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The Impact of Institutional Factors on Literacy level and Infant Mortality Rate: The Nigeria Experience

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of institutional factors on measures that indirectly affect economic growth. Such measures are the literacy level and infant mortality rate. Annual time series data from 1996 to 2023 were utilized for the study. To guide the study, pertinent questions were asked such as to what extent does institutional factors affects literacy level in Nigeria? Does institutional factors affect infant mortality rate in Nigeria? This investigation employed the Ordinary Least Square model in the estimations in order to achieve its stated objectives. The study revealed that regulatory quality promotes literacy level. Specifically, a unit improvement in regulatory quality sees literacy level improved by about 19 unit. The result shows that rule of law is significant in deteriorating literacy level and infant mortality rate and subsequently economic growth in Nigeria. In line with the findings, the study therefore recommends that Rule of law should be strengthened in the country. Our law makers and other stakeholders of government policies should reassess the laws to ascertain their suitability in charting the cause for sustainable development in the country. Again, adequate monitoring and evaluation of the relevant laws should be a routine task of certain officers to ensure that the planned economic development is attained.

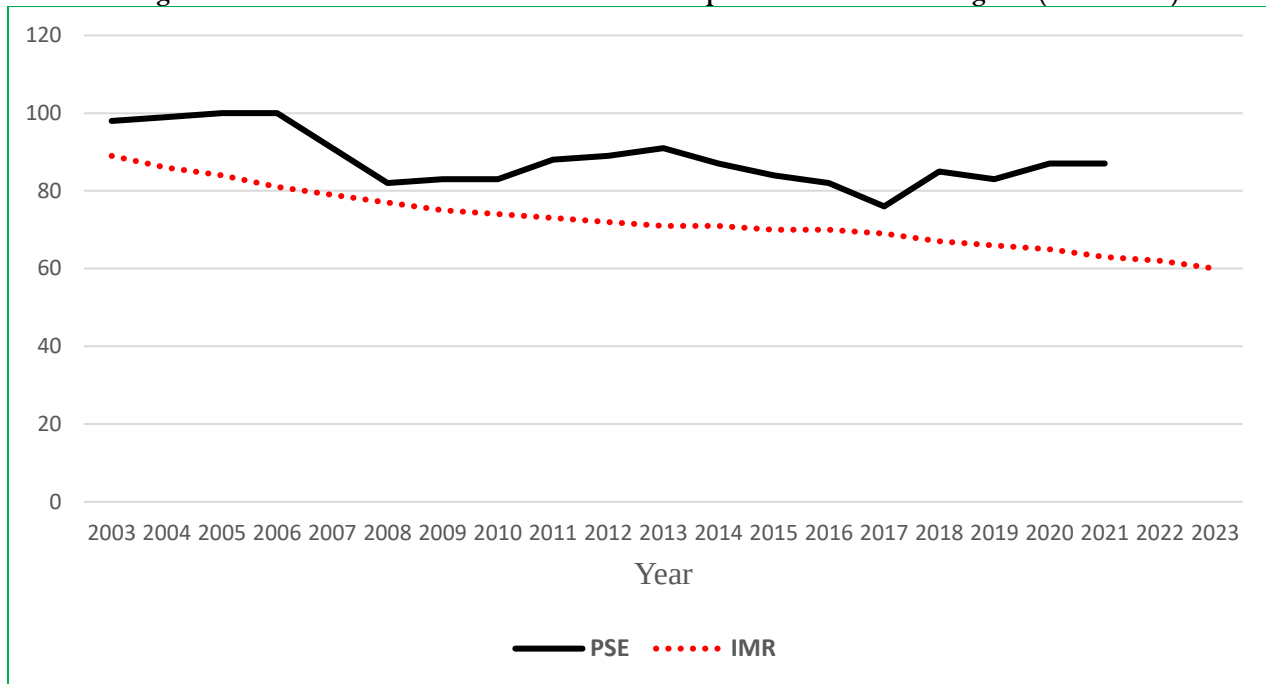
Keywords: Institutional Factors; Economic Growth; Literacy Level; Infant Mortality Rate; Regulatory Quality; Rule of Law; Sustainable Development; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Clearly, economic progress is one of the goals of development that represents the welfare of society. Economic perspectives tend to dominate the way of thinking about the definition of development and welfare. Conceptually, development can be referred to as growth and expansion, change, improvement, and transformation and modernization [1]. Therefore, it is often interpreted that an advanced city is a city with a high rate of economic growth as manifested in the form of skyscrapers, luxury shopping centers, luxury transportation, and so on. Those such cities are a haven for consumptive people like those found in big cities in Indonesia. As it turns out, economic development is also a cultural process because the economy itself is part of the cultural reality that can shape economic sense as stated by Michael McPherson [2].

