individual ballots as they are cast or on a periodic basis, as batches of ballots during the day of election or as one batch at a time of election.
- d. *Smart Card Voting (Token)*: With the use of the smart cards and kiosk there was a significant leap in voting technology, as persons were able to vote within their own comfort zone or that was the intention. The need for numerous human protection bodies has been removed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is

1. To provide a critical analysis of the role INEC played at the state and federal levels in the 2015 general elections

Research Question

1. What are the roles INEC played at the state and federal levels in the 2015 general elections

Methodology

This chapter deals with the research methodology of the study, including the research design, population/sampling techniques, sample and data-collection instrument. Content Analytical Approach was adopted from an institutional perspective while qualitative-descriptive and ex post facto survey design was adopted as the research methods. The findings of the research show INEC appears to have achieved the three imperatives of electoral governance, namely; administrative efficiency, political impartiality and public accountability in challenging circumstances. This research is a case study research form of qualitative data and, in particular, a common case study as it is a case analysis of the 2015 general election.

The research population for this study comprised all the thirty-six (36) states in Nigeria including the federal capital territory (FCT) Abuja, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), voters/subjects, informants' were chosen from lawmakers, political leaders, top members of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In this study, the analysis produced is from two main sources of data: primary and secondary data. Most of the data were panel data which was obtained from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Panel data was used to gather information about the 2015 general elections, regarding the various innovations introduced by INEC.

Results

The data was focused on Nigeria's 2015 general election around the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The overview of data collected during the 2015 election was provided in Table 1.0, of which in thirty six states, sixty-eight million, nine hundred and eighty one thousand, and two hundred and thirty-three (68,981,233) is the total number of registered voters. Sixty eight million, and seventy-nine thousand, three hundred and eighty seven (68,079,387) is the total number of PVCs printed, **sixty-six** million, six hundred and eighty thousand, six hundred and

fifty seven (66,680,657) is the total number of PVC received at state, and fifty-five million, eight hundred and nineteen thousand, one hundred and sixty four (55,819,164) is the total number of PVCs collected by voters.

Research Question: What are the roles INEC played at the state and federal levels in the 2015 general elections:

Table 1: Distribution of PVCs by 21 March, 2015

S/N	STATE	No. of Registered Voters	No. of PVC printed	No. PVC Received at State	% of PVC Received at State	No. of PVC Collected by Voters
1	Abia	1396166	1396162	1361072	87%	1182102
2	Adamawa	1565780	1565780	1557659	89%	1385299
3	Awka-Ibom	1680794	1680794	1692662	87%	1477489
4	Anambra	1963427	1963427	1917882	71%	1355909
5	Bauchi	2057211	2057211	2008242	97%	1938192
6	Bayelsa	610373	610373	565118	69%	392651
7	Benue	2019851	2019851	1989770	78%	1548074
8	Borno	1838514	1838514	1568774	90%	1407777
9	Cross River	1175623	1175840	1171919	84%	985918
10	Delta	2275264	2275264	2246881	86%	1939952
11	Ebonyi	1074273	1074273	1071273	83%	890756
12	Edo	1791165	1791165	1791165	100%	1791165
13	Ekiti	732021	732021	732458	70%	513720
14	Enugu	1429221	1429221	1412518	89%	1260496
15	Gombe	1147181	1147181	1141760	94%	1070725
16	Imo	1855172	1855172	1710003	80%	1375322
17	Jigawa	1831316	1831316	1831316	96%	1760378
18	Kaduna	3414250	3407222	3404502	92%	3145037
19	Kano	4975701	4506721	4975701	86%	4303586
20	Kastina	2840654	2840654	2790339	96%	2689681
21	Kebbi	1470648	1470648	1459451	94%	1369155
22	Kogi	1350883	1350883	1317672	73%	967411
23	Kwara	1179658	1179658	1171636	76%	884996
24	Lagos	5822276	5822276	5602138	71%	3971037
25	Nasarawa	1249129	1242667	1237303	83%	1026657
26	Niger	2013669	1957084	1957084	72%	1413015
27	Ogun	1795794	1795794	1642607	66%	1090950
28	Ondo	1526316	1526316	1515816	75%	1143851
29	Osun	1407107	1407107	1179658	73%	1031662
30	Oyo	2415566	2415566	2381102	70%	1677610
31	Plateau	2003046	1693097	1693097	89%	1508585
32	Rivers	2537590	2537590	2150601	88%	1899041
33	Sokoto	1664984	1611929	1496610	92%	1380843
34	Taraba	1340652	1340652	1342233	95%	1270889

