

Undergraduates Perception of Accountability, Transparency and Participation in Civic Activities in Nigerian South Western States

Ogunbayo Oluwasegun

Bamidele Olumilua University of Education Science and Technology Ikere Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined undergraduates' perception of accountability and transparency and participation in civic activities in Nigerian Southwestern States. This study employed a descriptive research design of the survey type. The study population comprised 872,100 undergraduate students from universities in Southwest Nigeria. The study sample comprised 1,522 university undergraduates recruited through a multistage selection approach that incorporated basic random, stratified, and purposive selecting procedures. Undergraduates Perception of Accountability and Transparency and Civic Activities Questionnaire' (UPATCAQ) was used to collect data. The instrument's face and content validity were confirmed by experts in Social Studies Education and Tests and Measurement at the Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. The instrument's reliability was confirmed using the test-retest approach, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.88. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequency counts, averages, standard deviations, percentages, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC). Undergraduates exhibit a favorable opinion of accountability and openness; nonetheless, their engagement in civic activities remains minimal. A significant relationship between perception of accountability and transparency and participation in civic activities. It was deduced that there exists a widespread recognition of the notion of accountability among undergraduate students in universities in Southwest Nigeria. It was advised, among others, that universities and pertinent government organizations should establish transparent governance processes within higher education systems.

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Corresponding Author:

Name: Ogunbayo Oluwasegun

Institution: Bamidele Olumilua University of Education Science and Technology Ikere Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Email: ogunbayooluwasegun@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Civic engagement constitutes a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, as it sustains the legitimacy, responsiveness, and stability of political systems. In democratic societies, effective governance depends largely on citizens' active

participation in public affairs, including decision-making processes, policy debates, and accountability mechanisms. Through civic engagement, individuals are able to articulate their needs, priorities, and concerns, thereby ensuring that government actions reflect the collective will of the people [1]. Beyond representation, civic participation

also serves as a safeguard against authoritarianism and abuse of power, as an informed and active citizenry helps to monitor government actions and demand adherence to democratic norms [2].

Within this democratic framework, youths—particularly undergraduates—occupy a strategic position. As future leaders, policymakers, and opinion shapers, undergraduates are expected to function not merely as passive observers but as active contributors to democratic governance. Their civic responsibilities should extend beyond electoral participation to include sustained engagement in policy advocacy, community development, public accountability, and democratic oversight. According to the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, meaningful youth participation is essential to ensuring that government policies genuinely reflect the interests of the broader populace rather than those of a privileged few.

However, effective undergraduate participation in civic life is contingent upon their internalization of democratic values such as accountability and transparency. The willingness of undergraduates to engage in civic activities is largely influenced by their awareness, acceptance, and practice of these values, with far-reaching implications for democratic consolidation and political stability. [3] observed that the underdevelopment of democratic attitudes and values constitutes a major obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria, particularly among youths. This weak commitment to democratic principles has manifested in negative political behaviours such as intolerance, dishonesty, personalization of public office, electoral malpractice, and political violence, which undermine democratic governance.

Accountability and transparency are central to democratic practice and good governance. Accountability signifies the duty of individuals and institutions to be responsible for their acts, whereas transparency indicates the openness, accessibility, and clarity of information pertaining to governance processes. In

democratic societies, public officials and institutions are expected to operate transparently and remain accountable to the citizens they serve. [4] emphasized that accountability is a critical democratic virtue that confers legitimacy on government and promotes effective governance. Similarly, [5] noted that transparency encompasses all factors that influence the flow of information within a political system.

Scholars have conceptualized accountability both as a normative democratic value and as an institutional mechanism. [6] characterized accountability as a proactive mechanism wherein public officials elucidate and rationalize their conduct, facing sanctions when warranted. [7] further identified accountability as an umbrella concept closely linked to democracy, equity, transparency, and efficiency. [8] characterized accountability as an institutional connection wherein an actor is required to elucidate and justify actions to a forum that has the authority to impose repercussions. [9] expanded this understanding by identifying two dimensions of accountability: answerability, which involves information and justification, and enforcement, which entails sanctions for misconduct.

In democratic contexts, accountability can be social, political, or managerial. Social accountability emphasizes citizen-led actions such as advocacy, protests, media engagement, and legal interventions aimed at holding the state accountable [10]. Political accountability involves checks and balances within government structures, including electoral processes and legislative oversight, while managerial accountability focuses on financial reporting, performance evaluation, and institutional auditing mechanisms. Collectively, these forms of accountability rely heavily on citizen participation, making civic engagement a critical vehicle for enforcing transparency and accountability in governance.

