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Information Literacy and Democratic Process in Bauchi State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the role of information literacy in the just concluded electoral process in Nigeria. Information has been a strong instrument that plays a great role in changing the lives of citizenry. The paper focuses on information literacy from a competency based set of standards being more holistic and reflects current trends in information literacy. Access to information has helped improve the lives of people who have been disenfranchised due to selection of wrong candidates in the electoral process. Social media has played a vital role in the Nigeria's electoral process recently. The wide spread information through social media had influence the choice of a number of candidates. University students were used as population of the study. The population comprises of 190 undergraduate students of two public universities in Bauchi State i.e. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University and Bauchi State University, Gadau. A total of 120 samples was drawn based on sample size determinations of Krejcie and Morgan. Therefore, 60 respondents each were drawn from the above two universities. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The result shows that social media has made a significant impact in influencing election outcome through information literacy, the result also help electorates gain critical thinking and applied skills in selecting candidates of their choice, and instill a sense of responsibility in electing the best candidate that will make life better and a difference in the world around them. It is concluded that information literacy is vital in the democratic process in Nigeria.

Keywords: Election, electorates, information, social change, social media.

Introduction

Information literacy aimed at empowering citizens for participatory democracy, particularly in developing countries (Hikwa, 2007; Johanna, 2017). The transformative power of information literacy is its ability to empower people with the capacity to make informed decisions; definitions of the concept which

highlight the user's ability to learn how to learn emphasize its importance as a valuable resource for the exercise of responsible citizenship in a democratic society (Favier, 2010; Secker, 2018). Access to quality information empowers citizens to make informed decisions and encourage participation in the democratic

process of communities. Globally, information literacy has also received recognition, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) Prague Declaration (2003) has reaffirmed its importance as a pre-requisite for effective participation in the information society and as part of the basic human right for developing lifelong learning.

The growing organization of information sources into digital forms and the emergence of a generation of people with relatively strong digital literacies, information literacy and the allied concept of the information society have become vital tools for empowering people with the needed skills for socio-economic development. Progressive economies are therefore capitalizing on these to set up institutions, organisations and policies that strengthen democratic processes for good governance in their countries (Hikwa, 2007; Secker, 2018). In Nigeria, changes in the information landscape in terms of the volume, format, content and the complexity of its delivery mechanisms have been significant. Increasing innovations in online information tools and resources have created a greater need for information literacy skills to enable users make informed choices for decision making (Owoeye & Abolarinwa, 2016). Consequently, improving information

literacy levels beyond the educational sector has become an important factor for improved national socio-economic outcomes which are essential for informed political participation and civic engagement in the democratic process.

Nigeria is a federal republic with a democratic system of government. The democratic process in Nigeria is based on the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which was adopted in 1999. The constitution guarantees the fundamental rights of citizens, including the right to vote, the right to free speech, and the right to assembly (Amaechi, 2020). The democratic process in Nigeria is divided into three branches of government: the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. Firstly, the executive branch is headed by the president, who is elected by popular vote for a four-year term. The president appoints cabinet ministers, and other top officials. Secondly, the legislature is bicameral, consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate has 109 members, three from each state. The House of Representatives has 360 members, with each state having at least one representative and additional representatives based on population. And lastly, the judiciary is headed by the Supreme Court, which has the power to interpret the constitution and to

rule on the legality of laws and actions of the government (Animashaun, 2021).

The democratic process in Nigeria is still evolving, and there are challenges to its full implementation. These challenges include corruption, voter apathy, and the influence of money in politics. And still there are challenges in the areas of leadership, transparency, and accountability which have hindered good governance and participatory democracy in the political system (Igali, 2014). However, there have been significant improvements in recent years, and Nigeria is considered to be a transitioning democracy.

For democracy to succeed, it is imperative that governmental institutions are strengthened to facilitate the democratic process as well as encourage participation by the citizenry. In the past few years, electoral reforms in governmental institutions have inspired improved participation by the Nigerian populace in political decisions and other policies that directly affect their lives. This was evidenced in the 2015 national elections which recorded over 50 percent participation in the electoral process as compared to previous elections; this was transformative in the nation's history (The Centre for Public Policy Alternatives, 2015). The implication of this development is that Nigerians are becoming more aware of their

civic rights and responsibilities, which is an indication of the need for greater participation and inclusion in the democratic process.

The political dimension of information literacy requires active participation by citizens in identifying, accessing, evaluating and using political information in all levels of governance which would influence the selection of credible leaders in the country (Attama & Igwe, 2015).

In view of the above the paper will examine the critical role of information literacy for social change in the just concluded electoral process in Bauchi State.

Objectives of the Study

This paper seeks to:

- i. Examines the role of information literacy in the just concluded electoral process in Nigeria.
- ii. Analyse the importance of information literacy in changing the lives of citizenry based on competency set of standards
- iii. Identify how information through social media assisted in improving the lives of people disenfranchised due to selection of wrong candidates.

Research Questions

- i. What are the role of information literacy in the just concluded electoral process in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the importance of information literacy in changing the lives of citizenry based on competency set of standards?
- iii. How does information through social media assisted in improving the lives of people disenfranchised due to selection of wrong candidates.

