

Lawmakers' Information Literacy Skills in Locating and Accessing Information for their Constituency Performance in South West Nigeria

by

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Abstract:

Legislators are representatives of their constituencies, they initiate and monitor development projects, link their constituencies with both state and national government and generally help in improving the quality of life for members. This study set out to find out how legislators' are able to locate and access information that may influence their performance. The survey research design was used. The population consisted of all the 177 legislators from all the six state houses of assembly in South-West Nigeria. The Cronbach's alpha was used to validate the questionnaire which gave a reliability coefficient of 0.188. The return rate was 85.3%. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Person moment correlation and ANOVA. Findings showed that legislators (64%) had a clear understanding of the information they needed for their constituency work, as the lawmakers (65%) were able to locate and access information from current awareness sources such as newspapers and radio. Legislators (35%) also found it easy to retrieve information from community based sources such as traditional and religious leaders as well as NGOs (31%). For the hypothesis, the correlation coefficient of the information skills, abilities measured revealed that for locating and accessing information (0.18p-value<0.029) had low significant positive relationship between them and their constituency performance. The null hypothesis were therefore rejected, that is the coefficient of determination (R²) 0.188 which signified all the skills accounted for about 19% validity in the lawmakers constituency performances.

Introduction

Democratic governance is aimed at increasing state capability, accountability and responsiveness for constituency performance. Lawmakers are pillars of democratic governance. They do this through three major functions of parliament, namely representation, law-making and supervision for a viable democracy (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2007). Achieving this depends on the institutional setting of the parliament, the members' capacity and the parliament's place and importance in national and international system (Overseas Development Initiative, 2007). It would appear that in most countries of the world, lawmakers are deemed to be ineffective in carrying out their legislative function of governance. Legislative representation has always been an integral part of political administration, especially where governments (including legislatures) routinely consult, interact, and exchange views and information with the public, so as to enable the citizens to contribute to good governance, express their preferences and provide their support for decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods (Kurtz, 2007).

The focus of the study is on six State Houses of Assemblies located in South West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, consisting of six states:- Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo. They all belong to the Yoruba speaking states of the country. Perhaps a brief description of all the selected states will enrich the background by providing an in-depth

understanding of the people, their culture, agriculture, social and economic developments of the states, upon which their legislative houses will perform their statutory functions as contained in the constitution.

Ekiti state was created on 1st October 1996. The recently released census of 2006 by the National Population Commission (NPC) put the population of Ekiti at 2,384,212 million. There are 16 local government areas in Ekiti State. Ekiti as a people settled in nucleus urban patterns, well linked by a network of roads. The State can boast of more than 127 large and small, ancient and modern towns, located on hills and valleys that characterize the state from which the confinement takes its name, Ekiti. Ekiti State, apart from the fact that it is the only state with a warm spring in Nigeria is the watershed and the source of some prominent rivers such as Ero, Ose, Ogbese and others. The people of Ekiti are hard-working, upright, studious and very articulate. Ekiti men are predominantly farmers, but women engage in trading (Ekiti State Legislative Report, 2012)

Lagos State was created on May 27, 1967 by virtue of state (Creation and Transitional Provisions) Decree No. 14 of 1967, which structured Nigeria Federation into 12 states. It is the smallest state in area of Nigeria; Lagos State is the most populous state (after Kano State) and arguably the most economically important state of the country, containing Lagos, the nation's largest urban centre. The state is known for her business and financial hub,

developments, investors, Technologists, Financial Capital, IT, Investment firms, Banks etc. (Lagos House of Assembly Annual Report, 2010). For Ondo state, it belongs to one of the states created in February 3, 1976 from the former Western State, with the capital at Akure. The state contains eighteen local governments; the majority of the citizens live in urban centres. The big government universities in Ondo State are the Federal University of Technology, Akure, and the Adekunle Ajasin University at Akungba. Education is a high priority by the state government and reputed as the education factory of Nigeria as a result of emphasis in the sector over the years (Policy Analysis and Research Project, 2008).