The attitudes of undergraduates toward accountability and transparency are therefore significant in shaping their civic behaviour. Individuals who hold positive perceptions of accountability are more likely

to demand responsibility from public officials, while those who value transparency tend to insist on openness and access to information. Empirical studies support this linkage. [11] demonstrated that education promotes transparency and accountability by instilling moral values, ethical behaviour, and civic responsibility necessary for sustainable development. Similarly, [12] found that institutional transparency significantly influences attitudes toward supervision and governance practices.

Within the Nigerian context, civic engagement has increasingly taken the form of collective action against corruption and governance failures. [13] reported that Nigerians exhibit a strong preference for collective civic actions such as protests, advocacy campaigns, and support for accountability-focused political candidates, rather than relying solely on formal reporting mechanisms. This trend suggests a growing recognition of civic engagement as a tool for demanding transparency and accountability. [14] further observed that the demand for accountability and transparency in Nigeria has intensified over the past decade, largely driven by civil society organizations and youth-led movements responding to policy failures and governance crises.

The emergence of movements such as "Enough is Enough," "Follow the Money," "BudgIT," and the "Say No to Corruption" campaign illustrates how civic engagement has been mobilized to challenge secrecy, corruption, and abuse of power. Social media has further amplified these efforts by enabling youths to share experiences, mobilize support, and link personal grievances to broader national narratives on accountability and transparency [13]. Initiatives such as the #BounceCorruption campaign, which engaged undergraduates through debates on corruption and democratic values, underscore the potential role of university students in shaping democratic discourse.

Despite these developments, concerns persist regarding the depth and consistency of undergraduate participation in civic activities, particularly in relation to their perceptions of accountability and

transparency. While undergraduates may express support for democratic ideals, the extent to which these perceptions translate into sustained civic engagement remains unclear. It is against this backdrop that this study examines undergraduates' perception of accountability and transparency and their participation in civic activities in Nigerian Southwestern states, with a view to understanding how these democratic values influence civic engagement among university students.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Civic engagement is fundamental to democratic sustainability, as it enables citizens to participate meaningfully in governance, demand accountability, and safeguard democratic values. Undergraduate youths, in particular, are expected to play a critical role in democratic consolidation due to their education, exposure, and potential as future leaders. However, concerns persist regarding the limited and inconsistent participation of undergraduates in civic activities in Nigeria, especially beyond periodic electoral involvement, thereby raising questions about the strength of democratic culture among this group.

Accountability and transparency are core democratic values that promote trust, legitimacy, and effective governance. Yet, Nigeria's political environment has been widely characterized by weak accountability structures, limited transparency, and persistent governance challenges. Although civil society organizations and youth-led movements have increasingly mobilized citizens to demand accountability, it remains unclear how undergraduates perceive these democratic values and whether such perceptions translate into active civic engagement. The gap between awareness of democratic ideals and actual participation continues to pose a challenge to democratic development.

Existing empirical studies have often examined accountability,

transparency, and civic engagement as separate constructs, with limited focus on their interrelationship among university undergraduates, particularly in Southwestern Nigeria. This lack of context-specific evidence hinders the development of effective civic education policies and youth engagement strategies. Consequently, there is a need to empirically examine undergraduates' perceptions of accountability and transparency and their relationship with participation in civic activities in Nigerian Southwestern States.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study investigated undergraduates' perception of accountability, transparency and participation in civic activities in Nigerian Southwestern States. It specifically examines the:

1. Perception of accountability and transparency in Southwest, Nigeria
2. Level of student participation in civic activities
3. Relationship between accountability and transparency and participation in civic activities

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. What is the perception of undergraduates' students on accountability and transparency in Southwest, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of student participation in civic activities?

1.4 Research Hypothesis

The subsequent research idea was evaluated: No substantial correlation exists between accountability and transparency and involvement in civic activities.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design of the survey variety. This entailed an examination of undergraduates' perceptions of accountability, transparency, and civic engagement in Southwest Nigeria. The study population comprised 872,100 male