35	Yobe	1101966	1101966	1017879	81%	824401
36	Zamfara	1495717	1495717	1459964	96%	1397296
37	FCT	932275	932275	888303	62%	547536
	TOTAL	68,981,233	68,079,387	66,680,657	83%	55,819,164

Source: <http://www.inecnigeria.org/?inecnews=distribution-of-permanent-voters-cards-as-at-march-122015-2>

From the data presented in table 1.0, it was explicitly revealed and shown that the total number of registered voters (68,981,233) was much higher than the total number of PVCs printed (68,079,387), and the total number of PVC received at state (66,680,657) is less than the total number of PVC printed ((68,079,387).

Discussion of Findings

Fundamentally, the opportunities offered to registrants and the efficacy of INEC PVC distribution differed, with some collection centers operating every day while others were centralized. The late delivery of voting materials also leads to unfavourable polls or outcomes.. The late arrival of a large number of PVCs (those from later CVR phases, transferees and lost cards) caused frustration and increased tension in the preparations to the elections. Unfortunately, up to 100,000 PVC remained unproduced one day before the election day 28 March election day. While the introduction of PVCs and card readers have been effective in increasing the reliability of the voter register and reducing opportunity for fraud. For instance, the nation was held spellbound watching President Jonathan and his wife struggling with their verification for over thirty minutes. In Enugu, similar incident played out which compelled the Deputy Senate President, Senator Ike Ekweremadu, to advise the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to discard the use of SCRs for polls after it has not been able to secure accreditation with the machine. For Ekweremadu, the card reader should have been tried in a bye-election or supplementary election before the major election. In Ebonyi state, the card readers failed woefully. Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, advised INEC to correct the lapses in the accreditation process linked to the SCRs in order to give credibility to the polls.

All these developments compelled the INEC to revert to manual authentication in some occasions and this action seriously questioned the state of preparedness of the commission for the election (Fadoju, 2015). INEC, however, downplayed the significance of such situations, claiming only 300 out of 150,000 polling stations, or 0.2 percent, were affected (Wallis, 2015). Apart from the failure of the smart card readers in some areas and lack of electricity to power the smart card readers, another controversy that surrounded the use of the biometric technology was the allegation and counter allegation by political parties that the card readers had been configured to aid the victory of a particular party. A further challenge is the alleged proxy collection of PVCs which, if unaddressed, risks cards being misused, especially if there is no improvement in biometric authentication of voters in PUs. However, political analyst applauded the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for insisting on the use of the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and the Smart Card Reader, designed to facilitate the authentication of voters' eligibility and consequently reduce election malpractices. Notwithstanding the shortcomings, the use of ICT tools by INEC significantly contributed to the integrity of the 2015 elections.

Conclusion

The study has established that there is interplay of factors bedevilling election and electioneering processes in Nigeria. In most cases, the electors had to be accredited first then returned to vote due to the irregularity that marred the polling process and often lead to manipulation of results. Manipulation of results, manual counting mistakes, reports of violence, coercion, ballot stuffing, underage and simultaneous voting and involvement of security forces often trail elections in order to aid the successful manipulations of the result. In some states, some persons claimed that the elections were rigged, resulting in post-election unrest and violence. Many of the registered voters chose alternate voting systems for possible voting case scenarios. Most registered voters opined that manual voting was not sufficient enough for the elections in Nigeria. The majority of registered voters chose an alternative (electronic voting system) to manual voting.

Recommendations

1. There is an urgent need for the government to develop alternate ways of voting to bring sanity to electoral processes, such as total elimination in of post-election unrest, violence and attacks; respect for citizen's vote, and resistance to intimidation, thuggery and violence; validity of vote cast-as-purposed, counted-as-cast and verifiability; upholding the principle of one person, one vote; financial management and accountability resources spent used by the electoral body;
2. vehement commitment and dedication to fight against the use of hooligans hijacking votes and stealing ballot boxes; reduction in the labour force in lieu of eradicating all forms of human mistakes or errors as a result of manual counting
3. Law enforcement agents ought to be amazingly watchful and guarantee that perilous discourse doesn't bring about upsetting the tranquil lead of the decision-making processes. Not only that, INEC and policymakers ought to guarantee that the utilization of card peruse for any political decision will be made constitutionally powerful in order to maintain a strategic distance from dissatisfaction during the political decision time frame.

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