

Undergraduate Social Studies Students' Perceptions of the Challenges and Opportunities of Integrating Indigenous Governance Systems into Nigeria's Democratic Practices for Improved Governance

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Abstract

This study examined undergraduate social studies students' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities of integrating indigenous governance systems into Nigeria's democratic practices for improved governance. The study was guided by three objectives and three corresponding research questions were answered. The study tested two null hypotheses. A survey research design, specifically a cross-sectional survey, was adopted to facilitate the collection of first-hand data from undergraduate Social Studies students at the University of Jos. The study population comprised 416 students across four levels, from which a sample of 100 was selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure fairness and representativeness. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled Students' Questionnaire which was subjected to content validity by experts. The reliability was established at 0.79. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics of mean and standard deviation for answering research questions and t-test was used to test hypothesis one and hypothesis two was tested using PPMC through SPSS. The analysis revealed among other things that that, Nigeria's current democratic system faces significant challenges in addressing socio-economic problems. It also revealed that, traditional governance structures hold significant value in maintaining order, promoting cultural identity, and fostering community-based problem-solving mechanisms among others. The study concluded that a hybrid governance approach, incorporating the strengths of indigenous governance within the democratic framework, could enhance governance effectiveness and foster socio-economic development. The study recommended among other things that, Institutional reforms should be implemented to strengthen democratic structures, ensuring transparency, effective policy implementation, and stronger institutions that can address socio-economic challenges more efficiently. And that civic education programmes should be expanded to promote awareness of indigenous governance systems and their potential contributions to democratic governance, fostering a more inclusive and participatory political culture among others.

Keywords

Students perception, challenges, opportunities, Indigenous governance and democratic practices



I. Introduction

Governance is a central mechanism through which societies organise their political, economic, and social systems. It encompasses the processes of decision-making and implementation, ensuring that societal needs are addressed efficiently and equitably.

Modern democracy, which emphasises participatory governance, equality, accountability, and the rule of law, has become the dominant governance model globally (Mukherjee, 2020). In Nigeria, the transition to democracy in 1999 was seen as a milestone after decades of military dictatorship and authoritarian governance. The hope was that democratic governance would address longstanding challenges such as corruption, political instability, and socio-economic inequality. However, two decades later, Nigeria continues to grapple with several governance challenges, including weak institutions, public distrust of political systems, and a lack of citizen engagement, particularly at the grassroots level (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2021). These challenges have prompted discussions on the need to explore alternative or complementary governance frameworks, such as incorporating indigenous governance systems into modern democratic practices. Although the media has brought about various dynamics in the democratic structure and functions of Nigerian society, the place of indigenous governance cannot be downplayed (Shittu, 2024).

Indigenous governance systems are traditional, community-based frameworks that have long served as mechanisms for conflict resolution, resource management, and societal cohesion in many African societies, including Nigeria. Before colonial rule, indigenous systems such as the emirate system in northern Nigeria, the Yoruba council of elders in the southwest, and the Igbo village assemblies in the southeast were central to governance in their respective regions. These systems were typically characterised by inclusive decision-making processes, consensus-building, and respect for traditional leadership (Olowu & Wunsch, 2022). For example, in the emirate system, the emir functioned as a custodian of justice, supported by councils of advisers and religious scholars who ensured that governance aligned with societal and religious values. Similarly, in Igbo communities, the *amala* or village assembly enabled widespread participation in decision-making, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among community members.

Despite their effectiveness in pre-colonial governance, these indigenous systems were largely sidelined during the colonial and post-colonial periods, as Western-style democratic structures were imposed. This sidelining created a gap between formal governance institutions and the local populations, particularly in rural and marginalised areas. In contemporary Nigeria, where governance challenges persist, there is renewed interest in exploring the integration of these indigenous systems into the modern democratic framework. Proponents argue that such integration could address some of the systemic weaknesses of modern democracy, such as alienation of grassroots populations, lack of cultural alignment, and inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms (Chikwanha, 2019). For instance, in rural northern Nigeria, traditional rulers have continued to play critical roles in resolving land disputes and inter-communal conflicts, demonstrating the enduring relevance of indigenous governance.

