



INSTITUTIONALIZING LEGISLATIVE EXPERTISE IN NIGERIA: A CASE FOR THE NEED TO ESTABLISH A MANDATORY PRE-SERVICE LEGISLATIVE TRAINING CERTIFICATION PROGRAM FOR INTENDING LEGISLATORS

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ABSTRACT

Parliamentary performance in Nigeria since the Fourth Republic has remained weak even after over 24 years of uninterrupted democracy. This weakness has been largely attributed to high legislative turnover and the perceived absence of a formal mechanism for preparing intending legislators before assumption of office. The central argument of this study therefore is that electoral victory alone does not equip a person to function effectively as a lawmaker. It believed that legislating is a technical work that requires specialized knowledge of constitutional procedure, bill drafting, committee practice, budget oversight and representation. This study however empirically examines the need to institutionalize mandatory pre-election training certification for intending legislators. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from INEC election records 1999–2023, NILDS and PLAC reports and 38 semi-structured interviews with federal and state legislators, legislative staff, and governance experts. Findings reveal that 76% of first-term legislators spent 12–16 months of a 48-month tenure learning basic parliamentary procedures. 83% of respondents linked weak oversight, poor bill quality and executive dominance to lack of pre-entry legislative knowledge. Anchored on Institutional Theory, Human Capital Theory and learning curve Theory, the study concludes that legislative expertise is a technical requirement. The study acknowledges that while NILDS provides post-election induction, respondents noted that this comes rather too late to prevent early inefficiencies. 87.5% of the respondents supported making pre-election training certification a mandatory requirement for INEC nomination. The study concludes that Nigeria's legislature needs prepared representatives not just elected representatives. High turnover makes post-election training insufficient. Drawing on global best practices from the UK, South Africa and Kenya the study recommends a constitutional amendment to Sections 65 and 106 of the CFRN 1999 and an amendment to the Electoral Act 2022 to make the proposed pre-election legislative certification a mandatory requirement qualification for parliamentary office. This will reduce the learning curve, preserve institutional memory, and improve the quality of lawmaking and oversight in Nigeria.

Keywords: legislative capacity, parliamentary performance, legislative turnover, institutional memory, National Legislative Institute, Nigeria, mandatory training.



1.0

INTRODUCTION

The concept of legislative expertise has gained significant recognition as a critical determinant of parliamentary effectiveness and democratic governance in contemporary democracies. Legislative expertise refers to the practical, procedural and technical knowledge required to perform legislative duties effectively, including bill drafting, oversight, and debate (Norton, 2013). In their submission, Fish (2006) and Barkan (2009) posited that parliamentary work requires knowledge of procedure, committee practice, legislative drafting, oversight and representation, making formal preparation before assumption of office a strong case for legislative effectiveness. The proposal is especially relevant in Nigeria because the country's legislature has over the years been plagued with high legislative turnover. Studies on the National Assembly show that legislative turnover after every election cycle has remained persistently high since the beginning of the Fourth Republic till date leading to huge erosion of institutional memory and slowing the maturity of new members over the years (Aiyede, 2017; Ayoade, 2009; Omotola, 2009). In practical terms, this means that every new legislative cycle often begins with many inexperienced members who must first be trained to be acquainted with the rules of parliament before they can contribute fully to the real business of policy formulation and their primary legislative assignment of governance. For example during the 9th National Assembly which was inaugurated in June 2019, about 63% of the elected members of the House of Representatives members were first-timers and over 70% of committee chairmanships were assigned to returning members because of perceived experience gaps between the returning and new members (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre [PLAC], 2019). The duration of the learning curve before the new members were acquainted with the parliamentary rudiments delayed the passage of priority bills in the first legislative year as new members struggled with basic procedures such as moving motions and understanding the budget cycle. Legislatures are not ordinary political gatherings where politicians gather for their town hall meeting; the parliament is rather a technical institution that requires specialized competence. A legislator is expected to debate bills, scrutinize public expenditure, participate in committees, represent constituents, and oversee the executive (Norton, 2013). Nigeria's constitutional qualification rules set the minimum age, citizenship, education, and party sponsorship requirements for election to the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly under Sections 65 and 106 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN, 1999), but does not require any legislative training before assumption of office. This creates a gap between eligibility to contest election into the parliament and intellectual readiness to perform legislative functions. This gap is perceived to have transformed into a more serious governance challenge as Nigeria over the years has maintained a high legislative turnover within the legislative arm of government especially the National Assembly. Research on Nigerian legislative turnover describes it as one of the major challenges to institutionalization because it is believed to be a major curse of weak continuity in performance as it slows membership maturity speed and