Osun state was created in 1991 from part of the old Oyo State. The name was derived from the River Osun, the venerated natural spring that is the manifestation of the Yoruba goddess of the same name. The major ethnic groups in Osun State are Ife, Ijesha, Oyo, Ibolu and Igbomina of the Yoruba people. Osun state is divided into three federal senatorial districts, each of which is composed of two administrative zones. The state consists of 30 local government areas, the third arms of government in Nigeria (PARP, 2008). Ogun-State created in February 3, 1976 with capital in Abeokuta; the major cities are Abeokuta, Ewekoro, Ikenne. It borders Lagos-State and Atlantic Ocean to the South, Oyo and Osun states to the North, Ondo state to the East and the Republic of Benin to the West. The state is made up of six ethnic groups the Egba, the Ijebu, the Remo, the Egbado, the Awori and the Egun. The major food crops include rice, maize, cassava, yam and banana. The main cash crops include cocoa, kola nut, rubber, palm oil and palm kernels. About 20% of its total area is constituted of forest reserve suitable for livestock (Ogun House of Assembly Annual Report, 2011)

Finally, the last state within the research study areas is Oyo- state; it is an inland state in South Western Nigeria, with its capital in Ibadan. It was part of the states created in 1976, it is a homogenous, mainly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group who are primarily agrarian but have a predilection for living in high density urban centres. The indigenous peoples mainly comprise the Oyos, the Oke oguns, the Ibadans, and the Ibarapas, all belonging to the Yoruba family and indigenous city in Africa of the Sahara. Ibadan had been a centre of administration of the old Western Region, Nigeria since the days of the British Colonial Rule. The climate of the state favours the cultivation of crops like maize, yam,

cassava, millet, rice, plantain, palm tree and cashew (Leke, 2010)

Legislators, as representatives of their constituencies are expected to provide effective representation for members of their constituencies. According to Mezey (2009), Kurt (2007), Hanna (2007) and Gladdish (2005) legislative duties include interaction with electorates, carrying out outreach programmes, bridging the gap between their constituencies and government, organising, initiating and monitoring development projects. Others are collaborating with private agencies and civil society groups to bring about development. In order to make themselves accessible to their constituency members, lawmakers need to have functional offices in their constituencies, where they can be visited for discussion about the affairs and problems affecting the members of their constituents through complaints and observations. Such functional offices should have the appropriate mixture of staff as well as manual and electronic equipment for receiving, retrieving and disseminating information. According to Rugambwa (2010) state Members of Parliament (MPs) often access question and answer information services from their constituents through cell phones, short messages service and emails. To do this effectively lawmakers need to have right information resources and the means of accessing them. Lawmakers as representatives of their people carry out constituency outreach programmes, where decisions are taken through the representative of all the constituencies.

In addition, organizing and initiating development projects will address the most pressing needs of constituency members as part of the duties of lawmakers. Most of the concerns of the constituency members are local issues; many of them want food, water and education for their children, good health, adequate housing, good roads and access to business opportunities. Every constituent wants development and as representatives who have the intimate knowledge of the constituency they represent, it is a matter of identifying priority areas, as an elected leader that can help organize and initiate development projects (World Directory of Parliament, 2007). The legislators' duty of bridging the gap between the government and their constituency is performed by intervening sometimes in complex and confusing structures and processes. Moreover, lawmakers' constituency duties involve identifying and collaborating with likeminded people or organization. There are a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and constituency based civil societies conducting work in

their constituency. Some of the NGOs serve as alternative means of providing basic infrastructure where government has failed in doing so. As elected representatives, lawmakers can leverage on the support of NGOs as a startup or a booster of existing concepts programmes and projects (UNDP, 2006).

Objectives of the study:

In order to achieve the aims of this study, the researches intend to:

1. identify the information needs of lawmakers in South West Nigeria;
2. examine the level which the lawmakers can locate and access information need for constituency performance;
3. identify the relative contribution of information literacy skills of lawmakers to constituency performance in South West Nigeria;
4. find out the challenges faced by lawmakers in acquiring information literacy skills for constituency performance

Research Questions:

1. What are the information needs of lawmakers in South West Nigeria?
2. What is the extent of lawmakers' access to locate and access information from library, information centre and other sources for their constituency performance?
3. What are the challenges faced by lawmakers in acquiring information literacy skills for constituency performance?

Research Hypothesis:

One hypothesis was formulated for the study and tested at 0.05

H₁ Information literacy skills employed by lawmakers in locating and accessing information do not significantly influence their constituency performance

Review of Related Literature:

Constituency performance of lawmakers as elected representatives in a knowledge-based democracy all over the world may require that decision-makers be well informed on how to carry out their constituency duties. Although democracy is still a very new concept to many of the nations, the process of building up democratic institutions and the consolidation of democratic ideas might take time and careful attention (Robinson & Hyde, 1998). Nigeria as a developing country belongs to the group of nations that is building up its democracy now in

their Seventh Republic, thus, as a matter of fact needs information.