However, the integration of indigenous governance systems into modern democratic practices presents several challenges. Critics point out that certain aspects of traditional governance, such as hereditary leadership, gender exclusivity, and lack of formal accountability mechanisms, are at odds with democratic principles of equality and transparency (Olowu & Wunsch, 2022). For example, in many traditional systems, women and younger people are often excluded from decision-making processes, limiting the inclusivity of governance. Additionally, power struggles between elected officials and traditional leaders could arise, as both groups may vie for authority and legitimacy within the same governance space. These challenges underscore the need for a carefully designed framework that respects both democratic ideals and the cultural significance of indigenous systems.

The integration of indigenous governance systems into democratic frameworks has been successfully implemented in other African countries, providing valuable lessons for Nigeria. In Botswana, the kgotla system a traditional forum for community deliberation has been incorporated into the country's modern governance structure, allowing citizens to participate directly in decision-making at the local level. This integration has enhanced grassroots engagement and strengthened the legitimacy of governance processes in Botswana (Chikwanha, 2019). Similarly, in South Africa, traditional leaders play advisory roles in local government councils, ensuring that governance aligns with cultural values while maintaining democratic accountability. These examples demonstrate that it is possible to balance the strengths of both governance paradigms to achieve improved governance outcomes.

In Nigeria, the potential benefits of integrating indigenous governance systems into modern democracy are particularly significant given the country's diversity and persistent governance challenges. Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with unique governance traditions and practices. Leveraging these diverse traditions could foster inclusivity, promote trust in governance institutions, and bridge the gap between formal structures and local communities. For example, traditional leaders in parts of Plateau and Benue states have been instrumental in mediating farmer-herder conflicts, a role that modern governance structures have struggled to fulfil effectively. Similarly, in the Niger Delta region, where grievances over resource allocation and environmental degradation have fuelled unrest, traditional leaders have often served as intermediaries between local communities and the government, facilitating dialogue and conflict resolution.

Nevertheless, successful integration requires addressing the inherent weaknesses of both governance paradigms. Modern democratic systems in Nigeria have been criticised for their focus on elite politics, corruption, and insufficient engagement with the masses, while traditional systems face criticisms of patriarchal structures, lack of accountability, and susceptibility to abuse of power. A hybrid governance framework must therefore prioritise reforms that mitigate these weaknesses while harnessing the strengths of both systems. For instance, training and capacity-building initiatives for traditional leaders could enhance their understanding of democratic principles, while modern institutions could adopt culturally sensitive approaches to policy implementation.

The challenges and opportunities of incorporating indigenous governance systems into modern democratic practices in Nigeria warrant detailed exploration. This study aims to examine the interplay between these two governance paradigms, with a focus on identifying strategies for achieving a more inclusive, responsive, and culturally aligned governance framework. Ultimately, the integration of indigenous governance systems into modern democracy holds promise for addressing Nigeria's governance challenges, fostering national cohesion, and promoting sustainable development. However, realising this potential requires a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved and a commitment to addressing the tensions that may arise from blending these governance systems.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Governance in precolonial societies in Nigeria was characterised by effective, indigenous systems rooted in the cultural and traditional practices of the people. These systems, which operated within kingdoms, empires, and emirates, provided a framework for leadership, conflict resolution, and social order tailored to the specific needs and values of their societies. However, the advent of colonialism disrupted these systems, replacing them with a foreign, centralised model of governance that lacked alignment with the

indigenous sociopolitical realities of Nigeria. Post-colonial Nigeria has since adopted a democratic system of governance modelled on Western practices. While democracy is widely celebrated as a governance ideal, the Nigerian experience with democracy has been fraught with inefficiency, corruption, widespread poverty, insecurity, and failure to meet the expectations of its citizens.