Review of Related Literature

A vast amount of research in information literacy has been developed since its emergence. The central position articulated by some of the most important documents in information literacy is the concern with the individual's skills development through lifelong learning (American Library Association (ALA) Presidential Committee on Information Literacy Final Report, 1989; Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, 2000; Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, 2015; The Alexandria Declaration (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), 2015). The two concepts of information literacy and lifelong learning are considered of great

value in developing people's critical thinking and creative abilities that foster active participation on issues of democracy and governance. It is in this regard that studies on a critical approach towards information literacy as a tool for public empowerment, democratic participation and national progress is investigated by various researchers.

Libraries have long been established as institutions for promoting democracy by ensuring access and equitable distribution of information resources (Maguire, 2012). With the increasing popularity of democratic forms of governance, this role has further been emphasised by the need for them to provide quality information services for the collective benefit of their clientele. According to Hikwa (2007), the value of critical information literacy to good governance is the applicability of information services to national development. This is because the provision of quality information sources is the basis for good decision making by citizens as it can serve as a tool for empowering citizens with the needed competencies to implement national plans for collective development. Hence, where information is viewed as a valued commodity in a democratic process, the role of libraries in equipping citizens

with critical information literacy skills is highly encouraged for capacity building and sustainable development in a country (Sturges & Gastinger, 2010).

Lloyd, Lipu and Kennan (2010) in their study point out that active participation in all aspects of socio-economic and political life by citizens is one of the defining principles of an inclusive society particularly in a democratic setting. They argued that the ability to build peoples capacity to participate in the governance of their communities require a collaborative approach in which libraries as information providers and other governmental institutions can provide quality access to information, technological facilities as well as training that would motivate and enable people to develop the ability to understand how information is effectively used to avoid social exclusion and marginalization in the democratic process. Limited information access and information skills often inhibit the capacity of individuals to fully participate in democratic processes and make informed decisions. Through critical information literacy, people can be provided with the potential to be informed on the critical and reflective use of information resources to contribute effectively in how they are

governed in their communities.

In Nigeria, studies in information literacy by LIS researchers have examined different aspects of the concept as used by practitioners in various fields, for example, bankers (Amusa, Bello, Omotoso & Osunrinade, 2016), farmers (Sokoya, Alabi & Fagbola, 2014), religious groups (Phillip, 2013), political groups, Taiwo (2015), lawyers (Lawal, 2013), and so on. However, Attama and Igwe's (2015) article specifically provided an in-depth analysis of the dimensions of information literacy, particularly critical information literacy, in various contexts in Nigeria and the expected responsibilities of librarians in the multi-literacy era. According to the authors, the political dimension of information literacy requires active participation by citizens in identifying, accessing, evaluating and using political information in all levels of governance which could influence the selection of credible leaders in the country. They argued however, that this conception of information literacy can only be actualized through effective collaboration between the government, educational institutions and civil society organizations in developing pedagogies that promote user engagement with the cultural contexts of information literacy in the respective

communities where information is created and interpreted for the purpose of political empowerment.

Methodology

Survey research design was employed for the study. Surveys are useful for descriptive and exploratory purposes; and are essential in obtaining information on characteristics, opinions, attitudes or previous experiences of group(s) of people (Zechmeister & Zechmeister 2006). A simple random sampling technic was employed in selecting the respondents. Questionnaire instrument was used in generating the data. The population comprises of 190 undergraduate students of two public universities in Bauchi State i.e. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University and Bauchi State University, Gadau. A total of 120 samples was drawn based on sample size determinations of Krejcie and Morgan. Therefore, 60 respondents each were drawn from the above two universities. The questionnaire has two sections: section one involves respondents' demographic information. While section two is made up of information that bother on the research topic. The stratified random

sampling technique was used for the administration of the questionnaires and all the questionnaires were returned by the respondents. The instrument was validated by the experts in the area of measurement and evaluation to ensure content validity. Meanwhile the reliability of the instrument was based on the Cronbach Alpha which produced reliability co-efficient of 0.82. The result showed that the instrument was good enough to be used. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data collected were subjected to simple frequency count and percentage. Similarly, chi-square statistical tools were used to find out impact of information literacy on democratic process.

Results and Analysis

The data collected from the respondent questionnaires were analysed using simple percentage. The demographic characteristics of the respondents such as age, gender, religion, marital status, educational qualification of the respondents. Below is Table 1.1 which indicates the age of the respondents:

Table 1.1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20 - 29 years	44	37
30 - 39 years	36	30
40 - 49 years	22	18
50 years - Above	18	15
Total	120	100

Field work: 2021

Table 1.1 shows that out of the 120 respondents, 44 (37%) respondents belonged to the age group of 20 to 29 years. While, 36 (30%) of them were aged between 30 to 39 years of age and 22 (18%) of the respondents

are of the age 40 to 49 years. Also, 18 (15%) respondents constitute 50 years and above. Therefore, the bulk of the respondents is between the ages of 20 to 29 years. This indicates that the majority of the respondents are at their younger age.