and female undergraduates from 17 public and 27 private universities in Southwest Nigeria. The study sample comprised 1,560 university undergraduates recruited through a multistage selection technique. Initially, three of the six states comprising Southwest Nigeria were chosen by a basic random sampling method. The second stage employed a stratified sampling technique to select two colleges, one federal and one state. The stratification was predicated on the ownership of the universities. The third stage entailed the selection of 260 undergraduates from each of the chosen colleges utilizing a simple sampling technique. For this study, the researcher developed an instrument named 'Undergraduates Perception of Accountability and Transparency and Civic Activities Questionnaire' (UPATCAQ) to gather pertinent data. To evaluate the face and content validity of the instrument, it was meticulously examined by experts in Social Studies Education and Tests and Measurement at the Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. The reliability of the UADVCEQ was determined by a test-retest methodology. The instrument copies were administered to 30 respondents who were not included in the sample but were part of the population. The copies of the instrument were re-administered to the same group of individuals biweekly. The data from the two trial tests underwent Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.88. Consequently, the device was deemed reliable. The instrument was administered by the researcher, assisted by a qualified research aide at each selected university. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, means, standard deviations, and percentages, were employed to address the research issues. Inferential statistics, including Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Research Question 1. What is the perception of undergraduates' students of accountability and transparency in Southwest, Nigeria?

To assess undergraduates' perceptions of accountability and transparency in Southwest Nigeria, the positive or negative scores of items 1-5 in section B of UPATCAQ were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and mean ratings. The negative attitude was

indicated by scores below the mean cutoff point ($x < 2.50$, i.e., $x = 1.00-2.49$), while the positive attitude was indicated by scores at or above the mean cutoff ($x > 2.50$, i.e., $x = 2.50-4.00$). The outcome is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency Counts and Mean Rating of The Perception of Undergraduates' Students of Accountability and Transparency in Southwest, Nigeria

Item	SA		A		D		SD		Mean	Remark
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Public officer can do without stealing	306	19.8	486	31.5	327	21.2	426	27.6	2.43	Negative
It is wrong to receive gratification before voting	564	36.5	429	27.8	330	21.4	222	14.4	2.86	Positive
It is wrong to pay to get employment/contract	426	28.9	768	52.0	150	10.2	132	8.9	3.01	Positive
It is wrong to buy gift for a civil servant in order to get a service/favour from him/her	939	60.8	426	27.6	99	6.4	81	5.2	3.44	Positive
It is wrong to use public office for personal gains	861	57.2	483	32.1	36	2.4	126	8.4	3.38	Positive
Grand	619	40.6	518	34.2	188	12.3	197	12.9	3.02	positive

The information contained in Table 1 above showed the perception of undergraduates' students on accountability and transparency in Southwest, Nigeria. Considering the mean cut off point of 2.50, university undergraduates had positive perception towards four out of the five items in table 1 above and negative attitude towards one out of the five items. Considering the grand mean of 3.02 that fall within the mean cut off point of 2.50-4.00, the overall perception of undergraduates' students of accountability and transparency in Southwest, Nigeria was considered positive

Research Question 2: What is the level of undergraduates' participation in

civic activities in southwest, Nigerian Nigeria?

To determine the level of undergraduates' participation in civic activities in southwest, Nigerian Nigeria? scores of items 1-10 of section C of UPATCAQ was subjected to frequency count, percentage and mean rating. The low level was defined by scores below the mean cutoff point (2.50, i.e., $x = 1.00-2.49$), while the moderate level was defined by the mean cutoff point ($x = 2.50-2.99$). The elevated level was established by the score exceeding the mean cutoff point ($x > 2.50$, i.e., $x = 3.00-4.00$). The outcome is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency Counts and Mean Rating of The Level of Participation Civic Activities Among University Undergraduates in Southwest, Nigeria

Items	A		S		R		N		Mean	Remark
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Register to vote during election	438	29.1	603	40.0	366	24.3	99	6.6	2.92	Moderate
Vote during national election	294	19.0	528	34.2	654	42.3	69	4.5	2.68	Moderate
Vote during local election	315	20.4	228	14.8	672	43.5	330	21.4	2.34	Low
Campaign for candidate during election	270	17.5	168	10.9	780	50.5	327	21.2	2.25	Low
Wear my party souvenir	132	8.5	306	19.8	549	35.5	558	36.1	2.10	Low
Donate money to support candidate during election	162	10.5	267	17.3	492	31.8	624	40.4	1.98	Low
Sign public petition online	150	9.7	132	8.5	468	30.3	795	51.5	1.77	Low
Sign public petition offline	201	13.5	126	8.5	474	31.8	690	46.3	1.89	Low
Join protest against unpleasant public occurrence	159	10.3	57	3.7	765	49.5	564	36.5	1.88	Low
Join protest against anti-human policy	192	12.4	90	5.8	759	49.1	504	32.6	1.98	Low
Grand total	231	15.09	251	16.35	598	38.86	456	29.71	2.179	Low

Table 2 presents the extent of participation in civic activities among university undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria. With a mean cutoff threshold of 2.50, the involvement level in civic activities among university undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria was deemed moderate in two of the ten items presented in Table 2 above. Participation in civic activities among university freshmen was deemed inadequate on 8 of the 10 items. The grand mean of 2.17, which falls within the cutoff range of 1.00-2.49, indicates that the general level of participation in civic activities among

university freshmen in southwest Nigeria is deemed poor.