Lawmakers' capability in locating and accessing falls within the concept of information literacy, it is the ability of information –seeker to have unhindered access to information required for research or other purposes following due process. Information access covers physical accessibility, understanding of information seeking behavior and disclosure of information. The physical accessibility of information has to do with the availability of adequate infrastructure, physical building, internet, intranet facilities, electricity, hardware and software. For the physical building, there is a need for standardization; the physical building has to be insured, with internet ready, electrically well fitted, good floor arrangement and provision for the physically challenged. It requires a flexible work environment, with demarcation between access to electronic resources and hard texts. There is a need for planning to ensure that there is consistent electricity supply, by ensuring that the people can depend on the public power supply or make arrangement for generator, battery or solar for backup. The lawmakers with their quest for information have to understand mental knowledge of information needs, that is to have the prior knowledge, environment and professional attitudes, coupled with different personality and cognitive styles and affective characteristics. (Akintunde, 2011).

Iwhiwhu (2011) posits that without the providence of information and its effective utilization in the legislative process by legislators, reliable laws in any society cannot be ascertained. Information is a very vital resource to individuals and organizations in the upgrade of knowledge about events and issues around them. It is also knowledge derived from study, experience or instruction. Information allows communities to work in concert with public officials and elected representatives (Kirkwood, 2004). It is a vital resource for the development of any community, state or country. Access to the right information is a very critical component in the constituency performance of a lawmaker in the parliament, just as it is important for productivity of information workers, and consequently the productivity and good decision of the organization employing them (Ogunsola, 2008). Making information sources readily available and accessible to policy makers in public institutions could significantly increase the effectiveness of public policies, such policy being

vital elements in developmental efforts. Well thought out policies are central to achieving key constituency performance goals such as alleviating poverty, raising living standards, creating good jobs, ensuring security, strengthening education, as well as improving public health and protecting the environment (Haynie, 2001).

In the way it was enshrined in some of the laws that cover constituency performance of the legislator to the members of their constituents. However, the ability of the parliamentarian to access information from a parliamentary library is a major concern for the legislator, it is therefore necessary that there is availability of information services, sources, and products and to disseminate information to parliamentarians in an objective nonpartisan manner (Hokere, 2010). While the library ensures that the range of reading materials is adequate and relevant to MPs and their staff being to perform is a function of the resources being available.

Methodology

The research design that was used for this study was exposit facto survey design of correctional type. This method was suitable for this research in the sense that the study had identified and systematically analyzed issues relating to lawmakers' information literacy skills and constituency performance. This study had focused on the legislators from the six States' Houses of Assembly of the South Western geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Although, there are 6 geo-political zones in Nigeria comprising of the South Western zone, South-South, South East, North East, North Western and North Central. However, the South Western zone which is made up of 6 states (Ekiti, Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo and Osun states) was picked for the study. One of the reasons is that the country is large (170 million people situated across 6 geo-political zones made up of 36 states and the Federal capital Territory, Abuja). Therefore conducting this type of research to cut across the whole nation may be cumbersome and may drag for years. Besides, parliamentarians are very busy people and are always on the move. Getting their attention is a bit challenging. The researchers had to select a sizeable sample that could be managed within a time frame. Besides, the South Western zone is one of the zones that enjoy relative peace. For instance in the North, especially the North Eastern and North Central zones of the country have remained volatile due to terrorist attacks for a couple of years (2009 till now) while the south –southern zone too has been subjected to militant activities. The South Eastern zone has been

rampaged by kidnappers over time. Therefore, gathering data from these zones was almost impossible as research assistants were not willing to go to those areas.

According to Nigeria Atlas of Electoral Constituencies (2008), there were a total of 177 constituencies and 177 lawmakers in this geopolitical zone. Total enumeration was used to determine the number of lawmakers that participated in this study. This means that all the 177 lawmakers in the South West geopolitical zone of Nigeria who represented the 177 constituents in the zone participated in the study due to their small number. To gather data, 6 research assistants were employed and trained. One person was attached to each state's parliament in the selected zone. They were detailed to attend to parliamentary sessions so as to gain direct contact to the lawmakers. This was done over a period of 4 months. Sometimes, the questionnaire were read to some of the respondents who were too busy to create time to fill the questionnaire. Out of the 177 copies of the questionnaire administered and filled, 151 were returned and found analyzable. The remaining 26 could not be retrieved because of logistics while others were invalid coupled with other constraints, this gave a response rate of 85.3%. It was based on the data from the total 151 copies of questionnaire retrieved that the analysis was made.