Nevertheless, the parameter for economic development in Nigeria as used in this study reveals that economic development in the country is at its poor performance.

Figure 1: Performance of Some Economic Development Indicators in Nigeria (2003-2023)



Source: Author's Computation: Data from World Development Indicator (WDI)

As shown in figure 1, the infant mortality rate (IMR) in Nigeria has continued to decrease over the years. As at year 2003, the infant mortality rate in Nigeria is 89% per 1,000 birth. This reduced to 70% in 2016. But as at 2023, the IMR has declined further to 60% per 1,000 birth. Again, the primary school enrolment (% Gross), PSE is also struggling for better performance. As at year 2003, the PSE was 98% but has declined to 87% in 2021. The poor performance of the economic development variables further raised worry on the strength of institutional factors in Nigeria.

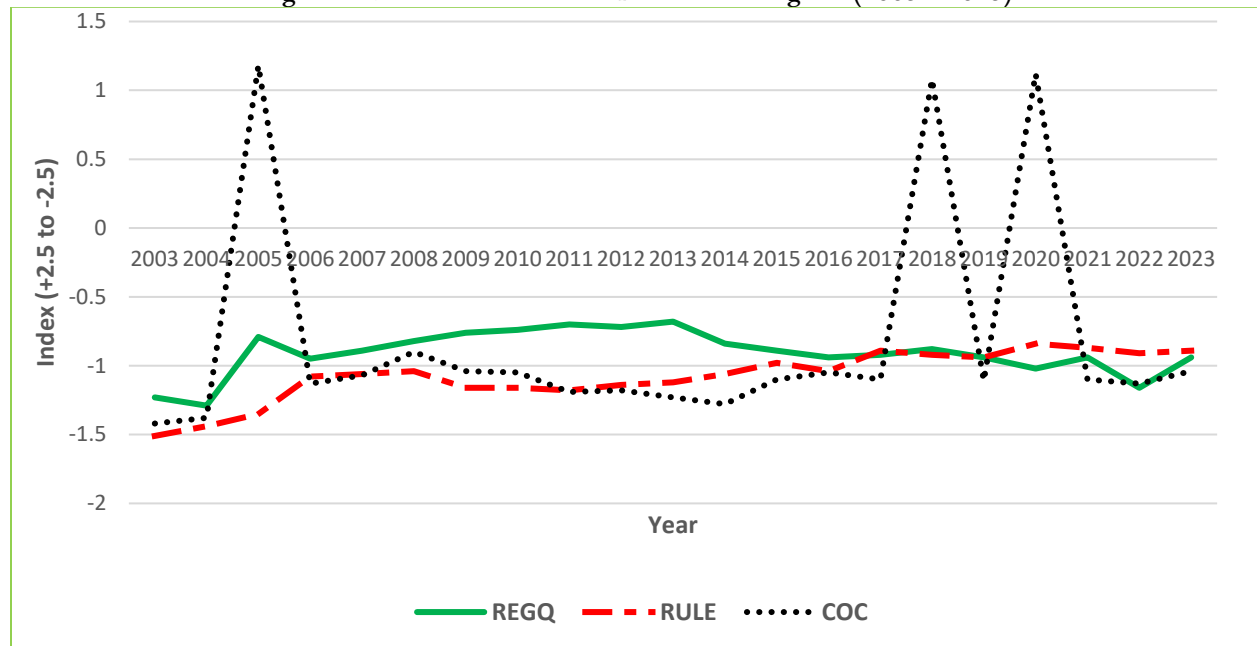
Economic institutions are regarded as fundamental causes of economic growth [3]. The contribution of economic institutions to economic growth far outweighs the availability of natural resources, the supply of factors of production and technological progress [1]. Several reasons have been advanced for the importance of economic institutions in stimulating economic growth. One of the reasons is that economic institutions determine the incentives given to the main performers in the economy; the outcomes of economic processes are influenced by the economic institutions. Through these incentives, economic institutions influence investment in physical and human resources, research and development (R&D), technology and the organization of production [3].

