DIGITAL TOOLS: AN IMPETUS FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG PRE-SERVICE SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study the study investigated students' level of awareness and accessibility to digital tools, the barriers they encounter, and the impact of digital expertise on their civic involvement. It was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. A descriptive research design was adopted, involving a sample of 400 pre-service Social Studies teachers drawn from both public and private institutions. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics. Findings showed that while a majority of students exhibited high awareness and access to digital tools, a significant portion faced barriers such as non-accessibility and poor infrastructure. Importantly, a significant relationship was found between students' knowledge of digital tools and their political participation. Furthermore, the study established a statistically significant difference in political engagement between students with high digital knowledge and those with limited competence. In light

of these findings, the study recommended the integration of digital civic education into the Social Studies curriculum, institutional investment in digital infrastructure, and regular digital literacy workshops tailored to pre-service Social Studies teachers.

Keywords: Digital tools, Political participation, Pre-service teachers, Social Studies

Introduction

The invention of digital technology has changed nearly every facet of modern society, not excluding the ways in which individuals engage with politics. Digital tools such as social media platforms, e-petition websites, all forms of mobile applications, and civic engagement portals have turn into instrumental in moulding political participation, majorly among young people. In democracies across the world, these devices serve as medium for information circulation, political engagement, and grassroots advocacy (Adeyemi & Bello, 2023) In Nigeria, however, the integration of online tools into the political lives of students, particularly those in teacher education programmes like Social Studies, remains uneven and untapped.

Afolabi and Okunade (2022) observed that political involvement among the youth is a critical component of sustainable democracy. Yet Nigerian youths often display low levels of participation in regulated political processes such as voting, attending rallies, or engaging in governance project despite increased access to smartphones, the internet, and online tools. According to Oladeji and Musa, (2021) the value of civic education in enhancing democratic values, there is an observable gap in assessing the digital readiness of pre-service Social Studies teachers who are expected to be both consumers and disseminators of civic knowledge. As future leaders, Social Studies students are expected to promote civic tenets and democratic practices. Their exposure and diligent use of electronic tools are therefore essential not just for their own involvement, but for the political enlightenment of the generations they will eventually teach. However, records and empirical evidence suggests that many of these students lack required knowledge of how digital tools can

promote political involvement (Adeowu, 2025).

With the expanding access of smartphones, internet availability, and technological platforms in Nigeria, the value for civic technology to foster participation is unequal but awareness does not always result to participation. Many students may be digitally literate for social or educational purposes but remain uninformed of the political usefulness of these tools. Without a comprehensible understanding of these changes, efforts to instill a digitally literate, politically active youth population may be jeopadise. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge the gap by determining the level of consciousness and understanding of electronic tools among pre - service Social Studies teachers and how this relates to their actual political engagement in Nigeria's democratic process. Specifically, the study set to:

i. determine the level of perception and familiarity of digital tools relevant to political participation among pre-service Social Studies teachers;

ii. identify problems that hinder pre-service Social Studies teachers' from effectively using digital devices for civic and political participation;

iii. investigate the level to which pre-service Social Studies teachers possess the required knowledge of digital tool for political engagement; and,

iv. examine the difference between pre-service Social Studies teachers' knowledge of online tools and their actual participation in political activities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for the study:

i. What is the level of perception and familiarity of online devices for political participation among pre-service Social Studies teachers?

ii. What are the major challenges confronting pre-service Social Studies teachers from effectively using digital tools for civic and political participation?

Hypotheses
Two hypotheses were tested in the study:

H_o1: There will be no significant relationship between pre-service Social Studies teachers' knowledge of digital apparatus and their level of political engagement.

H_o2: There will be no significant difference in the political involvement of pre-service Social Studies teachers with high knowledge of technological devices and those with low knowledge.

Methods
The study employed the descriptive survey research design. This design allows the researcher to determine the perception, understanding, and use of technological tools and how these impact the political engagement among pre-service Social Studies teachers in Osun State. The population comprised all pre-service Social Studies teachers in the colleges of education (public and private) in Osun State, Nigeria. A total of 400 pre-service Social Studies teachers were selected as the sample for the study. Multi-stage sampling method was employed. First, stratified sampling was used to classify the colleges of education into public and private institutions. After which, simple random sampling was used to select students from each stratum, giving room fair representation based on institutional ownership, geographical spread, and student population size. The major instrument for data collection was a self-designed structured questionnaire titled "Digital Tools and Political Engagement Questionnaire (DTPEQ)". The validity of the instrument was done by experts in the field of Social Studies, and Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument was pilot tested on 30 College of education students outside the study area and 0.76 Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was obtained indicating high internal consistency. Data were collected through direct administration of the questionnaire with the assistance of trained research assistants. Data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation were used to analysed the research questions. Inferential statistics, majorly chi-

square was employed to test the formulated hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results
Research Question 1: What is the level of perception and familiarity of online devices for political participation among Social Studies students?