Findings, as represented in Table 1 showed that legislators felt that their greater ability to locate and access information was from current awareness sources such as newspapers and the radio (65%). As expected, legislators were more able to locate and access information from print media than from electronic media. They indicated, for example, that they were able to use the library classification scheme to locate the materials they needed (53.7%), that they could access information from press releases (39%) and that they had the ability to use appropriate indexing and abstracting services and citation indexes (34%). Although these figures on their own appeared rather low, when compared with legislators' resources under electronic sources, they were high. Only 19% of legislators strongly agreed that they had the ability to use information gateways and search engines, 16% said that they could use electronic database and full-text services, or to formulate search queries (10%). Legislators also expressed their competence in accessing and locating information from institutional sources such as NGOs (45%), religious leaders (42%) and traditional leaders (39%). This suggests some level of closeness of

legislators to community based sources as the legislators will have the opportunity to be conversant

with issues affecting the development of the constituencies.

Findings and Discussion:

Table 1 Ability to locate and access information resources

Rating	SD (%)	D (%)	U (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
As a legislature					
I can locate information from various sources such as libraries, colleagues, professionals, community leaders	-	3 (2)	1 (0.7)	81 (55.1)	62 (42.2)
I can access the needed information effectively and efficiently	1 (0.7)	5 (3.5)	1 (0.7)	71 (50.4)	63 (44.7)
My understanding of issues affecting accessibility of information is low	31 (22.6)	20 (14.7)	4 (2.9)	45 (32.8)	37 (27)
I lack the ability to identify which information sources will best meet my legislative need	35 (24.1)	31 (21.4)	4 (2.8)	36 (24.8)	39 (26.9)
I have the ability to use keywords to search for material on a research topic	22 (16.3)	20 (14.8)	7 (5.2)	57 (42.2)	29 (21.5)
My ability to use a library catalogue to find specific books, journals titles or books on a subject is high	6 (4.2)	12 (8.3)	11 (7.6)	65 (45.1)	50 (34.7)
Electronic Sources					
I have the ability to use information gateways and search engines to locate material for an essay topic	30 (20.3)	38 (25.7)	10 (6.8)	42 (28.4)	28 (18.9)
I am skilled in formulating search queries	29 (20.1)	50 (34.7)	15 (10.4)	35 (24.3)	15 (10.4)
I possess requisite skills to use database and full-text services in locating materials for an essay topic	27 (18.2)	45 (30.4)	14 (9.5)	38 (25.7)	24 (16.2)
I have the ability to limit search by fields	22 (15.6)	49 (34.8)	16 (11.3)	33 (23.4)	21 (14.9)
I have the ability to use different levels of searching on databases	27 (18.4)	51 (34.7)	17 (11.6)	28 (19)	24 (16.3)
I can develop successful search strategies	31 (21.7)	44 (30.8)	17 (11.9)	32 (22.4)	19 (13.3)
Print Sources					
I do not know how to use the classification scheme system to locate print materials in the library	14 (9.5)	16 (10.9)	7 (4.8)	31 (21.1)	79 (53.7)
I have no understanding of interlibrary loan and access to other libraries	9 (6.4)	19 (13.6)	8 (5.7)	33 (23.6)	71 (50.7)
I am able to use appropriate indexing and abstracting services, citation indexes and databases	31 (21.7)	24 (16.8)	8 (5.6)	32 (22.4)	48 (33.6)
I am able to use current awareness methods to keep up to date	6 (4.1)	1 (0.7)	2 (1.4)	43 (29.1)	96 (64.9)
I can access information from press release (s) from pressure groups through the various media houses on issues affecting lawmakers constituencies	3 (2.1)	-	7 (4.9)	78 (54.5)	55 (38.5)
Institutional Sources					
I can locate information sources from their official publications such as annual reports of community-	-	-	1 (0.7)	82 (54.3)	68 (45)s

based societies and NGOs operating in my state					
I have the ability to source information from religious leaders	-	1 (0.7)	1 (0.7)	85 (57)	62 (41.6)
I often source for information from traditional leaders	-	1 (0.7)	1 (0.7)	88 (59.5)	58 (39.2)

SD-Strongly disagree, D-disagree, U-Undecided, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree

