



ATTITUDE OF UNDERGRADUATES TOWARDS GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN SOUTH WEST, NIGERIA

Akinlade B. K (Ph.D)¹, Onipede, A. A (Ph.D)²

Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the perceptions of undergraduate students regarding governmental involvement in environmental matters within the Southwestern region of Nigeria. Furthermore, this research analyzed the variances in the perceptions of undergraduates concerning governmental interventions in environmental issues within Southwestern Nigeria, specifically considering gender and institutional affiliation. A descriptive survey research design was utilized in the execution of this study. The participant population consisted of all university undergraduates situated in Southwestern Nigeria. A sample comprising 1752 male and female undergraduates from Federal, State, and Private universities was employed for the analysis. A multistage sampling technique was applied for the selection of the sample. The instrument utilized for data collection was the "Questionnaire on Attitude of Undergraduates towards Government Interventions in Environmental Issues (QAUGIEI). The validity of this instrument was affirmed through both face and content validity assessments, while the reliability of the QAUGIEI was determined via the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding an alpha coefficient of 0.74, which is regarded as sufficiently high and reliable for the purposes of this study. The administration of the instrument was conducted by the researcher, assisted by one research aide at each of the selected universities. The data acquired for this study were analyzed employing both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, means, and percentages, were utilized to address the research questions, whereas inferential statistics, specifically t-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), were employed to evaluate the hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05. The results of the study indicated that university undergraduates possessed a favorable attitude towards governmental interventions in environmental issues within Southwestern Nigeria. Additionally, the findings disclosed a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of male and female undergraduates regarding governmental interventions in environmental matters, as well as a significant discrepancy in the attitudes of undergraduates based on the ownership of their universities. In light of the findings of this study, it is recommended that university administrations enhance their efforts towards environmental education programs to furnish students with comprehensive knowledge that will positively influence their attitudes towards governmental interventions in environmental issues, irrespective of their gender or university affiliation..

KEY WORDS: Attitude, Undergraduates, Government Interventions, Environmental Issues, Gender, Ownership of University

The term environment encompasses all natural resources along with those created by humans in their pursuit of a meaningful and comfortable existence (Arikenbi, Ainakhuaghor, Ikharo & Jimba, 2023). This definition includes all elements that influence human life in various capacities—land, water, air, flora, and built structures. In the pursuit of economic advancement, which aims to amplify economic output without regard for the immediate and enduring repercussions on human and material resources resulting from such endeavors, human and national activities often dominate and devastate the planet rather than preserve it for current and future generations. Advancements in agriculture, industry, transportation, and technology are frequently utilized as indicators of a nation's economic progress. However, these human endeavors have engendered detrimental consequences for all living entities

within the biosphere. The rapid pace of industrialization has resulted in polluted waterways, tainted soils, diminished wildlife populations, and depleted natural resources. Consequently, the contemporary environment has become tainted, contaminated, and detrimental to the health of all living organisms, including humans (Akinlade 2024). The insatiable avarice associated with the exploitation of nature's abundant resources by humanity has disrupted the ecological equilibrium that exists between biotic and abiotic components on the planet. This adverse state, instigated by human actions, poses a threat to both human survival and that of other organisms on Earth (Bhasin, 2011). Hence, environmental issues represent the detrimental impacts of anthropogenic activities on the biophysical environment (Eccleson and March 2010). Environmental degradation has surfaced as a critical concern in contemporary society. The



global community is now increasingly alarmed by numerous environmental dilemmas, such as climate change, ozone layer depletion, and global warming. A significant portion of these issues can be attributed to irresponsible environmental behaviors, heavily influenced by prevailing societal attitudes (Meinhold and Malkus 2005). Nigeria, too, grapples with its own intricate environmental challenges that have contributed to degradation and promoted education aimed at sustainable living. Human pursuits for an elevated quality of life, facilitated by scientific and technological advancements, have precipitated various environmental dilemmas. These include overpopulation, escalating pollution, the devastation wrought by toxic spills and waste disposal, extensive deforestation of global forests for commercial exploitation, the detrimental impacts of numerous oil spills, and the destruction of wildlife habitats to accommodate human development, among others (Ehrabor and Don 2016). Such activities are prevalent in Nigeria and lead to numerous environmental crises or repercussions, including loss of biodiversity, threats to food security, damage from flooding, soil erosion, desertification, poor environmental health, and social discord stemming from restricted access to water and land rights.