Table 1: Level of Awareness and Accessibility of Digital Tools for Political Participation

Awareness & Accessibility	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
High Level	260	65%
Low Level	140	35%
Total	400	

From Table 1, it could be inferred that 65% of pre-service Social Studies teachers demonstrated a high-level perception and accessibility to technological tools. However, 35% of the respondents demonstrated a low-level of perception and access.

Research Question 2: What are the major challenges hindering pre-service Social Studies teachers from effective use of digital tools for civic and political participation?

Table 2: Challenges to Effective use of Online Tools for Civic and Political Engagement

Identified Challenges	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Lack of Awareness	72	18%
Non-accessibility of Electronic Tools	40	10%
inadequate of Infrastructure	60	15%
Both non-accessibility & lack of infrastructure	220	55%
No Major Challenges Identified	08	2%
Total	400	100

Table 2 shows that the major problems to effective use of online tools for civic and political engagement were non-accessibility and lack of infrastructure, followed by lack of awareness while few respondents identified no major challenge.

Hypothesis 1: There will be no significant relationship between pre-service Social Studies teacher' knowledge of digital apparatus and their level of political engagement

Table 3: Chi-Square Analysis of pre-Social Studies Teacher' Knowledge of Digital Tools for Political Engagement

Knowledge Level	Observed Frequency (O)	Expected Frequency(E)	(O-E)	$(O – E)^2 / E$
Low Knowledge	224	200	24	2.88
High Knowledge	176	200	-24	2.88
Total	400	400		5.76

Table 3 shows significant relationship between pre-service Social Studies teacher' knowledge of digital apparatus and their level of political engagement since $X^2 = 5.76 > 3.841$.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no significant difference in political involvement between pre-service Social Studies teachers with high knowledge of technological devices and those with low knowledge.

Table 4: Chi-Square Table Showing the Difference in the Level of Political Participation of pre-service Social Studies teachers with Low and High Knowledge of Digital tools

Political Participation	Observed	Exp Freq (E)	$(O – E)^2$
High Knowledge (High Participation)	180	126	23.14
Low Knowledge (High Participation)	100	154	18.93
High Knowledge (Low Participation)	0	54	54.00
Low Knowledge (Low Participation)	120	66	44.18
Total	400	400	140.25

Table 4 shows that there is difference in the level of political participation of pre-service Social Studies teachers with low and high knowledge of digital tools.

Discussions

Findings showed that majority of pre-service Social Studies teachers demonstrated a high level of perception and accessibility to technological tools used for political engagement. This allotment showed that while a majority of students are furnished to leverage digital platforms for political participation, a remarkable percentage still lack adequate exposure or access to these tools. This difference is a clear consideration of the existing "digital divide" in educational institutions, where unequal access to online tools and infrastructure hinder the opportunities for some students to get involve with online resources, including those related to political engagement. The digital divide shows the difference between students who have access to contemporary tools and those who do not, which can have critical consequences for their educational and civic engagement.

The finding is line with the finding of Akinbobola and Ojo (2021) who argued that students who have access may contend with the lack of digital literacy, which disturbs them from fully tapping these tools for political involvement. The finding was further corroborated with previous studies of Warschauer, (2004); Mtebe and Raisamo,(2014); Smith, (2019) who posited that public institutions, in particular, often face constraints in providing the basic infrastructure for students to engage effectively with online devices. The presence of technology alone is not enough; educational institutions must also ensure that students are equipped with the desired skills to handle these tools. This stress the need for holistic digital literacy programmes within Social Studies curricula to ensure greater students' involvement in online political activities. In addition, students' incentive and interest in political participation may further affect their engagement with digital apparatus. Again, this finding aligned with the finding of Ibijola and Okunade, (2023) who posited that students who are inherently connected to get involved in politics are more likely to find out and use digital devices effectively. In the other way round, students who are less encouraged may fail to identify the usefulness of these tools in the political process, leading to lower levels of involvement.