Interestingly, there has been a growing concern on the role of institutions in economic growth, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. This concern has been stoked by how a number of researchers and experts have argued that aside factors of production, technological change and innovations, other factors such as institutions, also influence economic growth across countries. When factors of production are effectively harnessed and value is added, against the backdrop of existing institutions, with a view to producing desired goods and services in the society, output is created [4]. A consistent increase in a country's total output or Real Gross Domestic Product (RGDP) over a long period of time is referred to as economic growth [5].

An institution can be described as a focused social structure with a set of rules, facilitated by cooperation of people and transcends individuals but influences people's behaviours and their lifestyle. In other words, institutions are humanly devised constraints that shape interaction between people [6]. [6], also distinguishes institutions from organizations, as he stresses that while the latter are the players of the social interaction, the former are the umpires of the game. [7], views forms of institutions as being legal, political, social or economic. Legal institutions are the most ubiquitous form as legislature can be found practically in any kind of social interactions. Political institutions are the organizations in a government that create, enforce, and apply laws. They often mediate in conflict, make government policy on the economy and social systems, and otherwise provide representation for the population. Institutional quality also involves individual and property rights as well as how a government regulates the economy and how it renders social services [6].

We look at the trend of selected institutional factors in Nigeria.

Figure 2: Trend of Institutional Factors in Nigeria (2003 – 2023)



Source: Author's Computation: Data from World Development Indicator (WDI)

As further revealed from Figure 1.3, the institutional factors in Nigeria has been performing below expectation. In an index of range -2.5 and +2.5, it is only the control of corruption that has maintained a positive value for only three times for over two decades. More worrisome is that the three times Nigeria has witnessed positive indices, they are so much below the upper limit. Nigeria has been very low also in regulatory quality as well as the rule of law with these variables scoring negatives for the period under consideration.

Generally, institutional quality is expected to influence economic growth, as data show that countries with high institutional quality have been more successful in adopting frontier technology to enhance productivity since the turn of the millennium [6]. But the relationship between institutional quality and economic growth is not yet clear in developing countries such as Nigeria, where many reforms targeted at economic growth have not yielded the desired results.

Clearly, this study set out to achieve two objectives. One, to ascertain the effect of institutional factors on literacy level in Nigeria. Two, to investigate the effect of institutional factors on infant mortality rate in Nigeria.