The imperative to safeguard the environment and achieve sustainable development has catalyzed the creation and enforcement of environmental policies intended to regulate human activities. Frequently, human actions result in environmentally unfriendly practices that degrade the ecosystem, thereby diminishing the Earth's capacity to sustain life.. Given the significance of environmental policy, its formulation, and implementation in Nigeria, the persistent environmental challenges within the nation necessitate a review of existing environmental policies. These policies encompass the legislations, standards, regulations, and administrative frameworks employed to mitigate activities with potentially detrimental effects on Nigeria's environment. Environmental laws address diverse pollutants, including toxic chemicals and noise, regulate activities such as mining and power generation, and provide overarching guidelines for the protection of fundamental natural resources, such as air, land, and water (Eneh, 2010).

Attitude, as a mental and neurological state of preparedness shaped by experience, exerts a directive influence on an individual's responses to objects and situations. This indicates that attitude reflects an individual's cognitive and behavioral disposition towards a given subject or issue. Consequently, environmental attitude embodies an individual's mode of thinking and acting concerning environmental matters (Kent in Ezeudu, Ezeudu & Sampson 2016). It encapsulates the feelings and concerns an individual holds regarding environmental changes, extending to general ecological sentiments, specific environmental issue concerns, and inclinations toward remediation efforts (Lidskog, Soneeryd & Uggla 2013). Behavior is significantly influenced by attitudes derived from life experiences and education” (Ewert and Galloway 2004), a

prerequisite for fostering positive environmental attitudes. Achieving behavioral changes pertaining to a specific issue requires a modification of attitudes towards that same issue (Maleki & Karimzadeh, 2011). Attitude towards environmental protection is a critical element within environmental safeguard psychology (Sarkar 2011), representing a psychological tendency to evaluate the environmental gender attitude favorably or unfavorably (Ojomo and Olawuyi 2019)..

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study examined the attitude of undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A research question was raised to guide this study:

What is the attitude of undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Two research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between attitude of male and female undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues.
2. There is no significant difference in attitude of undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues based on the ownership of University.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a descriptive research design of the survey type. The participant population comprised 872,100 undergraduate students (both male and female) enrolled in 17 public and 27 private universities located in the Southwestern region of Nigeria (NUC, 2023). The sample for this research included 1752 undergraduates, who were selected through a multistage sampling procedure. The initial stage utilized a simple random sampling technique to identify three of the six states within Southwest Nigeria, specifically Ogun, Oyo, and Ekiti. The subsequent stage employed a stratified random sampling technique to select three universities from each state, categorized by ownership type, including one federal, one state, and one private institution. The final stage utilized a proportional random sampling technique to choose undergraduates from each university. A single instrument, developed by the researcher, was utilized for data collection in this investigation. This instrument was designated as the “Questionnaire on Attitude of Undergraduates towards Government Interventions in Environmental Issues” (QAUGIEI).

The QAUGIEI comprised two sections, labeled A and B. Section A gathered demographic data from respondents, such as their gender and the name of their university. Section B included 15 items that assessed undergraduates' attitudes towards



governmental interventions in environmental matters, with responses evaluated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) –4, Agree (A) –3, Disagree (D) –2, to Strongly Disagree (SD) –1. The instrument's face and content validity were thoroughly established, while its reliability was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha reliability method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.73. The data collected were analyzed employing both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Research questions were addressed descriptively through frequency counts, means, standard deviations, and percentages. Hypotheses were examined using inferential statistics, including ANOVA, with all hypotheses tested at a significance level of 0.05..

RESULTS

Question: What is the attitude of undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues?

To determine undergraduates’ attitude towards government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria, (Positive or Negative) scores of item 1-15 of section B of QAUGIEI was subjected to frequency count, percentage and mean rating. The negative attitude was determined by scores below the mean cut off point (2.50) while the positive was determined by the mean cut off and above. The result is presented in Table 1

Table 1: Frequency counts and Mean rating of undergraduates’ attitude towards government interventions in environmental issues