Table 2: Challenges of lawmakers in acquiring information literacy skills

Constraints faced by legislators when sourcing for information	SD (%)	D (%)	U (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
I find it difficult to locate the most appropriate information resources in the State House of Assembly library catalogue		4(2.7)		62 (42.5)	80 (54.8)
There is too much of information resources (information explosion)		2(1.4)	2(1.4)	82 (58.6)	54(38.6)
Ability to evaluate information resources is essential		1(0.7)	1(0.7)	80 (55.7)	61(42.7)
Electronic/Online Sources					
Lack of knowledge of search techniques to retrieve information effectively		2(1.4)	2 (1.4)	53 (38.7)	80 (58.4)
I encounter low bandwidth, slow internet connectivity)		1(0.7)	1 (0.7)	73 (53.7)	61 (44.9)
I retrieve records with high recall and low precision	1(0.7)	1 (0.7)	2 (1.4)	72 (52.6)	61 (44.5)
Personal Sources					
Uncooperative attitude of library personnel	2 (1.4)	10 (6.9)	1(0.7)	49 (34)	82 (56.9)
One must understand the ethical issues guiding the use of information	-	3(2.1)	-	78 (54.5)	62 (43.4)
I experience financial constraints	-	1(0.7)	-	89(61)	56(38.4)
Institutional Sources					
There is need for time to retrieve the needed information	-	1(0.7)	2(1.4)	94(63.9)	50(34)
Most public libraries does not have current information resources	-	1 (0.7)	1(0.7)	85 (58.2)	59 (40.4)
Information resources from society leaders like traditional rulers, leaders of thoughts, religious groups, community-based societies (NGOs) are censored because of their role in the society.	1(0.7)	-	-	91 (61.1)	57 (38.3)

The legislators felt that their greatest challenges of acquiring information literacy was from electronic/online sources for lack of knowledge for search techniques to retrieve information effectively (58.4%). From uncooperative attitude of library staff personnel from personal sources had (56.9%) followed by another notable challenge (54.8%) for legislators that found it difficult to locate the most appropriate information resources in the State Houses of Assembly library catalogue. Low response

(38.4%) were recorded for financial constraints (38.4%), from institutional sources the highest (40.4%) had issues with public libraries who does not have current information sources, a lower recording (38.3%) an indication that the challenges here were less and this is better because of their relationship at the communal level.

For the legislators that agreed, selected high figures were noticed (58.6%) for information overload or

explosion, 55.7% for those that had challenges on their ability to evaluate information resources, 53.7% for those that encountered low bandwidth slow internet connectivity. Findings have shown that most of the legislators were deficient in information literacy skills because of the challenges they were facing as indicated above. Legislator needs information, the skills in getting this information are

important for their constituency duties. And this covers every aspect of their legislative work with direct effect on their constituency performance.

Hypothesis 1: Information literacy skills employed by lawmakers in locating and accessing information do not significantly influence their constituency performance.

Table 3: Correlation analysis of lawmakers' ability in locating and accessing information and their constituency performance

Measure	Mean (%)	Standard deviation	Correlation coefficient (r)	p-value	Remark
Measure of lawmaker's constituency performance	85.56	14.13	0.179*	0.029	Significant
Measure of lawmaker's ability to locate and access information	70.24	12.82			

Table 1: had shown the correlation coefficient obtained was 0.18 with a p-value of 0.029; therefore the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. This implies that there was very low significantly positive relationship between lawmakers' ability to locate and access information ($p < 0.05$). The findings revealed that a significant weak positive correlation did exist between constituency performance and location and accessibility to information. The findings revealed that a significant weak positive correlation did exist between constituency performance and location and accessibility to information. The results from this study agreed with Iwhiwhu (2011), where legislators (79%) said that they could locate information about their constituencies from people within the community, who could be elders or community spokesmen among others and also from media houses. Thus the study showed this information met their social, recreational, global and functional information needs necessary to carry out their parliamentary functions.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

This study investigated the relationship between the legislators' information literacy skills and their constituency duties. In this study, the ability of the lawmakers in locating and accessing information becomes paramount, where the majority of the legislators were able to locate and access information from within the community. The information generated was able to meet their social, recreational,

global and functional information needs to carry out their parliamentary functions. It is to be noted that the legislators' greatest abilities were from current awareness sources, such as newspapers and the radio, they were also able to access information from print media. Finally, altogether, legislators were representative of their constituency members, elected for lawmaking, as representatives, and do oversight functions. This study has revealed the condition in which can be attained, by establishing a positive relationship between information literacy skills and constituency performance. It might be low and weak, as the coefficient and validity has shown, but it cannot be neglected, although it can be improved. Based on the findings, it is recommended that there should be deliberate efforts to organize training for the newly elected members in the form of orientation, apart from access to information resources availability, the library and information professionals should ensure that information and communication technology facilities are available and finally, with the return to democracy, the constituency duties and performance of the legislators are essential for good democratic governance.

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