ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS, ATTITUDE AND PERCEPTION OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ONITSHA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA.

[1]Uzoamaka Rita Onyeizugbe, [2]Valerie Chinedu Nnodu, [3]Okolo Ngozi Virginia, [4]Alom Anselem Chukwuma, [5]Emeka Vivian Okeke, [6]Ihekwoaba Ebelechukwu Nwaoma

[1,2,3,4,5]Department of Environmental Management, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria [6]Department of Environmental Health Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Nnewi Campus, Nigeria

Corresponding email: ru.onyeizugbe@unizik.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Awareness is crucial to accelerating positive human behaviours towards the environment. This study assessed the environmental awareness level of senior secondary school students in Onitsha South Local Government area of Anambra State Nigeria. The specific objectives were to: assess environmental awareness level; environmental attitude and perception of some basic environmental terms of senior secondary school students in the study area. Survey method was used for this research. One category of questionnaire was distributed in eight secondary schools in the study area. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part sought information on awareness level of the students, while the second part sought information on the attitude of the students toward the environment, the third part sought information on perception of the students on some basic environmental terms. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed in the study area. Stratified sampling technique was used to distribute the questionnaire. The four communities in Onitsha south formed the stratum. Two schools were randomly picked from each community. The study concluded that the students have a very low awareness, attitude and perception towards environmental issues and concerns. The study further suggested some measures that would help save the situation which include: intensive environmental awareness programmes in secondary schools, inculcating environmental studies in secondary school curriculum, engaging qualified teachers to engage the students in environmental management classes, formation of environmental clubs in all secondary schools among others.

Key Words: Environment, Awareness, Environmental attitude, Perception, Secondary Schools.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Human relationship with the environment is vital to environmental protection. Environmental education and awareness are crucial to accelerating recovery from irreversible imbalances and environmental changes accrued as a result of human activities on planet earth.

Population explosion, excessive consumption, uncoordinated urbanization, expanding industrialisation and other human choices have continued to exacerbate environmental problems[1]. These problems include global warming, ozone layer depletion, soil erosion, flooding, drought, pollution, desertification, siltation of water bodies, landslides, emerging zoonotic diseases, poor agricultural yield, loss of biological species, forest loss among others. Humans are regularly exploiting environmental resources without adequate planning and ecological thinking[2]. According to World Health Organisation 2020 report on global diseases, 'the major cause of emergent diseases and leading cause of human death globally is environmental changes [3]. Humans are causing these changes through their actions. Therefore change of attitude and intensive awareness creation is an imperative need of the hour.

After 1972 United Nations conference on Human Environment held in Stockholm, several other conferences on the environment have been held to raise awareness on environmental issues and concerns. However, environmental problems levels have continued to rise globally [4]. Why? Could it be that awareness creation is not targeted to the required category of people at the right time/stage of their lives? Could it be that Primary and secondary school students are not carried along in this safe environment campaigns? Is it necessary to apply an adage that says 'catch them young' in our environmental awareness creation efforts in order to have a future generation that will become truly environmental conscious in their human activities?

In Nigeria, some cities have recorded worst level of environmental hazards such as PM_{10} pollution, but these hazards are not taken seriously [5]. Onitsha City in Nigeria is the most polluted in the World with about thirty times more than the recommended small and fine Particulate Matter (PM)[6]. Onitsha is grossly polluted, not just in terns of the air quality but also solid waste that litters the streets, blocked drainages and canals with the resultant effect of flooding during rainfall. There seem to be a 'throw it into the street or drainage syndrome' in the ancient City. To investigate further into these problems, this study seeks to assess the environmental awareness level of senior secondary school students in Onitsha South Local Government Area(LGA) of Anambra, State Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: assess the environmental awareness level of the students; assess the attitude of the students toward environmental concerns; evaluate the perception of the students on some basic environmental terms and finally make some suggestions according to data obtained in the three objectives above.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Environment: Environment within the context of this study is natural landscape together with all of its human and non-human features and processes. A space where networks of relationships, interconnections and interactions between entities occur.

Environmental Awareness: Environmental awareness in this research means consciousness of the problems and dangers facing mankind and the environment and of the pressing need for a positive action and control to halt the undesirable impact of human activities and demand upon the environment. Simply put, it means knowledge and understanding of facts and concepts related to environment and consequences of various environmental problems.

Environmental Attitude: For the purpose of this research, environmental attitude means reaction or response towards stimuli with regards to the environment. Attitude predicts intentions and overt behaviours. According to the theory of planned behaviours, people act in accordance with their intentions, while intentions are influenced by attitudes.

Perception: awareness or feelings about a thing. It refers to the act of apprehending by senses. Perception of environmental terms in this study simply means the way individuals process, evaluate and store information received about the environment. It means feelings and understanding about the environment.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design used for this study was survey design. A questionnaire survey was used to obtained the opinion of the respondents and inferences made at the end of the survey. One category of questionnaire consisting of three parts was distributed. Stratified sampling technique was used. The four communities (Housing Estate, Fegge, Odoapku and Woliwo communities) in Onitsha South LGA formed the stratum. Two secondary schools were randomly selected from each stratum for the study. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to senior students of final year class of all schools sampled. Fifty questionnaires was distributed in each school. The fifty questionnaires for each school were distributed proportionate to number of final year classes and students in each class.

