



East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies

eajis.eanso.org

Volume 6, Issue 1, 2023

Print ISSN: 2707-529X | Online ISSN: 2707-5303

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-5303>

EANSO

EAST AFRICAN

NATURE &

SCIENCE

ORGANIZATION

Original Article

Role of Voter Education and Performance of Electoral Management Body: A Case of Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission Kenya

Sellah Malamba^{1*}, Dr. Benjamin Tarus, PhD¹ & Sr. Dr. Lucy Wanza, PhD¹

¹ Catholic University of Eastern Africa – GABA Campus, P. O. Box 908 – 30100 Eldoret, Kenya.

* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0434-9540>; Email: mcsellah@gmail.com

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajis.6.1.1429>

Date Published: ABSTRACT

14 September 2023

Keywords:

Voter,
Education,
Strategy,
Performance,
Management,
Body.

This paper focuses on the role of voter education on performance of electoral management body. The study is undertaken at Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission (IEBC) Kenya. The study was grounded on civic engagement theory. The study was a descriptive research design investigation. The target population involved 772 commission officers with a sample size of 264 based on the Cochran formula. The IEBC officers were selected through use of stratified random sampling technique. The data collection tools were the questionnaire and interview schedule. Data collected from the field was analysed using qualitative and inferential statistics. Qualitative data analysis involved categorising responses from interviews and open-ended questions into themes and sub themes while inferential statistics was analysed using the Regression Model to test the hypothesis. The study found out that one of the pre-electoral strategies that IEBC focused on was voter education to the members of the public on regular occasion. The respondents indicated that the EMB conducted regular mobilisation campaigns jointly with other stakeholders to inform members of the public on matters relating to commission mandate in elections and boundary delimitations. Correlation statistics revealed existence of significant positive effect of pre-electoral voter education strategy and IEBC Kenya performance. It was concluded that voter education strategy played a significant role in predicting IEBC performance in Kenya. The study recommends that voter education needs to be done on continuous basis rather than waiting one year to the general election by regularly seeking funds support from government and non-government sources to support voter education.

APA CITATION

Malamba, S., Tarus, B. & Wanza, L. (2023). Role of Voter Education and Performance of Electoral Management Body: A Case of Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission Kenya *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 6(1), 220-229. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajis.6.1.1429>.

CHICAGO CITATION

Malamba, Sellah, Benjamin Tarus and Lucy Wanza. 2023. "Role of Voter Education and Performance of Electoral Management Body: A Case of Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission Kenya". *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 6 (1), 220-229. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajis.6.1.1429>.

HARVARD CITATION

Malamba, S., Tarus, B. & Wanza, L. (2023) "Role of Voter Education and Performance of Electoral Management Body: A Case of Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission Kenya", *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 6(1), pp. 220-229. doi: 10.37284/eajis.6.1.1429.

IEEE CITATION

S., Malamba, B., Tarus & L., Wanza "Role of Voter Education and Performance of Electoral Management Body: A Case of Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission Kenya", *EAJIS*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 220-229, Sep. 2023.

MLA CITATION

Malamba, Sellah, Benjamin Tarus & Lucy Wanza. "Role of Voter Education and Performance of Electoral Management Body: A Case of Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission Kenya". *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 6, no. 1, Sep. 2023, pp. 220-229, doi:10.37284/eajis.6.1.1429.

INTRODUCTION

A transparent, robust, and effective Election Management Body (EMB) in addition to honest election officers are the prerequisites for credible election which can improve public support and trust in the election process (UNDP, 2017). This is because a well-functioning EMB permits the citizens to select their representatives and communicate their favourites for how they would be governed (Katja, 2020). The veracity of the pre-electoral process is important to the integrity of democratic system by itself. This makes the EMB to develop pre-electoral strategies aimed at addressing issues that arise before, during, and after elections. One of the strategic determinants that could influence EMB performance is civic education which is made through voter education awareness activities. Voter education is learning that is provided to stakeholders to ensure all voters are prepared and have the ability to be involved in the electoral process (Tsie, 2015). Programmes on voter education are normally prepared, designed and executed by EMBs in partnership with civil society organisations and political parties (Senteuh, 2015). Mass media and private sector could be hired out to publish or produce voter education resources and may willingly take part in the voter education tasks at their own volition (Gelb & Diofasi, 2016). Ayo and Mbarika (2017) established a positive relationship between civic and voter education provision and turnout of voters during elections. In West Bengal Indian State, Bardhan, Mitra, Mookherjee and Nath (2014) found out that voter awareness influenced turnout during elections.