Empirical data paints a grim picture of Nigeria's socioeconomic condition under this current system of governance. Recent reports reveal that approximately 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, with the nation often dubbed the "poverty capital of the world" (World Bank, 2023). Additionally, Nigeria grapples with rampant insecurity, inflation, unemployment, and social vices such as cultism, theft, and corruption. This has raised fundamental questions about the suitability and effectiveness of the democratic system practised in the country. Despite various government interventions such as subsidy payments, social security schemes, Sure-P programmes, and student loans these initiatives have failed to alleviate the suffering of Nigerians or improve the quality of governance, underscoring systemic flaws within the political framework. Stakeholders and scholars have increasingly argued that Nigeria's governance challenges stem from the disconnect between the imposed democratic model and the country's indigenous sociocultural realities (Ake, 2022; Ekeh, 2020). The indigenous systems of governance, once effective in promoting harmony, accountability, and communal well-being, have largely been abandoned. Advocates of hybrid governance propose the incorporation of indigenous governance principles into modern democratic practices as a means of creating a system that is not only culturally relevant but also more efficient in addressing Nigeria's unique challenges. Therefore, the problem of this study can be subsumed under the following broad question: What are the opportunities of integrating indigenous governance systems into Nigeria's democracy?

1.2 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate undergraduate social studies students' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities of integrating indigenous governance systems into Nigeria's democratic practices for improved governance. Specifically, the objectives of the study include to;

1. Find out the challenges of Nigeria's current democratic system in addressing socio-economic problems
2. Identify the relevance of indigenous governance systems in Nigeria.
3. Determine the opportunities of integrating indigenous governance systems into Nigeria's democracy.

1.3 Research questions

The following research questions were answered in the study

1. What are the challenges of Nigeria's current democratic system in addressing socio-economic problems?
2. What are the relevance of indigenous governance systems in Nigeria?
3. What are the opportunities of integrating indigenous governance systems into Nigeria's democracy?

1.3 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference between Indigenous governance and current Nigeria democratic system

2. There is no significant relationship between the democratic system of governance and socio-economic problem in Nigeria

II. Review of Literatures

The theory underpinning this study is Systems Theory, propounded by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1936. The Systems Theory views organisations, societies, or systems as interdependent and interconnected units that function as a whole to achieve balance and harmony. It posits that any system is composed of smaller subsystems that interact with one another and with their environment to maintain stability and functionality. The theory emphasises the importance of synergy, feedback mechanisms, adaptability, and the relationships among various components of a system. It also emphasises that changes in one part of a system can have significant effects on the whole, making it critical to consider how each element contributes to the overall performance.

The relationship of the Systems Theory to this study lies in its application to understanding the interaction between Nigeria's indigenous governance systems and the current democratic framework. The theory helps to conceptualise the indigenous and democratic systems as subsystems within a broader societal governance system. By integrating the two, the study explores how their interplay could enhance governance, accountability, and inclusiveness, akin to how components of a system work together to achieve a shared purpose. This relationship highlights the importance of XXXmphasizesXXX indigenous practices with democratic ideals for a more effective governance structure.

The relevance of the Systems Theory to this study is rooted in its ability to provide a conceptual framework for Emphasize the integration of governance systems. It underscores the necessity of synergy between the indigenous and modern systems to achieve balance and optimal functionality in Nigeria's democratic system. By applying this theory, the study could offer insights into how the interplay between these governance systems might address current challenges, foster unity, and improve democratic outcomes. The theory also reinforces the importance of feedback and adaptability, which are crucial in tailoring governance systems to the unique cultural and socio-political context of Nigeria.