Research hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between perception of accountability and transparency and participation in civic activities.

To evaluate this hypothesis, scores on accountability, transparency, and civic engagement among university undergraduates were aggregated and analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The outcome is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. PPMC Showing Relationship Between Attitude Towards Accountability and Transparency and Civic Engagement Among the University Undergraduates

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	r _{cal}	p-value
Perception of accountability and transparency	1548	14.88	2.294	0.292*	0.000
Civic Activities	1548	42.29	9.051		

P < 0.05 (Significant Result)

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that $r_{cal} = 0.292$; $p = 0.000$, which is less than 0.05. The null hypothesis is rejected due to the p value being less than 0.05. This is a substantial correlation between the impression of accountability and transparency and engagement in civic activities.

3.2 Discussion

The findings indicated that undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria had a positive impression of accountability and transparency. This indicates that the majority of undergraduate students consider it unethical to receive compensation before to voting, to pay for employment or contracts, to offer gifts to civil servants for services or favors, and to exploit public office for personal benefit. This finding may be attributed to the growing national consciousness among the youth and the amplification of their voices facilitated by social media impact. This discovery opposes the stance of [15], highlighting issues related to widespread youth political disengagement and adverse impressions in numerous democracies. The study similarly indicated an enhancement in the willingness of youths to engage in the political process, as articulated by [16], who noted that the majority of youths are disempowered. The discovery further challenged [17] assertion that the civic engagement process in the country has been hindered, leading to diminished public participation in governance and public policy formulation. In contrast, the conclusion aligns with Kantikoy's (2021) findings from a study conducted in Jos North, Nigeria, indicating that undergraduate youths possess a robust

and favorable impression of democratic norms.

The survey revealed that the general level of undergraduate engagement in civic activities among university students in Southwest Nigeria was low. This implies that the majority of college youths do not participate in voting during local and national elections and rarely engage in campaigning for candidates or parties. This also suggests that they rarely participate in overseeing government spending, supporting governmental organizations, engaging in discussions about economic policy on social media, or reaching out to political representatives over matters of public interest. This conclusion may stem from a deficiency of faith in the government system and the continual repression of dissenting opinions within the nation. This conclusion aligns with [3], who asserted that both the elites and adolescents have unexpectedly demonstrated a lack of devotion to fundamental symbols and values of democracy. This aligns with the findings of [18], which indicate that university students exhibit a reluctance to protest against human rights violations and a propensity to accept bribes and support inappropriate political candidates for monetary benefits. This also supports [17] assertion that citizens' participation in the political process remains below an acceptable level in Nigeria.

The findings indicated a substantial association between perceptions of accountability and transparency and civic participation among university freshmen. This finding corresponds with the assertion of [13] that there exists a correlation between attitudes towards transparency and accountability and civic involvement, as emphasized in

the strategies utilized by civil society groups and social movement organizations. This aligns with the position of [14] that the desire for openness and accountability in Nigerian democracy has intensified over the past decade. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and various citizen advocacy groups are at the forefront of this issue.

4. CONCLUSION

It was concluded based on the findings from this study that undergraduate's participation in civic activities was lower than expected despite their positive perception of the accountability and transparency. It was equally inferred that an increase in the level of accountability could lead to a proportionate increase in the level of undergraduates' engagement in civic activities.

Recommendations

The following were recommended

1. Universities and relevant government agencies should institutionalize transparent governance practices within higher education systems. This includes regular dissemination of

information on decision-making processes, budgeting, student welfare policies, and institutional accountability mechanisms.

2. Universities should intentionally promote civic engagement programmes by integrating service-learning, volunteerism, and civic education into the academic curriculum. Student unions, campus organizations, and university management should collaborate with civil society organizations to create accessible opportunities for students to participate in community development, electoral education, and social advocacy initiatives.
3. Policymakers and university administrators should leverage transparent institutional practices as a strategy for enhancing civic participation. Universities should model democratic values through inclusive decision-making, ethical leadership, and accountable administration, as these practices can positively influence students' willingness to engage in civic and democratic processes

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