The study further found out that a significant proportion of pre-service Social Studies teachers face multiple challenges in

utilizing digital devices for political engagement. Notably, majority of the respondents identified a combination of non-accessibility and absence of adequate facilities as the major problem. This finding underscores the structural deficiencies in digital readiness within the Nigerian educational context. This finding is in line with Van Dijk (2020) who opined that the integration of online apparatus in civic engagement is greatly influenced by the availability of facilities such as internet connectivity, power supply, and access to devices. In many Nigerian institutions, majorly public colleges of education, these resources remain relatively inadequate or unreliable, thereby limiting students' effective participation in online political spaces. Also, some of the respondents pointed to a lack of perception as a standalone challenge, which aligns with previous research findings that digital literacy is not yet adequately embedded within teacher training curricula in Nigeria (Olaniran and Adebayo, 2022; Okonkwo and Eze, 2023). This lack of awareness hinder students' ability to recognise and utilise tools such as online voting platforms, political forums, or civic apps designed to ensure political engagement. Insignificant number of respondents demonstrated that they faced no major barrier, indicating that barriers in digital civic engagement are widespread. These findings align with global observations, who reported that in third world countries, digital exclusion is often driven by a mix of infrastructural deficiency and inadequate policy implementation (GSMA, 2023).

The finding showed a major relationship between pre-service Social Studies teachers' knowledge of digital tools and their level of political involvement. This finding reinforces the growing body of literature that highlights the transformative role of digital tools in shaping civic and political engagement, particularly among young people. In the context of 21st-century democracy, technological tools such as social media platforms, civic technology applications, e-governance portals, and online campaigns have become central to political discourse and participation. Research by Bosancianu *et al* (2020) had showed that digital tools lower the obstacle to political participation by facilitating access to relevant information, ensuring deliberative interactions, and enabling the mobilization of collective effort. These opportunities are majorly important in developing

countries where traditional forms of political engagement may be hindered by structural or institutional limitations. Adeowu, *et al* (2024) posited that Nigerian youths with higher digital literacy demonstrate higher levels of political awareness and civic engagement. However, this access alone is not enough; students must possess the basic skills and required knowledge to use these tools effectively for political participation. This study confirms that those with such knowledge are more likely to be politically active than those who lack it. Yet, differences in digital access and knowledge are obvious and can reinforce political exclusion. It must be noted that many students in Nigeria's tertiary institutions still face impediments related to technology infrastructure, electricity supply, and internet costs, which hinder their ability to engage politically via digital platforms. These infrastructural deficits, coupled with limited curriculum integration of digital literacy and civic technology, contribute to the low levels of political participation observed among some students.

The result further showed that there is a significant difference in political and civic engagement between pre-service Social Studies teachers with high understanding of online apparatus and those with low knowledge. The results suggest that there is indeed a major linkage between students' knowledge of digital tools and their level of political participation. The findings indicate that minority of respondents who are knowledgeable about digital tools actively participate in political activities. This significant difference supports the argument that digital literacy can enhance political engagement, as individuals who possess a deeper knowledge of digital tools are better empowered to access information, participate in political discourse, and involve in various political activities (Adeowu and Hamzat, 2024). This finding further aligned with the study carried out by Kehinde-Awoyele and Adeowu, (2025) who posited that digital tools, especially in the form of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, play a crucial role in shaping contemporary political engagement, particularly among younger generations. It must be stressed that these avenue ensure opportunities for citizens to share their opinions, mobilize, and advocate for political causes. Again, Olowu & Egbewole (2023) found that the internet and

technological tools reduce barriers to political participation, enabling individual to become more engaged in civic life which further corroborate the finding of this study. Social media has become a critical tool in promoting political engagement by ensuring easy access to information and enhancing communication between political actors and the public. The findings of this study are consistent with the observation of Zainal, (2023) who posited that students who are more familiar with digital tools are more likely to actively engage in political activities. This group of students is more inclined to use the internet for accessing news, discussing political issues, and participating in political campaigns. On the contrary, students with lower knowledge of digital tools are less engaged in political processes due to limited access to information and the inability to involve in online political discussions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that while a significant proportion of pre-service Social Studies teachers in colleges of education demonstrate a relatively high level of perception and accessibility to digital tools for political participation, critical obstacles still hinder optimal engagement. Chief among these are non-accessibility and lack of absence of adequate digital facilities, which remain a major concern. Importantly, the study establishes a critical relationship between students' knowledge of digital tools and their level of political engagement. Again, a significant difference was observed in the political participation of students with high knowledge of digital tools compared to those with limited knowledge. These findings underscore the crucial role of digital competence in shaping students' civic and political engagement and highlight the structural inequalities that must be addressed to ensure inclusive democratic participation in the digital age.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations were made. First, Social Studies curriculum should be revised to include digital civic education, so that students can gain relevant knowledge and skills needed to engage in political participation using digital

tools. Also, institutions must address infrastructure-related barriers by improving access to internet connectivity, digital devices, and stable electricity especially in public colleges where these issues are more pronounced. There is the need for awareness campaigns across colleges of education to improve students' exposure to available digital platforms for civic and political engagement. This will help close the awareness gap highlighted in the study. Lastly, digital literacy training programmes should be introduced and targeted at students with limited knowledge of digital tools with a view to reducing the disparity in political participation between students with high and low digital competence.

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