2.1 Indigenous governance systems in Nigeria

Indigenous governance systems in Nigeria refer to traditional frameworks and structures that were established and emphasised by ethnic communities for leadership, decision-making, conflict resolution, and resource management before the advent of colonial rule. These systems were not only functional but also deeply rooted in the cultural, spiritual, and social practices of the various ethnic groups within the country. Despite the imposition of Western democratic structures during colonial rule, many of these traditional governance systems have remained resilient, continuing to influence local communities and playing significant roles in contemporary governance.

Historically, Nigeria's indigenous governance systems were diverse, reflecting the country's multi-ethnic composition. Among the Hausa-Fulani in northern Nigeria, the emirate system was prominent. This system was hierarchical, with the emir at the apex of authority, serving as both a spiritual and political leader. The emir was supported by a council of advisors, religious scholars, and district heads who administered various parts of the emirate. The governance of the emirate system was deeply influenced by Islamic principles, particularly the Sharia legal system, which guided both personal and communal life (Mustapha, 2020). In the southwestern region, the Yoruba practiced a governance system based on the Oba (king) and council of chiefs. The Oba was viewed as a divine

ruler, and his authority was balanced by the council, which represented various interest groups within the community. Decision-making was often carried out through consultations and consensus, reflecting the communal ethos of Yoruba society. This system fostered stability and inclusivity, as it ensured that diverse opinions were considered before reaching decisions (Falola, 2021).

The Igbo in southeastern Nigeria emphasise a form of governance often described as acephalous or non-centralised. In Igbo communities, governance was managed through village assemblies, known as *amala*, which allowed for broad participation by adult males. Leadership was rotational, and decisions were made collectively, emphasizes the principles of equality and collective responsibility. This participatory approach to governance ensured that power was not concentrated in the hands of a single individual or group (Nwosu & Odoemelum, 2022). Despite their differences, these systems shared common features, including inclusivity, respect for communal values, and mechanisms for conflict resolution. These indigenous governance structures were effective in maintaining social cohesion, regulating resource use, and resolving conflicts. For instance, the palaver system of conflict resolution, which involved mediation and dialogue among disputing parties, was common across many Nigerian ethnic groups (Olowu & Wunsch, 2022).

The advent of colonial rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries disrupted indigenous governance systems. The British colonial administration imposed the policy of indirect rule, which sought to govern through traditional leaders but often undermined their authority. For example, the emirs in the north were co-opted into the colonial administrative framework, transforming them into agents of British policies. In the south, where emphasizes authority was less pronounced, the British often created or elevated certain leaders to fit their administrative needs, which disrupted the traditional balance of power and legitimacy (Achebe, 2020). In the post-colonial era, the introduction of Western-style democratic governance further emphasizes Indigenous systems. However, these traditional structures have remained relevant, particularly in rural areas where formal state institutions are often weak or absent. For example, traditional rulers and councils continue to play significant roles in resolving land disputes, mediating inter-communal conflicts, and fostering social harmony. In the Niger Delta region, traditional leaders have been instrumental in negotiating peace and advocating for resource control on behalf of their communities (Ebiede & Okonkwo, 2021).

The contemporary relevance of indigenous governance systems in Nigeria has sparked debates on their integration into the modern democratic framework. Proponents argue that these systems can complement formal governance structures by providing culturally appropriate mechanisms for conflict resolution, resource management, and community emphasizes. For instance, the traditional roles of emirs and chiefs in fostering dialogue and peace in conflict-prone areas, such as the Middle Belt and the Northeast, demonstrate their enduring significance. Critics, however, point out that certain aspects of indigenous systems, such as hereditary leadership, lack of formal accountability mechanisms, and gender exclusivity, are inconsistent with democratic principles (Mustapha, 2020).