1. Literature

1.1 Conceptual Literature

Literacy Level

'Literacy' or 'being literate' is defined in a number of ways, and these definitions are continually evolving. The term 'literacy', for example, sometimes refers only to reading, sometimes to reading and writing and sometimes, more rarely, to reading, writing and speaking and listening. [8], note: 'Most children learn to talk fairly easily. In contrast, learning to read and write is a laborious process. It is the ability to read and write which makes a person 'literate', with varying degrees of fluency.' The National Literacy Trust, however, includes reference to speaking and listening in its definition of literacy: 'We believe literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen well. A literate person is able to communicate effectively with others and to understand written information.' Many definitions of literacy focus on the ability to read and write at an appropriate level, eg [9]: 'The attribute of literacy is generally recognised as one of the key educational objectives of compulsory schooling. It refers to the ability to read and write to an appropriate level of fluency.' There is, however, no commonly accepted definition of what 'an appropriate level', 'effectively' or 'well' mean: 'There is no universal standard of literacy' [10]. The term 'functional literacy' seems to be an attempt to link literacy to purpose, and thus to some kind of level: [10], define functional literacy as 'the level of skill in reading and writing that any individual needs in order to cope with adult life'. They acknowledge, however, that this does not necessarily solve the problem of level, as 'it is clearly very difficult to arrive at a satisfactory definition of functional literacy', but go on to cite an incident in the USA where parents have prosecuted a school or school system for failing to provide a child at school-leaving age with 'functional literacy', an action which is premised on the view that functional literacy is a right of all pupils and the duty of schools to provide. Critics of functional literacy, however, see it as too limited in intention and scope: 'Here, as in Third World contexts, the

espoused goal of functional literacy has been overly utilitarian. The aim is to incorporate (marginal) adults into established economic and social values and practices.

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)

Infant mortality rate is the number of resident newborns in a specified geographic area (country, state, county, etc.) dying under one year of age divided by the number of resident live births for the same geographic area (for a specified time period, usually a calendar year) and multiplied by 1,000.

An infant mortality rate (or IMR) is considered a primary and important indicator of a geographic area's (country, state, county) overall health status or quality of life. There are some concerns about the quality of reporting of infant mortality internationally and within states, especially in terms of defining a live birth and/or complete reporting of both birth and death certificates for very low birth weight babies. The IMR is usually calculated using the annual number of resident infants who died during a year in the numerator and the total annual number of resident live births during the same year in the denominator. By matching infant death certificates to the corresponding birth certificates, much more additional and valuable data are obtained (birth weight, smoking status of mother, when prenatal care began, etc.) for infant mortality risk analysis.

Concept of Institutions

[11], a trailblazer in institutional economics cited by [12], defined institutions as a collection of rules, compliance measures, procedures, moral and ethical standards, and behavioral norms designed to restrict individuals' actions in the pursuit of maximizing the wealth or utility of principals. Institutions operate within a formal and informal framework referred to as the institutional framework. [6], asserts that the quality of institutional framework is contingent on its capacity to encompass legal structures, individual rights and governmental regulations and services. A collapse in these attributes undermines and weakens the institutional framework supporting economic development, thereby making it difficult for development to take place as expected [13]. In this light, [14], asserted that robust institutional frameworks, particularly in developing nations, can contribute positively to economic growth and development. For this study, institutional framework is assessed through the utilization of the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI). These WGI indicators encompass factors such as political stability, absence of violence, voice and accountability, control of corruption, government effectiveness, regulatory quality and rule of law. The scaling of these six measures in the Worldwide Governance Indicators ranges from -2.5 (lowest) to 2.5 (highest). Consequently, the institutional framework is broken down into the six indicators mentioned above, aligning with the World Bank Governance Indicators (WGI) recommendations. However, this study focused specifically on regulatory quality, control of corruption and rule of law.

1.2 Theoretical Literature

Institutional Quality Hypothesis/Theory

According to the 'institutional quality hypothesis', an economy's institutional framework, which governs how its economic agents interact with one another, has an impact on economic growth. In this perspective, the most important things are the "rules of the game" in a society, which are established by the dominant behavioral norms, both explicit and implicit, and their capacity to provide suitable incentives for positive economic behavior [15]. Most of the recent research on the "institutional quality hypothesis," however, has been linked to [11], investigation of the connection between institutional factors and economic performance which were quantified using indices of political instability and violence. Researchers such as [11]; and [15], have demonstrated that, aside from the availability of inputs, the natural environment, and technical advancement, institutions are the main driver of growth. Important institutions for growth are those that mobilize savings and make them available for investment [16]; those that protect property rights [17] and those that make rulers answerable to most of the populace [17].