reduces legislative competence (Omotola, 2009). For example, data from INEC (2019) shows that only 28% of members of the House of Representatives elected in 2015 returned in 2019. At the state level the turnover problem is even more severe. A study of the Lagos State House of Assembly found that between 2007 and 2019, average retention per Assembly was below 35% which suggest that over 25 of 40 members of the Assembly were new in each cycle (Akinola, 2020). In practical terms this means that committees like Appropriation, Public Accounts and Rules and Business most likely lose experienced committee members thereby forcing a restart of oversight work. Nigeria already has an institutional response to what it believed where the sole challenge legislative turnover creates in the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies [NILDS]. The Institute was established by the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies Act 2011 and later expanded by the 2017 amendment to strengthen its capacity-building and technical support role (National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS, 2017). NILDS describes itself as a capacity-building agency of the National Assembly and notes that it supports legislatures and democratic institutions through training, research & development and professional services (NILDS, 2022). NILDS has since 2011 conducted induction for members of the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th Assemblies. However, the critical limitation is timing and mandate. Because attendance is voluntary and occurs 2–3 months after inauguration, the 2019 induction for 9th Assembly members held in July which was one month after the Assembly was inaugurated. The implication of this timing is the budget had already been laid and key committees constituted. This means the current arrangement while useful remains insufficient if the goal is to ensure that all intending legislators pass through a mandatory preparatory process before entering office which is not what is obtainable with the induction training arrangement that NILDS currently operate. Unlike other regulated professions in Nigeria such as law and medicine the legislative office in Nigeria has no pre-entry competence requirement. Sections 65 and 106 of the 1999 Constitution only stipulate minimum age requirement, education and party sponsorship (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Yet legislators are constitutionally empowered to make laws, appropriate funds and conduct oversight functions etc. which are responsibilities requiring specialized technical knowledge in parliamentary procedure, bill drafting or budget analysis. The National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies [NILDS] provides post-election induction (National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, 2022). However, because this induction training occurs after assumption of office thereby steeping the performance curve of the first year of each term as it is often devoted to orientation rather than substantive legislative work. This study therefore examines the empirical justification for mandatory pre-election training for legislators. The problem this study addresses is the absence of a mandatory standardized legislative training program for intending legislators in Nigeria. Currently, a citizen may satisfy the constitutional requirements for election under Sections 65 and 106 of the CFRN (1999) and still have little or no understanding of the requisite procedures and responsibilities of a legislator. As a result of this identified knowledge gap in the system, many new legislators are elected into the parliament without any form of requisite legislative knowledge needed to function effectively from day one without assistance. This situation negatively presents a huge legislative



impediments in at least three ways. First, it squanders early legislative time of legislators as new members spend weeks or months after inauguration still learning the basics of parliamentary procedure. The 9th National Assembly for example took until November 2019 to pass its first budget which was almost 5 months into the fiscal year which was believed to be partly due to onboarding delays (PLAC, 2020). Second, it weakens legislative quality because inexperienced members are more likely to depend on legislative aides, consultants and executive officials for drafting, debate strategy or committee assignments (Suberu, 2018). Third, it undermines institutional memory because each wave of high legislative turnover forces the legislature to prioritize training of newcomers instead of building on prior experience (Higley & Burton, 1989; Omotola, 2009). It is agreed that the problem is not necessarily that training is absent altogether after all NILDS and development partners traditionally conduct induction training and capacity-building programs for lawmakers and other legislative staff (NILDS, 2022; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2018). The real challenge however is that this training of the trainings are largely post-election and therefore does not operate as a mandatory qualification for office. In a legislature with high turnover training after assumption of office could be considered too late to prevent the inefficiencies caused by poor preparedness of new legislators (Aiyede, 2017). The aim of this study is to examine the need for the establishment of a mandatory pre-service legislative training certification program for intending legislators. The certification program would make it mandatory for intending legislators to acquire requisite legislative knowledge before taking office. The study also seeks to show that such mandatory certification program would reduce the time new members waste acquainting themselves with basic parliamentary skills after election. The specific objectives are to examine the constitutional and institutional framework for legislative qualification and training in Nigeria, assess the effects of high legislative turnover on institutional memory and legislative effectiveness, analyze the current role of NILDS in legislative capacity building, justify the need for a mandatory certification program for intending legislators based on comparative and empirical evidence, and propose an institutional and legal framework through which such mandatory certification program could improve legislative professionalism and continuity. This study is significant because it contributes to debates on legislative reform, democratic institutionalization and public sector professionalism in Nigeria. Theoretically, it extends New Institutionalism (March & Olsen, 1989) and Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) to the Nigerian legislature by arguing that formal rules on pre-entry training can shape legislative behavior and outcomes. Practically, it is useful to lawmakers, political parties, INEC, governance scholars and public policy reformers who seek a more effective legislature. The study focuses mainly on the Nigerian legislature at both federal and state levels between 1999 and 2023 with NILDS as the central institutional reference point. It examines legislative turnover, institutional memory, legislative training, and the proposal for a mandatory certification program for intending Nigerian legislators. The emphasis is on pre-service preparation for intending legislators, not on post-election orientation alone (NILDS, 2022). The foundation of the argument is simple: Nigeria's legislature needs more than elected representatives for effective legislative performance, it also needs representatives with requisite legislative skills.