Stephen (2012) alludes that education is seen as the significant predictor of people involvement in political activities. This research investigated how voter education and awareness was conducted and its influence on EMB performance.

Statement of the Problem

It is every citizen's right in the country to participate in choosing the leaders to lead through a democratic process of voting. Pre-electoral management processes of voter education are an important practice that precede voting. However, research studies in many locations of developing countries show poor EMB performances (Breckenridge & Szreter 2012; Piccolino, 2016; Effah & Debrah, 2018; Haque & Carroll, 2020) and these EMBs are compounded with several challenges. In Kenya, analysis of 2017 Post-Election Report showed that there were increased incidents of number of rejected and invalid votes through post-election survey report. It was therefore important for the researcher to determine the role of voter education strategy on performance of IEBC, Kenya.

Research Questions

The research questions were:

- What is the role of voter education on performance of electoral management body?
- What needs to be done to improve on voter education towards enhancing performance of electoral management body?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research was guided by Civic Engagement Theory as its theoretical framework developed by Berinsky (2005). Berinsky (2005) defined this theory as a political engagement in which the capacity to develop workable relationships between individual values and interests are on one hand and debates in the political area on the other hand. This theory alludes that individuals who are involved in political processes are basically different from individuals who does not vote during elections and lessening the resource obstacles to voting would hence not improve people registration rate above what has already been attained.

The theorist also argues that decreasing the obstacles to vote essentially makes it simple for regular voters to cast their votes in non-conducive situations therefore affecting voters' ability to select their leaders (Berinsky, 2005). It has been argued that reduced registration level of new voters among poor people is because of inadequate civic engagement with electoral management body (for instance, IEBC in Kenya). Highton (2004) arrived at the same deduction when analysing past studies of reforms in voter registration. Depending on Knack's research on consequences of same day registration and late registration deadlines on number of citizens registering as voters, Highton deduced that pre-electoral transformations had no impact on people who were not already engaged politically. This suggests that citizens must be engaged in advance to ensure that they turn out to register and to vote during elections.

Civic engagement promotes political participation when requisite strategies have been factored. This is because people will be informed on why they are needed to enlist as voters. As more individuals have knowledge, the more possibly they are to take part in political and civic duties. The lack of civic engagement during voter registration is also perceived to result to more inadequate civic participation in important aspects of volunteering and voting. This study therefore finds it useful to

utilise this theory to examine the pre-electoral cycle strategy of voter education and performance of electoral management bodies with specific reference to IEBC, Kenya.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW OF STUDIES

Voter education is usually done through the mass media. Mass media role is critical and important in the society as it is also seen to be the voice in democratic countries. Media plays a crucial task in developing the community (Ayo & Mbarika, 2017). Journalism and media perform a crucial role in building citizens' views, highlighting civic concerns and creating understanding to people about government programmes. Media is remodelling the communities by disseminating information. Mass media raises awareness to the citizens by giving information on their roles and responsibilities in a democratic society. Media facilitates the citizens by enlightening them concerning the political system of their country (Folarin, 2005). In brief, effective performance of EMB is pegged on the information and education that is promoted through the mass media (Safdar et al., 2015).

Mobilisation of qualified voters by politicians and parties to take part in voting or become politically aware of matters in their countries is supposedly expected to improve turnout of potential voters during registration. Members of the public can simply be mobilised and persuaded to vote. Mobilisation by politicians or parties keeps qualified voters conscious of their public tasks. Mobilisation raises up their desires on governance matters and involvement in governance issues related to progress and development of their country. The belief normally goes that voting seems to be low advantageous tasks and that the good approach to improve turnout is through lessening transportation costs (Stephen, 2012).

In Canada, Elections Canada updates their citizens of their constitutional rights to vote in an election, how to be registered as voters, where they will vote

and how they will vote. The EMB also organises forums with communities and ethno-cultural groups, keeps website opened, provides toll-free telephone enquiries offices, and provides news releases. Where feasible, polling stations election officials communicate in French and English. Further, a deputy returning official can swear and appoint an interpreter for the activity. The unusual electoral systems nature can present a challenge for voters and could block many from undertaking registration as voters (Stephens, 2012).