1.3 Empirical Literature

Related Literature Relating to Institutional Factors and Literacy Level

[18], explored both linear and non-linear impacts that institutional quality and literacy level may have on the economic growth process in the sub-Saharan African region. Annual data from 1984 to 2019 from 28 sub-Saharan African countries was used. Established on the Solow neoclassical theory, we employ the Cobb-Douglas production function to assess the linear relationship; and the Constant Elasticity of Substitution (CES) to investigate a possible non-linear relationship. To prevent model misspecification and increase the power of the regressions, we apply panel cointegration tools that build in cross-sectional dependency and structural breaks. Our investigations expose significant positive relationships among economic growth, institutional quality, financial development, and capital for the 28 sub-Saharan African countries in the long run as long as structural breaks and cross-sectional dependence are taken into account. The impact of financial development enhanced by institutional quality on economic growth is positive and significant when structural breaks are considered for the Cobb-Douglas function. In the case of the CES function, the significantly positive impact is only present for financial development. Important policy implications on effective measures that stimulate economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa are derived from this study. [19], examined the connection between institutional quality and economic development for six nations: the US, UK, Germany, Turkey, Russia, and China. The analysis makes use of information from the 1996–2019 Global

Development Indicators and Worldwide Governance Indicators from the World Bank. The findings imply that institutional quality, as determined by the presence of the rule of law, the ability of the government to combat corruption, and the efficacy of its regulatory framework, positively affects economic development in all six nations. The effect of each indicator, however, differs between nations. According to the study, economic growth is positively impacted by investment and population expansion, but only to a lesser extent by trade openness and human capital. These findings suggest that countries should focus on improving institutional quality to foster economic growth, and that policies aimed at promoting population growth and investment may also be effective in driving economic growth.

Related Literature Relating to Institutional Factors and Mortality Rate

[13], examined the influence of institutional quality on the mortality rate and development of Nigerian economy in the 21st century using annual time series data covering 2001 to 2019. The data for the variables were checked against unit root problems using ADF unit root test and all the variables were either integrated of I(1) or I(0). Consequently, the Pesaran, Shin, and Smith (PSS) Bounds test was employed and it confirmed the existence of a long-run relationship among the variables of the study. The Auto-Regressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model was utilized and the study found that Institutional Quality (INSQ) exerts a significant negative influence on economic growth. The error correction term was negative and statistically significant implying that the economic growth was capable of reverting to the long-run equilibrium path slowly in event of any disequilibrium. The study recommends improvement in the quality of the country's institutions by instituting a strong fight against corruption, increased accountability and freedom of expression, improved regulatory authority, and increased government effectiveness through improved leadership selection processes.

[20], investigated the influence of institutional factors on economic growth in ASEAN. Institutional variables include political stability, voice and accountability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption, while economic variables include exports and imports. This study utilized panel data estimation on 10 countries in ASEAN during 2002-2018. The fixed effect model was the best estimation model. The findings show that there are three keys of institutions that had a significant influence on per capita GDP on ASEAN, namely voice and accountability, regulatory quality, and rule of law. If the institutional factors were weak, it would be detrimental to economic performance. It could be that if the institutional factors are weak, it will be detrimental to economic performance. The policy implication is that the synergy of all stakeholders needs to be improved for better institutional enforcement.

[21], investigated the effect of institutional quality on mortality rate in Ghana and Nigeria, using panel data covering 1996 to 2019. Variables used in the study included the real gross domestic product growth rate, capital formation, labour force, and inflation rate, all obtained from the World Development Indicators, while the proxies for institutional quality such as government effectiveness, control of corruption and regulatory quality were obtained from the World Governance Indicators. This study carried out the unit root test, Pedroni's cointegration test and the Autoregressive Distributed Lag Model. The study established that control of corruption was very effective in Ghana while the reverse was the case in Nigeria thereby promoting economic growth in Ghana and retarding growth in Nigeria. Regulatory quality was also found to promote economic growth in Nigeria, whereas it retarded growth in Ghana. This study also found that there was government ineffectiveness which retarded economic growth in both countries. Finally, the study recommended that the Nigerian Government should intensify control of corruption by stipulating stiffer penalties, while the Ghanaian Government should improve upon regulatory quality in order to stimulate economic growth. Finally, National Governments of both countries should introduce a policy on business process re-engineering backed by political will in order to improve government effectiveness with a view to accelerating economic growth.