Table 1.2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	77	64
Female	43	36
Total	120	100

Field work: 2021

Table 1.2 above indicates that out of the 120 respondents, 77 (64%) of them are males, while 43 (36%) respondents were females.

This shows that majority of the respondent are males.

Table 1.3: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	72	60
Married	36	30
Widow/Widower	12	10
Total	120	100

Field work: 2021

Table 1.3 above indicates that out of the 120 respondents, 72 (60%) of them are single, while 36 (30%) respondents were married.

However, 12 (10%) of the respondents are widows. This shows that the majority of the respondents are single.

Table 1.4: Freq and Percent Distribution of Respondents According to Educational Status

Educational Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Under Graduate Students	120	100
Post Graduate Students	00	00
Total	120	100

Field work: 2021

Table 1.4 above indicates that 120 (100%) respondents are under graduate students, while none are post graduate students

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Table 1.5: Does information literacy influence election outcome?

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	92	77
No	28	23
Total	120	100

Field work: 2021

Table 1.5 above indicates that 92 (77%) respondents agreed that information literacy through social media influence election

outcome, while 28 (23%) respondents say no to the question (i.e. they did not agree).

Table 1.6: Does people gain critical thinking and applied skills in selecting candidates of their choice through information literacy?

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	88	73
No	32	27
Total	120	100

Field work: 2021

Table 1.6 above indicates that 88 (73%) respondents agreed that people gain critical thinking and applied skills in selecting candidates of their choice through information literacy, while 32 (27%) respondents say no to the question (i.e. they did not agree).

candidates of their choice through information literacy, while 32 (27%)

Table 1.7: Does information literacy instill a sense of responsibility in electing the best candidate?

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	120	100
No	00	00
Total	120	100

Field work: 2021

Table 1.7 above indicates that all 120 (100%) respondents agreed that information literacy instill a sense of responsibility in electing the best candidate that will make life better and a

difference in the world around them, while none of the respondents say no to the question.

Table 1.8: Importance of information literacy

Importance	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Changing the lives of citizenry	96	80
No change in the lives of citizenry	24	20
Total	120	100

Field work: 2021

Table 1.8 above indicates that 96 (80%) respondents believed that the importance of information literacy is changing the lives of

citizenry. While, 24(20) respondents believed that No change occurred in the lives of citizenry

Table 1.9: Does social media assist in improving the lives of people disenfranchised?

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	112	93
No	08	07
Total	120	100

Field work: 2021

Table 1.9 above indicates that 112 (93%) respondents agreed that social media assist in improving the lives of people disenfranchised due to selection of wrong candidates, while only 08 (07%) respondents say no to the question.

Discussion

The findings of the study are based on the data collected from the respondents. The data collected from the respondent questionnaires were analysed using simple percentage. The discussion covers the socioeconomic and

demographic characteristics of the respondents as well as the role of information literacy in the democratization process. The study revealed that information literacy influence election outcome. This correspond with the findings of Democratic Transition in Nigeria (2023), which stated that there is a high level of illiteracy and poverty in Nigeria. Many people lack the information literacy skills they need to participate effectively in the democratic process. This can make them more susceptible to misinformation and manipulation, and it can make it difficult for them to make informed choices about who to vote for. Similarly, the study revealed that people gain critical thinking and applied skills in selecting candidates of their choice through information literacy. This coincide with the findings of Amaechi (2020) which mention that people can gain critical thinking and applied skills through information literacy by accessing, evaluating, and using information effectively. Likewise, the study exposed that information literacy instill a sense of responsibility in electing the best candidate. This is akin with the findings of Anku (2023) which exposed that information literacy instills a sense of responsibility in electing the best candidate by providing individuals with the skills to access to accurate and comprehensive information

about candidates, their platforms, and their records. As well as assess the credibility of candidates' statements and campaign promises, enabling them to separate fact from fiction. Likewise, verifying the accuracy of information presented by candidates and campaigns should be promoted. This fact-checking helps voters identify misleading or false claims.

Moreover, the study find out that social media assist in improving the lives of people disenfranchised. This correspond with the findings of Animashaun (2022) who opined that social media improve the lives of people who are disenfranchised or marginalized providing a voice to individuals and communities that may not have had the opportunity to be heard through traditional media channels. Also social media enables disenfranchised individuals to connect with others who share similar experiences or challenges. Therefore, Social media serves as a powerful tool for advocacy and activism. Disenfranchised groups can use these platforms to raise awareness about their issues, organize protests, and mobilize for social and political change. In the same direction, Social media can bridge this gap by providing a platform for sharing educational content, news, and resources related to health, legal rights and employment.

Conclusion

The paper highlight the value of information literacy as an important factor in the exercise of democratic process in Bauchi State. Access to information literacy has assisted in improving the lives of people. In the same direction, social media has played an important role in the Nigeria's electoral process, in order to encourage political participation by citizens.

Similarly, the paper emphasized the importance of information literacy as an important policy agenda for providing access to quality information sources for informed decision making in the electoral process in Nigeria in general.

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