In Pakistan, Safdar et al, (2015) explored the media role in improving 2013 general elections turnout. The research was conducted in Multan City involving 200 respondents who were selected using convenience sampling. It was deduced that media perform a critical function in intensifying 2013 general elections turnout. Media makes people aware of their right to register as voters in Pakistan and thus promotion of democracy. The research failed to show how mass media was used to educate voters on matters election; not only registration but actual voting as well, an issue that this study investigated.

In Ghana, Stephen (2012) examined factors that explained small turnout of voters, measures that have been approved to improve turnout of potential voters during registration and the voter turnout trend in Ashaiman district level elections. A total of 370 eligible voters were selected using cluster sampling approach from six communities. It was established that the factors that contributed to lower voter turnout during elections include inadequate voter education, fear of intimidation, voter fatigue, and dissatisfaction of voters. Further, it was discovered that voters belief that their preferred candidate will not easily win elections, long queues at polling stations, complacency, and religious factors accounted for the poor voter turnout in elections. The research focused on finding out factors influencing turnout while this present study examined how voter education, one of the

independent variables of the study, influences voter turnout during elections.

In Mityana District Uganda, Banura (2019) examined the voter education turnout. The independent variable was voter education through voter outreaches, voter awareness campaigns and voter training. The dependent variable was turnout during elections which was measured through: total number of voters participating in an electoral process, representativeness of voters, demographic characteristic of voters, and timeliness to vote. The study established a strong positive linkage between voter training and turnout in elections. It was presumed that there was a positive connection between voter training, voter awareness drives, voter outreaches and turnout in elections. The study sample was not clear, and the instruments used were not properly validated as they captured information relating to training of election officers instead of voter education and awareness, an issue that this study investigated.

In the Republic of Sudan, Odek (2016) assessed electoral procedures' influence on democratic elections. A total of 211 respondents were sampled using purposive and simple random sampling methods. Questionnaire and interview guides were used for data collection. Results showed that there existed positive relationship between electoral supervision, electoral legal framework and electoral mass sensitisation and conduct of democratic elections. The study by Odek was conducted in Sudan which in recent years (2019) experienced coup de tat resulting to overthrow of the long-term leader Omar El Bashir and one of the reasons was associated with electoral malpractices. This study examined how provision of electoral knowledge influences voters' participation in elections in a democratic country like Kenya.

Waithira (2016) investigated the relationship between level of education and voting. The researcher tested if level of education (formal) had a relationship with voting. Data was analysed from rounds 2 to 5 of the Afro barometer. The study

found out that acquisition of formal education and spending additional years in school did not increase the probability of voters turning out to vote. Unexpectedly, citizens who had no formal education came out to vote more than those with formal education implying that education level did not influence voting in Kenya. This study departs from Waithira (2016) who examined the education qualifications of voters while the present study examined how voter education is provided to all voters (irrespective of their education level) in order to ensure that they register and turn out during voting times.

Another study by Mwontune (2017) in Tigania East Constituency investigated factors that influence levels of voter registration. A descriptive survey design was used to study a population of 24,225 persons eligible to register as voters in the constituency. It was noted that voter sensitisation had a strong positive impact on levels of voter registration; eligible voters' attitudes had a strong positive contribution on levels of voter registration; accessibility of registration centres had a moderate positive contribution on levels of voter registration and availability of a voter's legal documents had a moderate positive influence on levels of voter registration. The present study goes further to establish how other indicators of EMB performance (apart from registration of new voters) are influenced by the voter education and sensitisation strategies undertaken by IEBC.

Lastly, Mutanu (2019) investigated how voter education role influenced Nairobi County governance efficacy. A descriptive survey design was used to select 331 respondents from a target of 1228 using stratified random sampling method from Westlands, Starehe, Mathare, and Embakasi South. Result showed that approaches utilised during voter education activity predict voters' behaviour during election. It was also observed that information access was essential in assisting voter educators to make decisions which efficiently directed voters to make well-reasoned decisions on how and who to

vote for. Additionally, voter education initiatives developed by EMB influenced governance efficiency. Respondents were aware of the significance of voter training in informing voters on actions to take when choosing leaders which would affect efficacy of governance. The dependent variable for the Mutanu research was on governance efficacy while the present study is on EMB performance. The review of empirical studies on voter education and EMB performance show that the success of EMB is dependent on how voter education is planned and conducted. The studies agree that it is the responsibility of the EMB to utilize the best approaches to conduct voter education and not only to rely on one approach. Studies failed to show how mass media was applied to educate and inform voters on matters election. Further, the studies have failed to explicitly state how voter education is conducted and its influence on EMB performances as many have focused only on voter turnout during Election Day.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive research design was chosen since it assisted to have plain representation of the concept from which data was collected. Using descriptive research design, the investigator collected facts concerning the events by use of interviews and surveys. The study target population involved IEBC directors and secretariat at the headquarters in Nairobi, county election managers and secretariat at the county offices, senior election officers and assistant election officers. Therefore, *Table 1* demonstrates the target population for the investigation.