Item	N	SA		A		D		SD		Mean	Remark
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I observe environmental sanitation	1695	852	50.3	753	44.4	84	5.0	6	0.4	3.45	Positive
I obey environmental pollution control law	1725	831	48.2	783	45.4	90	5.2	21	1.2	3.41	Positive
I obey government law against open defecation because it will not help in preventing environmental issues	1707	831	48.9	642	37.6	195	11.4	36	2.1	3.34	Positive
I obey law against bush burning because it will stop people from burning bushes	1698	573	33.7	813	47.9	258	15.2	54	3.2	3.12	Positive
I obey law against the indiscriminate dumping of waste	1680	693	41.3	702	41.8	249	14.8	36	2.1	3.22	Positive
I obey the law against effluent	1650	612	37.1	807	48.9	180	10.9	51	3.1	3.20	Positive
I obey law on the recycling of waste because it will prevent environmental issues	1689	861	51.0	666	39.4	153	9.1	9	0.5	3.41	Positive
I obey law against the improper dumping of waste	1716	852	49.7	714	41.6	126	7.3	24	1.4	3.40	Positive
I obey the law of river basin development authority because it will help in protecting water bodies and conserve water	1713	789	46.1	816	47.6	102	6.0	6	0.4	3.39	Positive
I obey the regulations against the illegal cutting of trees which will help in preventing erosion	1713	756	44.1	810	47.3	129	7.5	18	1.1	3.35	Positive
I observe laws of guiding ecological fund because it has help in the prevention of environmental issues	1665	696	41.8	798	47.9	150	9.0	21	1.3	3.30	Positive
I observe laws guiding ecological fund because it will help in the prevention of drought and desertification	1677	600	35.8	897	53.5	177	10.6	3	0.2	3.25	Positive
I observe government policies on environmental protection because it is effective	1680	669	39.8	765	45.5	213	12.7	33	2.0	3.23	Positive



I obey the laws guiding creation of waste management agencies by the government because it yielded good result	1728	642	37.2	918	53.1	150	8.7	18	1.0	3.26	<i>Positive</i>
I obey law against the unlawful falling down of trees because it will prevent erosion and desertification	1734	816	47.1	777	44.8	111	6.4	30	1.7	3.37	<i>Positive</i>
Mean Cut off = 2.50											

The information in Table 1 further showed that 94.7% of the respondents agreed to observing monthly environmental sanitation. Also, 93.6% of the respondents often times obey environmental pollution control law while 90.4% of the respondents obey law on the recycling of waste because it will prevent environmental issues. In addition, 91.3% of the respondents obey law against improper dumping of waste. The table further showed that the law of river basin development authority to conserve water bodies, regulations against the illegal cutting of trees which will help in preventing erosion, laws of guiding ecological fund for the prevention of environmental issues as well as laws guiding ecological fund for the prevention of drought and desertification are oftentimes obeyed as agreed upon by 93.7%, 91.4%, 89.7% and 89.3% of the respondents respectively. Finally, 90.3% of the respondents

agreed to obey the laws guiding creation of waste management agencies by the government while 91.9% agreed to obey law against the unlawful falling down of trees in order to prevent erosion and desertification. The information in table shows that participants had positive attitude toward all the 15 items. Thus, the overall attitude of participants was considered positive.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between attitude of male and female undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues.

To test this hypothesis, scores on male and female undergraduates' attitude towards government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria were collated and subjected to t-test. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: t-test showing difference in attitude of male and female undergraduates towards government intervention in environmental issues

<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>t_{cal}</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Male	732	48.95	7.002	1750	3.405*	0.001
Female	1020	47.63	8.517			

P < 0.05

The result in table 2 shows that $t_{cal} = 3.405$; $P = 0.001 < 0.05$. Since the P value is less than 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference in attitude of male and female undergraduates towards government intervention in environmental issues.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in attitude of undergraduates towards government intervention in environmental issues based on the ownership of University.

To test this hypothesis, scores on undergraduates' attitude towards government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria based on forms of ownership were collated and subjected to ANOVA. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: ANOVA showing difference in undergraduates' attitude towards government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria based on forms of ownership of university

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Between Groups	1146.552	2	573.276		
Within Groups	109164.101	1749	62.415	9.185*	0.000
Total	110310.652	1751			

P < 0.05

Information contained in table 13 shows that $F_{cal} = 9.185$; $P = 0.000 < 0.05$. Since the P value is less than 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference in undergraduates' attitude towards government interventions in environmental issues based on the ownership of

University. To determine the source of significant difference, Scheffe Posthoc analysis was carried out. The result is presents in Table 4.