2. Methodology

Model I

To ascertain the effect of institutional factors on literacy level in Nigeria, we specify and have:

$$PSE = \Omega_0 + \Omega_1 RULE + \Omega_2 REGQ + \Omega_3 COC + \Omega_4 DOM + \Omega_5 FDI + \Omega_6 LAB + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Where

PSE = Primary School Enrolment, proxy for Literacy level

RULE = Rule of Law as a proxy for Institutional Quality, measured by its index.

REGQ = Regulatory quality requirements as a proxy for Institutional Quality, measured by its index.

COC = Control of corruption as a proxy for Institutional Quality, measured by its index.

DOM = Domestic Investment as control variable.

FDI = Foreign Direct Investment as control variable.

LAB = Labour force participation rate as control variable.

" ε " is the stochastic disturbance term representing all factors that have influence on the dependent variable but which are not explicitly taken into account.

" Ω_0 " denotes the intercept term, that is, the mean or average effect on dependent variable of all the variables excluded from the model, especially when all the explanatory variables are set at zero values.

Model II

To investigate the effect of institutional factors on infant mortality rate in Nigeria, we again modify and have:

$$IMR = \Omega_0 + \Omega_1 RULE + \Omega_2 REGQ + \Omega_3 COC + \Omega_4 DOM + \Omega_5 FDI + \Omega_6 LAB + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

Where

IMR = Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births) and other variables as defined earlier

3. Results

Presentation and Discussion of Objective Two Results

The first objective of the study is to ascertain the effect of institutional factors on literacy level in Nigeria. Following the model specified in equation 1, the regression result of the study dealing with the objective is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Result of Model I (Dependent Variable = PSE, Proxy for Literacy Level)

Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic	Prob.
RULE	-21.48554	-3.365606	0.0042
REGQ	18.99488	2.633560	0.0188
COC	2.059361	2.178683	0.0457
DOM	0.362159	2.422350	0.0285
FDI	-4.569130	-3.105497	0.0072
LAB	-0.079288	-1.243948	0.2326
R-squared	0.562038		
Durbin-Watson stat	2.3093881		

Source: E-Views 10 Output

From Table 1, the R^2 of 0.56 shows that about 56% of the total variation on the primary school enrolment (PSE) is jointly caused by variations in rule of law (RULE), regulatory quality (REGQ), control of corruption (COC), domestic investment (DOM) foreign direct investment (FDI), and labour force participation rate (LAB). The remaining 44% were explained by factors outside the model. Since majority of the factors causing changes on the dependent variable, this is considered a good fit for the model. The value of Durbin-Watson test statistic being approximately 2 shows absence of autocorrelation. This implies that the model is good and the result reliable for robust policy impact.

Notably, except for labour force participation rate, all the variables significantly affect the primary school enrolment (PSE), which is further a potential economic growth indicator. While all the other institutional factors for the study are well behaved, only the rule of law showed a negative sign. Also, foreign direct investment and labour force participation rate do not adhere to the a priori expectation. Specifically, the result reveals that keeping all other variables constant, a unit improvement in the rule of law sees literacy level declines by about 21 units. This is contrary to expectation that with strengthened rule of law, literacy level will improve thereby fostering economic growth. The study further reveals that regulatory quality promotes literacy level. Specifically, a unit improvement in regulatory quality sees literacy level improved by about 19 unit. The expectation further is that this will foster economic growth. Again, control of corruption is seen to improve literacy level in the country. For a unit improvement to control of corruption, literacy level improved by 2 units. Though of expected direction, control of corruption is seen to have a very little impact on the improvement to literacy level in the country. Similarly, domestic investment is of expected direction yet very little impact to literacy level in the country. Contrary to expectation, the foreign direct investment declines literacy level in the country. The result revealed that for increase inflow by a unit, literacy level declines by about 4 units. The labour force participation rate is not statistically significant and also of wrong sign.