The final sample size for this study consisted of 264 IEBC staff which was determined through Cochran formula on sample size selection. Based on the research question, the research utilised questionnaire (employees) and interview schedule (directors) as data collection instruments. The questionnaire and interview schedule were constructed based on research questions. The questionnaire was designed and validated before

being taken to the field. This was undertaken as a measure of enhancing accuracy and soundness of data collected for the research. The study examined reliability using test – retest approach which is a method that gives an exclusive approximation of reliability for the provided test after numerous trials. The obtained reliability values for the questionnaire were 0.7631 which, based on Bryman (2016) advice, was judged to be reliable.

Data analysis involves the process of scrutinising data collected and making inferences and

deductions about them (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Analysis of data was performed through qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative method was done using content analysis by organisation of the responses into themes and sub-themes from data to be collected from interviews. Quantitative data collected from the study was analysed through running descriptive statistics; means, standard deviation, percentages, and frequencies. Inferential statistics: correlations were also done to test association between the independent variable and dependent variable at 95.0% confidence level.

Table 1: Target population

Respondents	Target	Computation from Cochran formular	Sample
IEBC directors	9	$9/772*264$	3
IEBC secretariat staff	89	$89/772*264$	30
County officers	94	$94/772*264$	32
Constituency officers	580	$580/772*264$	199
Total population	772		264

Source: IEBC Human Resource Department (2022)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research question sought to know how voter education strategy was being executed by IEBC and its effect on performance. Therefore, questions were asked through interviews and questionnaires in

relation to voter education. Firstly, the IEBC officials who were the respondents for this study were requested to rate their level of agreement or disagreement on statements measuring voter education and performance of their institutions. The descriptive outcomes are provided in *Table 2*.

Table 2: Voter Education and Performance of Electoral Management Body

Performance area	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	StD
Voter education programmes by IEBC have increased registration of voters in the area that I operate	4 (1.8)	14 (6.4)	11 (5.0)	135 (61.6)	55 (25.1)	4.018	.8511
Use of media (radio) has increased voter awareness on matters elections	4 (1.8)	3 (1.4)	29 (13.2)	109 (49.8)	74 (33.8)	4.123	.8230
Regular mobilisation campaigns by IEBC and other stakeholders increases support of IEBC on voter education	3 (1.4)	4 (1.8)	19 (8.7)	108 (49.3)	85 (38.8)	4.223	.7900
Involvement of faith-based organisation helps IEBC to achieve its electoral activity objective of voter education	2 (0.9)	2 (0.9)	29 (13.2)	129 (58.9)	57 (26.0)	4.082	.7120
IEBC partners with other government and non-government organisations in enhancing voter education and turnout during registration and voting	4 (1.8)	4 (1.8)	21 (9.6)	110 (50.2)	80 (36.5)	4.178	.8185
Composite scores						4.125	0.7989

Key: SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, U-Undecided, A-Agree and SA-Strongly Agree.

Results show that majority 135 (61.6%) of respondents agreed and 55 (25.1%) strongly agreed that IEBC voter education programmes increased voters' registration in the areas they operated. In operationalising this strategy, IEBC in 2022 elections recruited county voter educators, constituency voter educators and two ward based educators. These voter educators were employed to do voter education at grassroots. This is because if voters are not educated on the purpose of them registering to vote, their ability to choose their leaders in future elections is compromised. This means that voter education programme is a highly valued strategic operation that IEBC undertakes in fulfilling of its mandate.

Secondly, 109 (49.8%) agreed and 74 (33.8%) strongly agreed that use of mass media has increased voter awareness on matters elections while 29 (13.2%) were undecided. The result shows that IEBC has taken advantage of the influence that mass media has towards ensuring that voters are educated on issues surrounding elections. Aside from radio, the commission also uses voter education materials like, flyers, brochures, and posters to reach out to Kenyans. For the current generation, the social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) were also utilised to conduct voter education activities.