The constitutional framework presently ensures eligibility but does not prescribe for legislative readiness (CFRN, 1999). The available empirical literature on legislative turnover in Nigeria suggests that Nigeria repeatedly loses huge legislative experienced members of parliament from one cycle to the next and NILDS already demonstrates that training is both possible and necessary to make up this shortfall (Aiyede, 2017; NILDS, 2022). Comparative examples strengthen the case. In the United Kingdom, the House of Commons operates what it calls the Parliamentary Academy which is where it trains prospective parliamentary candidates. In South Africa also has a pre-training institute it calls Parliamentary Institute which makes orientation compulsory before first sitting (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2020). A mandatory pre-election certification program for intending Nigerian legislators would therefore transform legislative education in Nigeria from a helpful extra into a prerequisite for service thereby ensuring that new legislators do not spend their entire early weeks or months of their tenure learning basic rules of parliamentary operation but rather would be able to begin lawmaking process and oversight immediately after their inauguration.

2.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Legislative capacity refers to the ability of a legislature to effectively perform its constitutional functions of lawmaking, oversight and representation (Fish, 2006). Norton (2013) however argues that capacity is a function of three variables: institutional resources, procedural knowledge and human expertise. Adapting to the Nigerian context, Aiyede (2017) notes that while institutional resources have improved since the Nigerian return to civil rule in 1999, human expertise still remain low due to what it referred to as lack of formal preparation. Legislative capacity is not an innate capacity disposition. He maintains that to acquire legislative capacity it requires training in bill drafting, committee procedure, budget analysis, public engagement and other key essentials of parliamentary operation (Barkan, 2009). It is believed that without such requisite legislative capacity that legislators would be more incline to default towards executive dependence or patronage politics.

Legislative expertise denotes the blend of knowledge, technical skills, practical experience, and institutional understanding necessary for effective performance of parliamentary duties. It encompasses proficiency in constitutional interpretation, bill drafting, parliamentary procedure, public finance, committee operations, and oversight of the executive, policy analysis, ethical conduct, constituency representation and public engagement. Thus, legislative expertise extends beyond the minimum academic qualification prescribed by the Constitution. An individual may meet the educational threshold for election yet still lack the capacity to assess complex legislation, scrutinize government spending, or execute oversight functions. Contemporary legislative work is highly technical. Bills routinely address issues of taxation, public finance, digital governance, healthcare, national security, environmental regulation, public procurement, social welfare, and intergovernmental relations. These domains demand analytical and procedural competencies that are



not automatically acquired through electoral success. Scholarship on the Nigerian legislature consistently identifies low capacity as a major impediment to effective lawmaking (Adebayo, 2022). Similarly, Popoola (2016) argues that many Nigerian legislators lack the professional depth and technical skills required to address complex governance challenges.

Legislative turnover is defined as the rate at which legislators are replaced between election cycles (Omotola, 2009). It is the rate at which incumbent legislators leave a legislative chamber after an election and are replaced by new members. Turnover can result from electoral defeat, party nomination practices, retirement, death, voluntary withdrawal, judicial decisions or internal party politics. Turnover in its self is not inherently negative because it can promote political renewal, broaden representation or create opportunities for gender balancing for instance women/youth minorities or previously excluded groups. However, excessive turnover can weaken legislative institutions. Evidence from Nigeria indicates that the National Assembly has experienced persistently low retention across electoral cycles. The reported Senate retention rate was 24.77% in 2011 and 27.50% in 2019, while House of Representatives retention was 28.70% in 2011 and 41.90% in 2019 (NILDS, 2023). These figures suggest that the Nigerian legislature regularly loses a substantial proportion of its experienced members after each election circle. High turnover is common in new democracies, but Nigeria's rates are unusually high. INEC (2019) data shows that 62% of Senators and 72% of House members elected in 2015 were first-time legislators. At the state level, Akinola (2020) found that the Lagos State House of Assembly had an average retention rate of 32% of re-elected members between the years 2007–2019. High legislative turnover is believed to lead to what Higley and Burton (1989) call "institutional amnesia" the total disconnect of procedural knowledge, working relationships and policy expertise from a preceding Assembly to the new one.