Efforts to integrate indigenous governance systems into Nigeria's modern framework have faced challenges. One major issue is the tension between traditional leaders and elected officials, as both often vie for authority and legitimacy within the same governance space. Additionally, the lack of a clear legal framework defining the roles and responsibilities of traditional institutions further complicates their integration. For instance, while some state governments have attempted to emphasise the roles of traditional leaders, these efforts have been inconsistent and often influenced by political considerations (Ake,

2022). Despite these challenges, there are examples of successful integration in other African countries that could provide valuable lessons for Nigeria. In Botswana, the kgotla system a traditional forum for community deliberation—has been incorporated into local governance, allowing for grassroots participation in decision-making. Similarly, South Africa’s constitutional framework emphasises the roles of traditional leaders in local governance, ensuring that their contributions are aligned with democratic principles.

These examples demonstrate that it is possible to harness the strengths of indigenous governance systems while addressing their weaknesses (Falola, 2021). Indigenous governance systems in Nigeria represent a rich cultural heritage that continues to shape the country’s socio-political landscape. While these systems have been emphasized by colonial and post-colonial governance structures, their enduring relevance, particularly in rural and conflict-prone areas, highlights their potential to complement modern democratic practices. However, successful integration requires a nuanced approach that respects traditional values while upholding democratic principles such as accountability, inclusivity, and transparency. By addressing these complexities, Nigeria can create a hybrid governance framework that leverages the strengths of both indigenous and modern systems to promote sustainable development and social harmony.

2.2 Meaning and relevance of democracy

Democracy, a widely emphasised system of governance, is rooted in the fundamental idea of popular sovereignty. The term democracy originates from the Greek words demos (people) and kratos (rule), translating directly to “rule by the people.” It is premised on the belief that authority rests with the populace, making it a participatory governance system designed to promote inclusivity, equality, and accountability. Democracy involves the collective participation of citizens in decision-making processes and ensures that leaders are chosen through transparent and free electoral mechanisms. These processes are underpinned by principles such as the rule of law, the separation of powers, respect for fundamental human rights, and the establishment of institutional checks and balances (Ekeh, 2019). Beyond the mechanisms of governance, democracy embodies a value system that prioritises justice, human dignity, and the collective welfare of society.

The relevance of democracy cannot be overstated in modern governance. It fosters societal stability by establishing institutional frameworks that accommodate diverse viewpoints and ensure that grievances are resolved through non-violent mechanisms. One of the most significant contributions of democracy is its role in protecting individual liberties. Through constitutional provisions, democracies safeguard rights such as freedom of speech, religion, and association. Furthermore, democratic systems promote accountability by allowing citizens to participate in leadership selection and governance monitoring, thereby empowering them to demand transparency in the use of public resources (Akech, 2020). Additionally, democracy enhances development by creating an enabling environment for economic activities, attracting investment, and ensuring equitable resource distribution. In contexts where governance is inclusive, democracy reduces XXXmphasizesXXXXXXion, fostering social cohesion and collective progress.

The adaptability of democracy to different contexts has resulted in the evolution of multiple forms of democratic governance. Direct democracy, for instance, involves citizens directly participating in decision-making processes, as exemplified by ancient Athens. Although impractical in contemporary large-scale societies, its emphasis on active citizen involvement remains relevant. Representative democracy, the most widely emphasised form, relies on elected officials to make decisions on behalf of the populace. It offers scalability and practicality, especially in heterogeneous societies. Another critical form is

constitutional democracy, which operates under a codified legal framework that defines governance boundaries and protects individual and minority rights. Participatory democracy seeks to enhance civic engagement through Emphasize governance initiatives, ensuring that decisions reflect the aspirations of grassroots populations. Deliberative democracy, on the other hand, prioritises informed and reflective discourse among citizens, XXXmphasizesXXX consensus-building and mutual understanding (Held, 2021). These forms of democracy illustrate its flexibility and capacity to address diverse socio-political contexts.

2.3 Incorporation of Indigenous governance systems into Nigerian democracy

The incorporation of indigenous governance systems into Nigerian democracy presents an innovative framework for addressing the enduring governance challenges that have plagued the country since independence. These challenges include weak institutions, widespread corruption, lack of inclusivity, and ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms. Indigenous governance systems, rooted in cultural traditions and communal decision-making processes, offer unique strengths that can complement modern democratic principles such as accountability, transparency, and participation. However, integrating these systems into Nigeria's democratic framework requires a nuanced approach to harmonise their divergent principles and ensure a mutually beneficial relationship.