Presentation and Discussion of Objective Two Results

The second objective of the study is to ascertain the effect of institutional factors on infant mortality rate in Nigeria. Infant mortality rate is also another factor that determines sustainability of economic growth. Following the model specified in equation 2, the regression result of the study dealing with the objective is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Result of Model II (Dependent Variable = IMR, Proxy for Infant Mortality Rate)

Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic	Prob.
RULE	0.028073	0.027629	0.9783
REGQ	2.247676	2.101653	0.0499
COC	-0.025719	-0.148222	0.8838
DOM	-0.046206	-2.392363	0.0279
FDI	-0.697961	-3.170639	0.0053
LAB	0.029549	2.487300	0.0229
R-squared	0.637615		
Durbin-Watson stat	2.451193		

Source: E-Views 10 Output

From Table 2, the value of the R^2 indicates that about 63% of the changes in infant mortality rate is caused by the changes in rule of law (RULE), regulatory quality (REGQ), control of corruption, (COC), domestic investment (DOM), foreign direct investment (FDI), and labour force participation rate (LAB). This means that about 27% of that variation in the model is caused by other factors not captured in the model. This represents a good fit to the model. Again, the value of the Durbin-Watson, which is approximately 2 indicates the absence of autocorrelation on the residuals. These are good results for depending the outcome of the values in the regression. Surprisingly, it is only one of the institutional factors (regulatory quality) that is statistically significant and of the expected sign. Rule of law (RULE) and control of corruption (COC) are not statistically significant and thus are not robust variables in explaining what happens to infant mortality rate in Nigeria. The control variables are statistically significant but only labour force participation rate that concurred to the a priori expectation.

Clearly, the result of model II reveals that rule of law is not statistically significant. This means that plans and programmes within the framework of the rule of law are not targeting infant mortality rate. However, regulatory quality shows to significantly improve on the infant mortality rate in the country. From the result, a unit improvement on the regulatory quality results to about 2 units improvement on the infant mortality rate. Control of corruption is not only insignificant but also of wrong sign. This implies that control of corruption is not targeting improving infant mortality rate. Further, the control variables of domestic investment, foreign direct investment and labour force participation rate are all statistically significant at 5% level. However, their impact towards improving infant mortality rates are small and dwindling, except for labour force participation rate.

4. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following policy recommendations are proffered.

1. Rule of law should be strengthened in the country. The result shows that rule of law is significant in deteriorating literacy level in Nigeria. The political elites and the rich should not bend the arm of law towards ensuring increasing literacy level in the country because of the importance of a knowledgeable citizen. This will help the workability of institutional framework in restoring the country to the path of sustainable growth.
2. The regulatory requirement is significant in promoting both literacy level and infant mortality rate in the country. The implication of this is that some laws made are enforced. This should be sustained and further reviewed especially considering the dynamic nature of variable like infant mortality rate. Again, our law makers and other stakeholders of government policies should reassess the laws to ascertain their suitability in chatting the cause of economic development in the country. Further, adequate monitoring and evaluation of the relevant laws should be a routine task of certain officers to ensure that the planned economic development is attained.
3. Further, the control of corruption should be redesigned for effectiveness. The variable shows insignificant contribution towards promoting infant mortality rate. This could be as a result of many Nigerians accepting some corrupt practices as a norm and a way of life. The National Orientation Agencies (NOA), the media, Schools and religious bodies should intensify the crusade and fight against corruption. The slogan of "Kill corruption before corruption kills us" should be enshrined in the system. The society should start by seeing corruption as a cankerworm and menace to economic growth.
4. The institutional variables shows significant influence towards literacy level in the country. However, rule of law greatly deteriorates the literacy level. The adherence to rule of law should start from the judiciary gaining the trust of the people. Therefore the judiciary should rise up and uphold the integrity of their profession and be true in the discharge of justice in the country.

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