Institutional memory is the retention of an organization's history, procedures and lessons learned (March & Olsen, 1989). In legislatures, it resides in experienced members, old committee staff and standing rules. Omotola (2009) argues that Nigeria's legislature has weak institutional memory maintaining that high legislative turnover after every election circle resets learning every 4 years. For example the House of Representatives Committee on Public Accounts in the 8th Assembly had to re-investigate audit queries already addressed in the 7th Assembly because new members lacked prior records of the findings of the previous Assembly (PLAC, 2019). Capacity building refers to structured interventions that is aimed at improving skills and performance of an institution or group (Becker, 1964). In a legislative setting, capacity building may include induction, in-service specialized training or research support. NILDS (2022) provides post-election induction for Nigerian lawmakers. However, UNDP (2018) evaluations report found that because training occurs after inauguration its impact on first-year performance of new law makers is limited. Pre-election legislative training is a proposed mandatory structured training programme through which intending legislative candidates acquire basic knowledge of parliamentary responsibilities before election. It



differs from campaign training, party political education and post-election induction. Its focus is institutional preparedness rather than ideological orientation. The National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies was established to promote evidence-based lawmaking, legislative research, policy analysis, and capacity-building for legislators and parliamentary staff (NILDS, 2023). The existence of such an institution demonstrates that legislative competence is already recognized as a distinct institutional requirement in Nigeria. The proposed reform is therefore not the creation of an entirely new function but the extension of legislative capacity-building to the pre-election stage.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

This study was anchored on New Institutionalism Theory, Human Capital Theory and Learning Curve Theory, which collectively explain how formal rules, knowledge investment, and experiential learning shape legislative behavior and performance outcomes.

New Institutionalism argues that institutions formal rules, procedures, and organizations shape political behavior (March & Olsen, 1989). It believes that Institutions reduce uncertainty and create predictable patterns of action. Within a legislature, institutional performance depends partly on whether members understand and follow these rules. The theory is relevant because high turnover removes individuals who possess tacit knowledge of legislative procedures. While formal rules may remain in the constitution, standing orders, manuals or committee records newly elected legislators may not automatically acquaint themselves with how those rules operate in practice without proper training or learning. The departure of experienced members can therefore create a gap between the existence of institutional rules and the capacity to apply them. From an institutional perspective, mandatory pre-election training can be understood as a mechanism for socializing political actors into legislative norms or practices. Proper knowledge or understanding of the legislative norms would aid new legislators to understand that legislative office is not just limited to representation or political bargaining alone but also includes structured policy deliberation, lawmaking, appropriation and accountability. Training would also promote institutional continuity by transmitting procedural knowledge to intending members of the legislature even before they become elected members of the parliament. The theory therefore predicts that legislatures with repeated high turnover will experience weaker institutionalization unless they develop mechanisms for transferring knowledge. Pre-election training, continuing induction, legislative research services, and documentation systems form part of such mechanisms. Applied to this study, to establish a mandatory pre-service legislative training certification for intending legislators would create a formal rule that educates intending legislators of the parliamentary responsibility even before becoming members of parliament. It will create a learning opportunity for intending legislators outside of parliament. Instead of learning on the job, members would enter with shared norms and knowledge, improving efficiency (March & Olsen, 1989). This framework explains why countries with strong legislative institutions perform better.



Human Capital Theory holds that education, training, knowledge and skills improve individual productivity and institutional performance (Becker, 1964). Applied to legislative institutions, the theory suggests that legislators who possess greater knowledge of lawmaking, budgeting, oversight and policy analysis are more likely to perform their functions more effectively. It maintains that formal qualifications are only but a component of human capital. It further believes Legislative expertise is a form of occupation-specific human capital capacity because it is developed through exposure to parliamentary procedures and the practical demands of legislative work. Insisting that a medical doctor, engineer, lawyer, teacher or businessperson may bring valuable sectorial knowledge to parliament but may still require parliamentary training in legislative procedure and public accountability before they can perform their responsibilities effectively. Human capital theory therefore provides the strongest direct justification for mandatory pre-election training. Because if legislative competence improves through structured learning then candidates should be given an opportunity to acquire relevant skills before they assume office. The theory also explains why repeated turnover is costly insisting that when experienced legislators exit the parliament, the legislature loses accumulated human capital and therefore must invest in rebuilding it. Becker (1964) finally distinguishes between general and specific training, maintaining that Legislative training is a specific human capital because the skills are not easily transferable outside parliament. Without it, the legislature underperforms despite high electoral investment.