Thirdly, results show that 108 (49.3%) of respondents agreed and 85 (38.8%) strongly agreed that regular mobilisation campaigns that IEBC engage in with other stakeholders like politicians helps reach wide mass of people with voter education programmes. The practise of incorporating other elections stakeholders like politicians helps to build trust between the EMB and the voters. Whereas IEBC undertakes the regular mobilisation campaigns independently, it may lose support and credibility from the electorates as politicians are key influencers of their people.

Fourthly, 129 (58.9%) of respondents agreed and 57 (26.0%) strongly agreed that the decision by IEBC to involve faith-based organisations helps the

institution achieve its electoral objective on education of voters. This implies that IEBC has tapped on the influential role faith-based organisations (religious organisation) have on the followers and utilise the platforms to conduct voter education activities.

Lastly, study results indicate that 110 (50.2%) of respondents agreed and 80 (36.5%) strongly agreed that IEBC collaborates with other government and non-government institutions when undertaking voter education exercises. This means that other government agencies (provincial administration) and non-governmental institutions (NGOs, CBOs, donors, private companies, and global organisations) have been greatly incorporated in IEBC voter education programmes to ensure there is high turnout during registration and voting period. According to one official, IEBC normally targets administration offices of chiefs, assistant chiefs, village elders and women groups in disseminating voter education information. Composite data illustrate that many respondents ($M=4.125$, $SD=0.79$) agreed that voter education pre-electoral cycle is highly conducted at IEBC by being cascaded from national, county, constituency, and ward level through involvement of multiple stakeholders within the public and private sectors.

Through interview, the directors were asked to indicate how did voter education strategy operationalised at IEBC. All the directors affirmed that IEBC takes keen emphasis on ensuring that voter education programmes are conducted continuously. Director No. 1 said that:

Voter education has helped in expounding to the general public step by step of the electoral activities before and after elections.

Director No. 2 remarked the following with respect to voter education strategy at IEBC:

IEBC voter education is well undertaken to increase awareness of citizen(s) political rights.

It is also undertaken to help voters and citizens to hold their leaders to account.

In addition, Director No. 3 indicated that;

Voter education has demystified elections and addressed misconceptions like elections rigging. This has made members of the public to be satisfied with the processes of the commission.

From the above responses from the directors, it is evident that voter education not only targets voters and other citizens to be active participants in the

electoral process, but it also ends up improving the voters’ perception and image about IEBC. Cascading of voter education programmes to ward level has greatly enhanced knowledge to voters by rejected ballot papers number in the 2022 elections compared to 2017. Through undertaking such undertakings of voter education, the performance of IEBC on matters of sensitisation of voters increased.

A correlation test was computed to check on the relationship between the independent variable on dependent variable as shown in Table 3

Table 3: Correlations

		Voter Education	EMB performance
Voter Education	Pearson Correlation	1	.459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	219	219
EMB performance	Pearson Correlation	.459**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	219	219

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

It is clear that there exists significant positive correlation between the voter education ($r=0.459$, $p=0.001$) and performance of EMB. The result shows that the pre-electoral strategies have a significant ($p<0.05$) positive effect between pre-electoral cycle voter education strategy and IEBC Kenya performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found out that voter education pre-electoral cycle strategy was conducted on regular occasions by IEBC. The respondents indicated that the EMB conducted regular mobilisation campaigns jointly with other stakeholders to inform members of the public on matters relating to commission mandate in elections and boundary delimitations. Considering the commission cannot work alone, the study found out that they partnered with government and non-government agencies to conduct road shows, public discussions and use print and electronic media to disseminate

information regarding their right of every citizen to choose their own leaders and understand the electoral process. This ensured that members of the public were well informed of commission activities and the need to participate in electoral matters. Through these initiatives, the study found out that in areas where voter education was successfully conducted, there was increase in the number of registered voters. Correlation statistics revealed existence of significant positive effect of voter education strategies and IEBC Kenya performance. Hence, voter education pre-electoral strategy played a significant role in influencing IEBC performance. The study recommends that voter education needs to be done on continuous basis rather than waiting one year to the general election by regularly seeking funds and support from government and non-government sources to support voter education. For citizens to be made aware on election matters, simulations and mock elections need to be held in different parts of Kenya once a year. Voter education process also should be accompanied by

reference materials covering various thematic contents related to the agency activities. Public debates and discussion on election and boundary matters also needs to be increased as it would be the source of knowledge for the commission in improving its focus towards its agenda.

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