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Environmental awareness, attitude and perception of senior secondary school students were tested using questionnaire survey and result obtained showed a very low level of awareness, attitude and perception from table 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

Table 1: Environmental Awareness Level of the Sampled Students

Environmental Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pesticides used in farms can pollute our soils and water bodies	0	0	321	79	0
Excessive deforestation results to desertification, climate change, flood, soil erosion and loss biological species	0	2	103	297	0
Indiscriminate dumping of solid waste can cause flooding and release of toxins into the environment.	52	215	34	98	1
Carbon monoxide from engines causes global warming	4	25	322	45	4
Sand mining and stone quarrying causes landslides and gully erosion	67	16	109	112	96
Discarding plastic waste into water bodies affects aquatic life and pollutes the water body	15	11	89	201	84

Table 2: Attitude of Secondary School Students Towards the Environment

S/N	**Attitude of Secondary**	**Yes**	**No**
1	Do you always discard refuse into a waste bin?	189	211
2	Do you re-use outdated newspapers?	2	288
3	Do you always turn off unnecessary bulbs/lights at	52	348

	home		
4	Do you feed animals with left over foods	116	284
5	Do you get a new shopping bag for each shopping?	374	26
6	Would you rather burn a piece of land for planting of crops	325	75

Table 3: Perception of Students towards Some Environmental Terms

S/N	Environmental Terms and meaning	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Idea	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1	Ecology: Study of relationship between Organism and their physical environment	9	70	263	37	21
2	Biodiversity: Variety of Plant and Animal life in the World.	14	86	199	51	50
3	Desertification: Permanent loss of vegetative covers	68	209	52	31	40
4	Sustainability: Ability to utilized today and tomorrow and still be in good form	0	16	314	43	27
5	Environmental Degradation: Destroying the quality of the Environment	2	111	199	36	52

The tables above showed that students are not abreast with environmental terms, concerns and issues, thus showing low level of environmental illiteracy among the students. This finding is in synchrony with a research by McGreen and Achhard 2018, which revealed an alarming gap in environmental illiteracy among junior high school students in Belarus.

From the result obtained in table 1, the respondents are not aware of environmental issues. Findings agrees with UNEP (2012) which emphasized the need to inculcate environmental stewardship in students. It is important to begin early enough to teach our young students about

green environment, if we must have a society that are environmentally conscious/friendly. Table 2 shows that the attitudes of the students are not environmentally friendly

The research revealed that the general thinking and acting by young students of Onitsha South LGA towards good quality of environment is low. It is important not to overlook this trend, rather effort should be made to improve on their feelings and concern towards the environment. This will help to eradicate most environmental problems in Onitsha and environs. Secondary school students that are fully aware of the consequences of their action towards the environment is equal to a future generation of people that will remain environmental conscious in their actions. Thus resulting to a better or reduces environmental crises, it will result to having a set of people that will willingly renege from activities that are harmful to the environment. In secondary schools, relevant topics such as environmental pollution, environmental hazards, natural and human resource management, land degradation, climate change, sanitation, effects of industrial concentration, among others can be infused into the curriculum. These subjects are used to promote students awareness towards their environment and at the same time develop in the students environmentally friendly attitudes. For a better and safer environmental for now and future generation. Some of these students after secondary education, go into various disciplines that do not learn anything in environmental management hence, secondary education is the opportunity or place where they should be taught properly about environmental issues and concerns.

The consequences of land degradation, deforestation, pollution explosion, desertification, water and air pollution among others have started manifesting in the form of drought, temperature rise, flooding, low agricultural yield (food shortage) siltation of water bodies, gully erosion, among others. To curtail the environmental problems, environmental related contents should be infused in secondary school curriculum. Secondary school students can contribute to the fight against environmental degradation through what they learn from their classrooms.

5.0 CONCLUSION

1) Awareness among the senior secondary school students in Onitsha South LGA is very low.
2) Their attitude towards the environment is not environmentally friendly. Environmental ethics and responsibility is not considered in their day to day affairs.
3) Their perception of some basic terms in environmental management is quite appalling.

4) There is need to put in more efforts in sensitizing our students on the need and importance of environmental management

Educating students about the human environment and creating environmental awareness among the masses is very important need of the hour.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations were made

1. Qualified teachers must be enrolled into secondary school system in order to give students what is expected.
2. School gardens and green areas have a great deal in creating environmental awareness consciousness among secondary school students because it will bring to the students different varieties of plants and animals which needs to be conserved and serenity of a green environment
3. Environmental awareness programs should be organized in schools. This will help the students to develop environmental awareness skills and also have solutions to different types of environmental treats.
4. Environmental clubs should be organized in secondary schools. This will help the students to be a good environmental stewards

REFERENCES

[1] Boiyo, K. V. (2019). Environmental Participation Among Secondary School Students: A Comparative Study of Kasarani and Kibera Division, Nairobi County, Kenya (Masters thesis, Kenyatta university).

[2] Fien, J. (2021). Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education. *International Journal of Environment, Energy and Sustainable Development 3(3), 243-253.*

[3] Chelsea S., Jennifer E. (2020). How to Go Green: Creating a Conservation Culture through Education, Modelling, and Communication. *Journal of Environmental Education Volume 43, Issue 3, 2020*

[4] Chinedu, C. (2021). Environmental Education of Secondary School Students in Owerri Education Zone, Imo State. M.ED. Project of the Department of Science Education, UNN.

[5] Porteous, J.D. (2018). Environment and Behaviour: Planning and Everyday Life. Boston USA, Addison. Wesley Publishing Company.

[6] Robinson, J. O. (2013). Environmental Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Breaking the Missing Link. *International Journal of Education and Research Vol.1 No 5.*

[7] United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)(2021). 21 Issues for the 21st Century: UNEP Report on Climate Change Across the Globe.

[8] World Health Organization (WHO) (2010). Environmental Health Report. Retrieved from www.WHO/enviromental/health/pdf.org

[9] MCgreen and Achhand (2018). The Concept of Environmental Education. Journal of EnvironmentalEducation, 1(3), 30-31.