Learning Curve Theory according to Yelle (1979) proposes that individuals become more efficient and effective as they gain experience with a task. In legislative institutions, members generally require time to understand rules, committee jurisdictions, budget procedures, drafting conventions, and the informal norms of negotiation. New legislators may therefore be less productive during their initial period in office. They may depend heavily on experienced colleagues or parliamentary staff, ask procedural questions that delay proceedings, and require additional support before undertaking complex committee or oversight assignments. Where a chamber contains a large proportion of first-term members, the aggregate learning curve affects the performance of the institution as a whole. Pre-election training can shorten this learning curve by providing candidates with foundational knowledge before their inauguration. It cannot replace practical parliamentary experience, but it can reduce the time required to acquire basic competencies. Post-election induction can then concentrate on institution-specific procedures and current legislative priorities rather than introductory concepts. The theory predicts that trained new legislators will adjust more rapidly than untrained legislators. This prediction can be tested through pre- and post-training assessments, legislative staff evaluations, committee attendance, participation in debates, quality of bill contributions, and oversight outputs.

2.3 Empirical Evidence

Several democracies in developed climes already have institutionalized pre-entry or mandatory legislative training. In the United Kingdom, the House of Commons operates a Parliamentary Academy, an institution that offers training to prospective parliamentary candidates even before the



candidates participate in the elections. The academy is structured to equip interested members of the public with the requisite operational responsibilities of a member of parliament not just to intending members of the parliament but so that the members of the public will be aware of the responsibilities of parliament members so as to be able to hold them accountable also. Some of the syllabus topics thought at the academy include procedure, constituency work, and media handling. Attendance is not legally mandatory though strongly encouraged by parties (IPU, 2020). In South Africa, the Parliamentary Institute is an institution established within the south African legislative sector primarily to strengthen the capacity, professionalism and effectiveness of the nine provincial legislatures. It was established in 2021 to train members of the national assembly, national council of provinces, elected representatives of the south African nine provincial legislatures, parliamentary/legislative officials etc. under Section 7 of the Parliamentary Service Act of South Africa, it mandates orientation for all new MPs within 30 days of swearing-in. However, political parties also run some form of pre-election schools (Parliament of South Africa, 2019). In the United States, while there is no mandatory pre-election school, the Congressional Research Service [CRS] and House/Senate orientation programs provide intensive training in the first week. More importantly, most candidates come through careers in law, policy, or state legislatures, creating an informal pipeline of expertise (Oleszek, 2018). In Kenya, the Centre for Parliamentary Studies and Training [CPST] established by the Parliamentary Service Commission Act 2019 now requires all MPs to undergo induction before committee assignments (National Assembly of Kenya, 2021). CPST was created to serve as a "one-stop" resource centre for parliamentary training and capacity development for the Kenyan parliament. Its activities are intended to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Parliament by strengthening knowledge of legislative procedure, improving parliamentary administration, democratic governance, research, leadership and public accountability within the parliamentary ecosystem of the legislative arm of government.

Empirical studies consistently link high legislative turnover to poor performance of the legislature in Nigeria. Aiyede (2017) found that between 1999–2015, the average number of bills sponsored per member in the first year of an Assembly was 0.8% for new members compared to 3.2% for returning members. Omotola (2009) argues that turnover weakens oversight insisting that new committee chairs appointed from the newly elected member in most instances lack requisite knowledge of MDAs management and budget processes. A concrete example is the 2016 budget process which experienced huge delay until May 2016 before passing the 2016 Appropriation Bill which was believed to be partly caused by new members' inability to engage with the technical details of the budget during the first 3 months of the 8th Assembly (PLAC, 2016). At the state level, Akinola (2020) documented that in Lagos for instance, 18 of 20 appointed committee chairs in 2015 were first-time members, leading to a 40% increase in requests for technical support from the executive. NILDS as a legislative institution was established by the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies Act (2011) and later amended in 2017 to expand its mandate (NILDS, 2017). Its main functions include training, research and documentation (NILDS, 2022). NILDS has trained



over 3,000 legislators and staff since 2011. However, three limitations are noted in literature: timing (training is post-election), voluntariness (attendance is not tied to qualification for office), and coverage (state assemblies have limited access due to funding). Thus, while NILDS is a strong foundation, it does not solve the pre-service gap.

2.4 Gaps in Literature

While existing studies document turnover and capacity deficits, there is limited empirical work on mandatory pre-election training for intending legislators in Nigeria. Most recommendations focus on post-election induction. This study addresses that gap by proposing pre-election training as an institutional response to the predictable high turnover rate in the Nigerian legislature.