**Table 4: Scheffe Post-hoc analysis of undergraduates' attitude towards government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria based on forms of ownership of university**

Variables	1	2	3	N	Mean
1. Federal		*		846	47.42
2. State	*			678	48.12
3. Private				228	48.57

P < 0.05)

The information in table 4 showed that significant difference only existed in the attitude of federal and state university undergraduates towards government intervention in environmental issues.

DISCUSSION

The finding of the study also showed that there is a positive attitude and willingness among respondents to comply with various laws and regulations related to environmental issues. The positive attitude and willingness to comply with environmental laws and regulations is promising for environmental management and conservation efforts. It suggests that a combination of awareness, perceived benefits, social norms, trust in government, and personal values may be driving this positive behavior. Promoting and sustaining this optimistic disposition is paramount for the enduring protection and management of the environment.

The pronounced levels of consensus regarding adherence to regulations related to environmental sanitation, pollution control, waste management, safeguarding of aquatic ecosystems, mitigation of erosion and desertification, as well as the establishment of waste management agencies, signify a collective recognition of the significance of these initiatives in safeguarding the environment and advancing sustainable practices. This observation aligns with the findings of Ewert and Golloway (2004), who determined that individuals exhibiting a favorable disposition towards waste management regulations demonstrated a greater propensity to engage in responsible waste disposal practices, encompassing appropriate waste segregation and recycling. Furthermore, Karabulut and Alpkan (2013) established that individuals possessing elevated levels of environmental awareness and affirmative attitudes towards environmental regulations were more inclined to adhere to waste management and pollution control protocols. These findings illustrate that individuals with constructive attitudes towards environmental regulations are more predisposed to partake in pro-environmental behaviors and comply with specific measures pertinent to waste management, pollution mitigation, and environmental conservation.

The results of the study revealed a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of male and female undergraduates regarding governmental intervention in environmental matters. This observation suggests that gender constitutes a critical factor in influencing how students perceive and react to governmental initiatives in the context of environmental conservation. These gender-specific variations in attitudes accentuate the necessity

for tailored educational and advocacy approaches that acknowledge and address these divergences, ultimately promoting more inclusive and efficacious environmental policies and programs. Potential explanations for this observation may be grounded in societal norms and expectations, discrepancies in individual experiences and exposure to environmental challenges, as well as differences in the pedagogical methods employed to teach or communicate environmental topics, all of which can shape students' attitudes towards governmental interventions in environmental issues. This finding corroborates prior research investigating gender disparities in environmental attitudes. For instance, a study conducted by Ojomo and Olawuyi (2019) examined gender differences in environmental attitudes among undergraduate students in Nigeria, revealing that females generally demonstrated more affirmative attitudes towards environmental concerns and exhibited a greater likelihood of endorsing governmental interventions in comparison to their male counterparts.

In a similar vein, a study by Salladarré and Lazzarotti (2017) explored gender disparities in environmental attitudes and behaviors among university students in Italy. The results indicated that females exhibited higher levels of pro-environmental attitudes and were more inclined to engage in environmental actions, including endorsing governmental interventions, relative to males. These studies underscore the impact of gender in shaping individuals' perceptions regarding governmental interventions in environmental matters. Factors such as variations in values, beliefs, and socialization experiences may play a role in contributing to these gender differences in attitudes.

The finding of the study showed that there is significant difference in undergraduates' attitude towards government interventions in environmental issues based on the ownership of University. This finding highlights the potential impact of institutional factors, such as the ownership and governance structure of the university, on shaping students' attitudes towards environmental issues and the role of the government. Public and private universities often have distinct characteristics, funding sources, and organizational cultures, which can shape students' beliefs and values regarding environmental conservation and the effectiveness of government interventions. The finding corroborated Sarkar (2011) who conducted a study on students' environmental attitudes using Bangladesh as case study. He found that students in less dense populated school like the private universities contexts had a slightly higher level of



environmental attitudes than that of the students in public universities. This finding seems to be somewhat interesting, however, Sarkar (2011) revealed in his study that people in less dense populated area like the private schools have much more opportunities to contact with nature and less access to the media than public schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the variations in attitude of undergraduates based on university ownership, indicating the influence of institutional factors on students' views of government interventions.

Recommendations

1. Management of universities, irrespective of ownership should empower undergraduates irrespective of gender, to take the lead in organizing environmental initiatives and projects within their universities. This can include organizing tree planting events, waste management campaigns, and other sustainability initiatives. By actively involving students, they can become agents of change and ambassadors for government interventions in environmental issues.

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