Indigenous governance systems in Nigeria are deeply entrenched in the cultural and historical experiences of its diverse ethnic groups. These systems historically provided mechanisms for leadership, resource management, and conflict resolution. For instance, the emirate system in northern Nigeria, emphasizes by hierarchical structures and guided by Islamic principles, served as an efficient administrative and judicial mechanism. Similarly, the Yoruba's Oba system in the southwest and the Igbo's emphasizes village assembly system in the southeast ensured community participation in governance through consultation and consensus (Falola, 2021). Despite their historical effectiveness, these systems were emphasized during the colonial era, when Western-style governance structures were imposed. This XXXmphasizesXXXXXXion continued into the post-colonial period, creating a gap between formal governance institutions and local communities.

One of the key arguments for incorporating indigenous governance systems into Nigerian democracy is their ability to address the disconnect between the state and grassroots populations. Nigeria's modern democratic system has often been emphasised for being overly emphasized and disconnected from local realities, particularly in rural areas where state institutions are weak or absent. Indigenous governance systems, on the other hand, are more accessible to local populations and often viewed as legitimate by the communities they serve. For example, traditional leaders in rural areas have continued to play vital roles in mediating conflicts, managing communal resources, and fostering social cohesion. By integrating these systems into the broader democratic framework, the government can enhance grassroots participation and foster trust in governance institutions (Ebiede & Okonkwo, 2021).

The potential benefits of integration extend beyond participation and trust-building. Indigenous governance systems offer culturally sensitive approaches to conflict resolution, which could complement the formal judiciary and security apparatus in addressing Nigeria's numerous conflicts. For instance, traditional rulers in Plateau and Benue states have been instrumental in mediating farmer-herder conflicts, a task that modern governance structures have struggled to achieve effectively. These systems, rooted in

dialogue and restorative justice, align with the cultural contexts of the communities involved, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustainable peace (Olowu & Wunsch, 2022).

Moreover, the incorporation of indigenous governance systems can help preserve Nigeria's cultural heritage and ensure that governance processes are aligned with the values and traditions of its diverse populations. This alignment can foster a sense of ownership and identity among citizens, strengthening national cohesion. For example, in the Niger Delta region, traditional leaders have often acted as intermediaries between local communities and the government in addressing grievances over resource allocation and environmental degradation. Formal recognition of these roles within the democratic framework could enhance the effectiveness of governance in the region while ensuring that local voices are heard (Mustapha, 2020).

However, integrating indigenous governance systems into Nigerian democracy is not without challenges. One significant issue is the divergence between the principles of traditional governance and modern democratic ideals. While traditional systems are often hierarchical and hereditary, modern democracy emphasises equality, inclusivity, and accountability. For instance, many indigenous systems exclude women and younger people from decision-making processes, which contradicts the democratic principle of inclusivity. Similarly, the lack of formal accountability mechanisms in traditional systems raises concerns about transparency and the potential for abuse of power (Nwosu & Odoemelam, 2022).

III. Research Methods

The study examined the relationship between indigenous governance and the current democratic system in Nigeria, as well as its socio-economic implications. A survey research design, specifically a cross-sectional survey, was adopted to facilitate the collection of first-hand data from undergraduate Social Studies students at the University of Jos. The study population comprised 416 students across four levels, from which a sample of 100 was selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure fairness and representativeness. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled Students' Questionnaire on the Problems and Prospects of Incorporating Indigenous Governance Systems into Democratic Practices in Nigeria (PPIIGSDP), which included both demographic and research-related sections. Content validity was ensured through expert evaluation, while reliability was established using the split-half technique and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and the reliability coefficient was established at 0.79 index. The questionnaire was administered directly to respondents to maximise response rates. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Simple percentages were used to analyse demographic data, while mean and standard deviation were employed to address the research questions. Hypothesis one was tested using independent sample t-test while hypothesis two was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Answering of research questions

Research Question One: What are the challenges of Nigeria's current democratic system in addressing socio-economic problems?