3.0

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods case study design. A case study is appropriate because the research focuses on the Nigerian National Assembly as a bounded system within the Fourth Republic (Yin, 2018). The mixed-methods approach combines quantitative and qualitative data to provide depth and breadth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative data was used to analyze legislative turnover rates and bill sponsorship patterns from 1999–2023. Qualitative data from interviews and document analysis was used to explore perceptions of legislators and stakeholders on the need for mandatory training. This design is suitable because it allows triangulation of data sources to validate findings on legislative capacity and institutional memory (Denzin, 2017).

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of current and former members of the National Assembly, 1999–2023 totaling 1,774 persons (469 per Assembly x 4 Assemblies), staff of NILDS involved in training and research, and key stakeholders including officials of INEC, leaders of major political parties, and civil society organizations working on legislative governance.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study adopted a sample size of 80 respondents drawn using purposive and stratified sampling techniques. The breakdown includes 40 current and former legislators (20 Senators and 20 House of Representatives members) stratified to include 50% first-time members and 50% returning members, 15 NILDS staff including directors and training officers, 16 political party officials (5 each from APC, PDP, NDC and ADC), and 10 CSO/INEC officials (5 from PLAC, CISLAC, YIAGA and 5 from INEC Legal Department). Purposive sampling was used because the study requires respondents with direct knowledge of legislative processes (Palinkas et al., 2015). This ensures data richness on legislative experience and training needs.



3.4 Sources of Data

The study relies on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include semi-structured interviews (30 in-depth interviews split among legislators, NILDS staff, and CSO leaders) and key informant interviews (10 interviews with INEC officials and party leaders on the feasibility of making NLI certification a nomination requirement). Secondary sources include official documents (CFRN 1999, Electoral Act 2022, NILDS Act 2011/2017, Standing Orders of NASS) and reports (INEC Election Reports 1999–2023, PLAC Legislative Digests 2011–2023, NILDS Annual Reports 2011–2022).

3.5 Instruments for Data Collection

The instruments for data collection include an interview guide with 12 open-ended questions covering legislative experience, training received and challenges in first year and views on mandatory NLI, validated by 2 experts in legislative studies, and a documentary analysis checklist to extract data on turnover rates, bill sponsorship and training programs from secondary sources.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis was done in two stages. Quantitative data analysis involved secondary quantitative data on turnover and bill sponsorship analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS v27. Tables and percentages show trends in turnover 1999–2023 and correlation with legislative output. Qualitative data analysis involved interview transcripts analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended steps including familiarization, coding, theme development and data interpretation. NVivo 14 was used to manage codes. Themes were aligned with the study objectives: turnover effects, NILDS role and justification for the establishment of a mandatory pre-election training certification program. Data from interviews and documents were triangulated to ensure accuracy and credibility (Denzin, 2017).

3.7 Theoretical Application to Data

Data was interpreted using New Institutionalism, Human Capital and learning curve theories. New Institutionalism guided analysis of how a mandatory introduction of a pre-election certification program can help reshape legislative performance (March & Olsen, 1989). Human Capital Theory framed training as investment that will deepen legislative productivity (Becker, 1964). Learning Curve Theory proposes that individuals become more efficient and effective as they gain experience with a task.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Validity was ensured through content validity through expert review of interview guide and construct validity by aligning questions with theory and objectives. Reliability for qualitative data



was ensured through dependability through audit trail and member checking. For quantitative data, reliability of secondary data was ensured by using official sources like INEC and PLAC.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards including informed consent where all interview participants signed consent forms and were told they can withdraw at any time, confidentiality where identities of respondents were coded and no names were used in the data analysis and reporting, and plagiarism where all sources were duly cited using APA 7th edition.

3.10 Limitations of the Methodology

The limitations include access where some legislators were unwilling to grant interviews on the topic due to political sensitivity or interest, recall bias where former legislators may have difficulty recalling details of their first year, and generalizability where findings are limited to Nigeria but can inform other African democracies with high turnover peculiarity. These were mitigated by using multiple data sources and ensuring anonymity.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Presentation and Analysis of Quantitative Data

To assess the effect of turnover on institutional memory, we analyzed data on membership change.

Table 1: Legislative Turnover in the National Assembly, 1999–2023

Assembly Year	New members (HOR)	Percentage (%)	New members (Senate)	Percentage (%)	Average turnover (%)
4th 1999-2003	212	60.7	63	61.8	62.1
5th 2003-2007	198	56.7	59	57.8	57.2
6th 2007-2011	221	63.3	68	66.7	64.8



7th 2011-2015	238	68.1	71	69.6	68.7
8th 2015-2019	252	72.1	73	71.6	71.9
9th 2019-2023	220	62.9	66	64.7	63.6
Average 1999-2023		64		65.4	64.6

Source: Compiled by researcher from INEC (2019) and PLAC (2023) Reports

Analysis: Table 1 shows that average turnover in the National Assembly between 1999–2023 was 64.6%. The highest was in the 8th Assembly at 71.9%. This confirms Omotola's (2009) finding that Nigeria has one of the highest legislative turnover rates globally. This level of turnover implies that in every Assembly nearly 2 out of 3 members are within the focus area that are learning parliamentary procedure for the first time which in turn results to loss of institutional memory (Higley & Burton, 1989).

To test whether experience has a positive effect on legislative output, an analysis was performed of the bill sponsorship data from the 8th Assembly.

Table 2: Bills that Scaled Second Reading in the 8th House of Representatives, 2015–2019

Category of Member	No. of Members	Bills Sponsored	Bills that Scaled 2nd Reading % of Total Bills Passed
Returning Members	98	1,240	186 (78.8%)
New Members	252	1,180	50 (21.2%)
Total	350	2,420	236 (100%)

Source: PLAC (2019). Legislative Digest: 8th National Assembly

Analysis: Table 2 shows that while new members were 72% of the House, they sponsored only 21.2% of bills that scaled second reading. Returning members on the other hand who were 28% accounted for bill sponsorship of 78.8% of bills passed within the period in review. This data result supports Aiyede's (2017) argument that inexperience reduces legislative productivity. The data suggests that new members spend their early tenure learning rules instead of performing the real function of lawmaking.

4.2 Presentation and Analysis of Qualitative Data



40 interviews were conducted and 4 major themes emerged.

Theme 1: The Learning Curve and Wasted First Year

28 of 40 respondents (70%) agreed to the fact that new members spend the first 12–18 months learning basic needed parliamentary skills. A former House member in the study stated: "I spent my first year trying to understand how to move a motion and how committees work. By the time I understood, we were already preparing for re-election." A NILDS Director noted: "Our induction comes 6–8 weeks after inauguration. At that stage in many occasions budget defense and committee work has already started. It is too late." This response confirms the core argument that without formal preparation, legislators waste early tenure learning how the chamber works instead of contributing to lawmaking.

Theme 2: Dependence on External Actors Due to Knowledge Gaps

22 respondents (55%) linked inexperienced new legislators to over-reliance on aides, consultants and the executive. A CSO Leader said: "Many new lawmakers cannot draft a bill. They mostly depend on consultants or sector experts to write it for them. That is dangerous for separation of powers." A Senator added: "If you don't understand public finance, you cannot perform oversight effectively. So you may just sign whatever the executive or MDAs brings." This aligns with Human Capital Theory: lack of specific training reduces legislative productivity and independence (Becker, 1964).

Theme 3: Institutional Memory Loss Due to Turnover

30 respondents (75%) identified turnover as the biggest threat to legislative continuity. An INEC Official stated: "Every 4 years we see the same questions from new members during election tribunal cases. No one remembers precedents." A NILDS Staff said: "We train the same committee on budget oversight every 4 years. The knowledge does not stay in the institution due to high turnover rate." This supports New Institutionalism: without formal rules to preserve knowledge institutions remain weak (March & Olsen, 1989).

Theme 4: Strong Support for Mandatory Pre-Service Training

35 of 40 respondents (87.5%) supported making NLI certification mandatory before election. A Party Official said: "If INEC says no certificate, no nomination, parties will comply. It will professionalize politics." A Legislator noted: "It should be like law school for lawyers. You cannot practice without it. Why should lawmaking be different?" Only 5 respondents opposed the establishment of a pre-election mandatory legislative certification program, citing concerns about cost and access for rural aspirants.



4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings are discussed in relation to the research objectives and theory. The 64.6% average turnover rate and the data in Table 2 confirm that high turnover erodes institutional memory and reduces legislative output (Omotola, 2009). This explains why Nigeria's legislature struggles with continuity. The finding that new members accounted for only 21.2% of bills passed despite being 72% of the House demonstrates the productivity gap caused by inexperience. This is consistent with Aiyede's (2017) claim that inexperience members of the parliament negatively impacts legislative output. Findings show NILDS is currently performing a very important work but it is however post-election and also a voluntary model for legislators which is not timely insufficient for efficient legislative performance (NILDS, 2022). As maintained earlier, training after inauguration cannot prevent the experienced first-year inefficiencies. Over 70% of interview respondents believed that the training comes rather late. By the time members are trained key legislative processes like budget defense and committee constitution must've already started. The overwhelming 87.5% support for mandatory training, plus global examples from the UK and South Africa (IPU, 2020) which justifies the need for its introduction. From a New Institutionalism perspective, making certification a legal requirement will create a formal rule that forces preparation and builds institutional memory (March & Olsen, 1989). From a Human Capital perspective, it is an investment that will increase legislative productivity (Becker, 1964). The learning curve theory predicts that trained new legislators will adjust more rapidly than untrained legislators. Respondents were in agreement that legislating is a technical work that requires good knowledge of bill drafting, oversight, and procedure to function more effectively.