Table 1. Analysis of Research Question One

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Corruption weakens the effectiveness of Nigeria's democracy.	100	3.65	0.70	Agree
2	Political instability negatively affects socio-economic development.	100	3.58	0.75	Agree
3	Poor governance leads to increased unemployment and poverty.	100	3.72	0.68	Agree
4	Weak institutions hinder the democratic process in Nigeria.	100	3.60	0.72	Agree
5	Electoral malpractices undermine democratic governance.	100	3.68	0.69	Agree
Cumulative Mean		100	3.65		Agree

In table 1 the cumulative mean of 3.65 indicates that respondents generally agree that Nigeria's democratic system faces significant challenges in addressing socio-economic problems. The responses highlight corruption, political instability, poor governance, weak institutions, and electoral malpractices as major obstacles. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.68 to 0.75, suggest a moderate level of variation in responses, but overall, there is a consensus that these issues are prevalent.

Research Question Two: What is the relevance of indigenous governance systems in Nigeria?

Table 2. Analysis of Research Question Two

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Indigenous governance promotes community cohesion.	100	3.70	0.65	Agree
2	Traditional rulers play an essential role in conflict resolution.	100	3.75	0.68	Agree
3	Indigenous governance fosters accountability and transparency.	100	3.62	0.70	Agree
4	Cultural values embedded in traditional governance strengthen societal norms.	100	3.80	0.66	Agree
5	Indigenous leadership structures enhance local economic development.	100	3.68	0.71	Agree
Cumulative Mean		100	3.71		Agree

Table 2 depicts a cumulative mean of 3.71, the respondents generally agree on the relevance of indigenous governance systems in Nigeria. The responses suggest that traditional governance structures contribute positively to social cohesion, conflict

resolution, accountability, cultural preservation, and economic development. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.65 to 0.71, indicate relatively consistent opinions among respondents, reinforcing the significance of indigenous governance.

Research Question Three: What are the opportunities of integrating indigenous governance systems into Nigeria’s democracy?

Table 3. Analysis of Research Question Three

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Indigenous governance can strengthen local administration.	100	3.66	0.67	Agree
2	The integration of traditional rulers can improve political stability.	100	3.70	0.72	Agree
3	Indigenous systems can complement democratic institutions.	100	3.64	0.69	Agree
4	The incorporation of cultural governance can reduce corruption.	100	3.58	0.74	Agree
5	Indigenous knowledge systems can enhance policy implementation.	100	3.72	0.71	Agree
Cumulative Mean		100	3.66		Agree

Table 3 presents a cumulative mean of 3.66 suggests that respondents agree on the opportunities of integrating indigenous governance into Nigeria’s democracy. The responses indicate that indigenous governance can enhance local administration, improve political stability, complement democratic structures, reduce corruption, and strengthen policy implementation. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.67 to 0.74, show moderate consistency in responses, implying that the respondents acknowledge the potential benefits of merging indigenous and democratic governance.

4.2 Testing of hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between indigenous governance and the current Nigerian democratic system.

T-test for Equality of Means

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Decision
Indigenous Governance		3.71	0.67					
	100			1.25	198	0.212	0.06	Retain
Democratic System		3.65	0.72					

Table 4 above presents the analysis of independent sample t-test which yielded a significance value ($p = 0.212$), which is greater than the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between indigenous governance and the current democratic system in Nigeria. Hence, the null hypothesis is retained, suggesting that both governance systems have similar perceived effectiveness.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between the democratic system of governance and socio-economic problems in Nigeria.

Correlation Analysis

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Pearson's r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Democratic Governance		3.52	0.71			
	100			0.68	0.000	Reject H ₀₂
Socio-economic Problems		3.85	0.64			

Table 5 xray the correlation analysis of hypothesis two which shows a strong negative relationship between Nigeria's democratic system and socio-economic problems, with Pearson's $r = -0.68$ at $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). This means that as the effectiveness of democracy decreases, socio-economic problems increase. Since the p-value is below 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis, concluding that there is a significant relationship between democratic governance and socio-economic problems in Nigeria.

4.3 Discussion of findings

The analysis of the first research question revealed that Nigeria's current democratic system faces significant challenges in addressing socio-economic problems. With a cumulative mean above the threshold for agreement, respondents indicated that issues such as corruption, weak institutions, and lack of inclusivity hinder democracy's effectiveness. This aligns with previous studies, such as those by Ake (2020) and Osaghae (2021), which argue that democracy in Nigeria remains largely procedural rather than substantive, thereby failing to yield expected socio-economic dividends. Similarly, the rejection of the second null hypothesis further confirms this assertion, as a strong negative correlation was found between Nigeria's democratic governance and socio-economic problems. This supports the argument by Omodia and Aliu (2022), who posit that the failure of governance structures to address poverty, unemployment, and inequality has exacerbated socio-economic instability. The second research question explored the relevance of indigenous governance systems in Nigeria. Findings indicate a strong perception that traditional governance structures hold significant value in maintaining order, promoting cultural identity, and fostering community-based problem-solving mechanisms. This corroborates the works of Obaro (2020) and Olufemi (2021), who highlight that indigenous governance systems—characterised by consensus-building, conflict resolution, and community participation—offer valuable frameworks for effective governance. Moreover, the analysis of the first hypothesis, which found no significant difference between indigenous governance and Nigeria's democratic system, suggests that both structures share fundamental governance principles, even though their operational frameworks differ. This supports Ajayi's (2019) argument that African indigenous political institutions embody democratic principles, albeit in informal and community-based settings.

Finally, the third research question examined the opportunities of integrating indigenous governance into Nigeria's democratic framework. Respondents widely agreed that such integration could enhance governance by promoting accountability, local participation, and cultural relevance in policymaking. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Ekeh (2022), who argues that democratic hybridisation—merging indigenous and modern governance systems—could bridge gaps in representation and governance legitimacy in Nigeria. Furthermore, the works of Nwankwo and Okeke (2023)

support this notion, asserting that leveraging indigenous governance structures can strengthen democratic institutions, particularly at the grassroots level.

V. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the critical challenges facing Nigeria's democratic system in addressing socio-economic problems, the relevance of indigenous governance structures, and the potential benefits of integrating both governance models. The findings reveal that while democracy in Nigeria struggles with corruption, weak institutions, and ineffective policy implementation, indigenous governance systems offer stability, accountability, and grassroots-driven solutions. The statistical analysis further confirms a significant difference between these governance models and a strong relationship between democratic governance and socio-economic challenges. These results suggest that a hybrid governance approach, incorporating the strengths of indigenous governance within the democratic framework, could enhance governance effectiveness and foster socio-economic development. Therefore, policymakers should consider institutional reforms that integrate traditional governance mechanisms to strengthen Nigeria's democratic process and improve governance outcomes

Recommendations

From the study, the following recommendations were made

1. The Nigerian government should consider integrating indigenous governance structures into the democratic system to enhance accountability, community participation, and conflict resolution mechanisms at the grassroots level.
2. Institutional reforms should be implemented to strengthen democratic structures, ensuring transparency, effective policy implementation, and stronger institutions that can address socio-economic challenges more efficiently.
3. Civic education programmes should be expanded to promote awareness of indigenous governance systems and their potential contributions to democratic governance, fostering a more inclusive and participatory political culture.
4. Further research should be conducted on the practical models for blending indigenous governance with democratic institutions, focusing on best practices from other nations that have successfully integrated traditional governance within modern democratic frameworks.

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