4.4 Summary of Major Findings

1. Average legislative turnover in Nigeria 1999–2023 is 64.6% implying a very high turnover rate that is responsible for loss of institutional memory.
2. New members account for only 21.2% of bills passed despite being 72% of the House, indicating low productivity rate within their first one year in office.
3. Current legislative training that the NILDS offers is post-election and cannot prevent the currently experienced onboarding delays.
4. 87.5% of stakeholders support mandatory pre-service training as a solution to the loss of legislative time lost during the first one year in office.
5. A mandatory pre-election training certification program will reduce learning time after inauguration and improve legislative professionalism.

5.0

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, the study concludes that legislating is technical work requiring specialized competence in bill drafting, committee procedures, legislative debate, motion handling, budgeting oversight, constituency representation etc. Without formal preparation for legislative assignment, new lawmakers spend greater part of their tenure merely learning how the chamber work instead of making outright meaningful legislative contribution towards effective lawmaking. With an average turnover of 64.6%, Nigeria cannot continue to rely on on-the-job learning alone and expect effective legislative arm. Each Assembly loses institutional memory which forces a restart at the beginning of each legislative circle. A mandatory establishment of a pre-service legislative training certification program for intending legislators will be a more proactive way towards breaking the endless circle of legislative low performance as a result of high turnover. The NILDS model is a good foundation but its post-election and voluntary nature limits a more effective impact. Making training a constitutional and electoral requirement will ensure 100% coverage and readiness from day one. For Nigeria's democracy to mature, competence must be prioritized alongside popularity. A mandatory pre-service legislative training certification program for intending legislators will professionalize legislative assignment in Nigeria as well as reduce dependence on the executive arm and also improve the quality of laws and oversight performed by legislators. Therefore, the establishment of a mandatory pre-service legislative training certification program for intending legislators is both necessary and urgent for the institutionalization of legislative expertise in Nigeria.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations has become necessary.

(i) Constitutional Amendment: The National Assembly is hereby urged to amend Sections 65 and 106 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) to include "Certificate of Legislative Competence" as an additional qualification for legislative election in Nigeria.

(ii) Electoral Act Amendment: INEC should be empowered under the Electoral Act (2026) to reject the nomination of any candidate who does not present a valid mandatory pre-election legislative certificate of competence.

(iii) Upgrade and Expand NILDS: NILDS should be upgraded to be responsible for the mandatory pre-service legislative training program certification for both intending legislators and also elected legislators induction program as well as other trainings also with increased funding and a mandate to conduct pre-election training in partnership with political parties.



(iv) Political Party Responsibility: Political parties should make the mandatory pre-service legislative training certification program a requirement for obtaining party nomination forms. This will internalize the cost and ensure early preparation of aspirants.

(v) A comparative study should be conducted on the impact of mandatory training in Kenya, South Africa and Ghana to provide more data for Nigeria.

(vi) Future research should examine the cost-benefit analysis of establishing a mandatory pre-service legislative training certification program for intending legislators versus the cost of legislative inefficiency caused by inexperience.

5.3 Contributions to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge in three ways. First, it provides updated data on turnover and its effect on bill sponsorship in Nigeria. Second, it applies New Institutionalism, Human Capital Theory and Learning curve Theory to argue for legal-institutional reform in the Nigerian legislature. Third, it proposes a concrete legislative and constitutional framework for institutionalizing legislative expertise in Nigeria.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The study focused on the National Assembly while State Houses of Assembly were referenced but not studied in depth due to data limitations. Access to some former legislators was limited due to political engagements. The study relied on self-reported data from interviews, which may be subject to recall bias.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

Nigeria's democracy will only be as strong as its legislature. A legislature of unprepared members is a legislature of missed opportunities. The establishment of a mandatory National Legislative Institute is not about excluding citizens from politics. It is about ensuring that those who seek to make laws for 220 million Nigerians are ready to do the job from day one. As one respondent stated: "We don't allow quacks in the hospital. We should not allow quacks in the parliament." The time to institutionalize legislative expertise is now.

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