

Perception of Ecotourism among Undergraduate Students of Agricultural Science in Tai Solarin University of Education and Olabisi Onabanjo University

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Abstract. This study investigated the perception of ecotourism among undergraduate students of Agricultural Science of Tai Solarin University of Education and Olabisi Onabanjo University. The study followed a survey design. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire from a sample of 132 respondents. It was analysed using descriptive statistics and a t-test. Participation in ecotourism was found to be high (55.3%). Visitation, sightseeing and trekking were the modal ecotourism activities. Insecurity, low interest, high costs and lack of time were the main hindrances to participation in ecotourism. It was concluded that most (75%) of the respondents had a favourable disposition towards ecotourism in the study area. Significant difference ($t = -4.162$, $p = 0.000$) existed in perception of ecotourism in the two universities. Intensification of ecotourism awareness, funding of ecotourism, inclusion of ecotourism in higher education curricula, ecotourism advocacy and programmes that will encourage students' participation in ecotourism activities are recommended.

Keywords: Ecotourism; Curricula reform; Relevance.



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1 Introduction

Tourism is an ever growing industry around the world with many countries now dependent on the tourism industry within their countries for continued growth as development. It has penetrated human life as a necessity, as part created by man with man and for man. Tourism whether practiced knowingly or instinctively as one of human activities with an extensive search and development from the beginning of mankind especially now; in the 21st century. A report put out by the World Economic Forum States that there was an increase in the number of international tourism receipts from US&2.1 billion to US & 622.7 billion between 1950 and 2004. By 2006, the tourism sector accounted for 10.3% of World GDP: jobs in the industry making up 8.2% of total employment worldwide (World Tourism Analysis, 2007). The World Tourism Organization UNWTO (2016) has estimated that the industry has grown form 25 million international travellers in 1950 to over 800 million with a projection of 1.2 billion travellers by 2020. Many people involved in travel of especially to long distance to ease tension and maintain a healthy living through a change of environment devoid of all stress of life (Ojewola, 2008).

Tourism can develop and grow to her humans have positive view towards it and when they see their roles in the process of the tourism development. Ecotourism involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objectives of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its plants and animals as well as any existing cultural aspects. Honey (2008) defined ecotourism as travel to fragile pristine and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact and often on small scale. It helps educate the traveller, provide funds for conservation, upgrade the economic development and political empowerment of local communities and foster respect for different cultures. Ecotourism is a sustainable, non-invasive form of nature-based tourism that focuses primarily on learning about nature. First-hand, which is ethnically, manages to be low-impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented. It typically occurs in natural areas and should contribute to the conservation of such areas (Fennell, 2007).

Perception is socially and culturally constructed, and often interrelated with many influencing factors such as religion, cultural and ethnic background, collective pressure, laws and regulation. Accordingly, an attempt at finding out tourist or visitor knowledge and perception right from the school level particularly at higher institutions is worth the while Convelli et al, (2005) pointed out that concepts of quality as perceived by tourists including knowledge level, satisfaction and perception have rarely been applied in nature research. The submission above therefore suggests the need for investigating undergraduate students of Agricultural Science in Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED), Ijagun and Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU) Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria so as to increase student's knowledge in participation in ecotourism towards maximizing benefits derivable from ecotourism in the study area and Ogun State at large.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate perception to ecotourism among undergraduate students of Agricultural Science in TASUED and OOU Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess respondents' participation in ecotourism in the study area.
2. Determine respondents' perception of ecotourism in the study area.
3. Identify respondents' constraints to participation in ecotourism.

1.2 Hypothesis of the Study

It was hypothesised that there is no significant difference between respondents' perception of ecotourism in Tasued and OOU.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Ecotourism and sustainable development are intertwined in that conservation and preservation of the environment is crucial to attaining sustainable development

This research work is hinged on the need to address poor awareness that people have about ecotourism. The knowledge of students in higher institutions perception about ecotourism would help managers and operators of ecotourism plan the development of the industry. Proper perception of ecotourism particularly among youths in tertiary institutions is a requisite to making it a powerful instrument for preservation of nature with favourable outcome for populations.

The outcome of this research work will go a long way in assisting management of the two sampled institutions to come up with effective teaching of ecotourism towards creating more interest in ecotourism which may in the long run increasing revenue for Ogun State government through ecotourism.

2 Methodology

The study was carried out in TASUED and OOU, Ogun State, Nigeria. The target population consisted of undergraduate Agricultural Science final year students of the two institutions. Multi-stage sampling was used to select the departments and 132 respondents that were involved in the study. Data were collected by face to face interview, using a validated interview schedule from November, 2018- July, 2019. The face and content validity of the instruments were ascertained by experts. Test-retest approach was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire and a coefficient of .83 was obtained. The information collected on personal characteristics of respondents includes: age, sex, marital status and institution. Other information collected includes: respondents level of participation in ecotourism, perception to ecotourism and constraints that limit respondents participation in

ecotourism. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and the hypothesis was tested using the student t-test.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Personal Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows that most (94.7%) were within the age range of 20-30 years. This implies that respondents are matured and in their reproductive age and have vigour to engage meaningfully in ecotourism. Age is an important factor when considering participation in an activity. It has been argued that age in some instances, could be an entry criterion for livelihood activities (Ewebiyi, 2014). This result is in consonant with that of Alarape and Oladele (2018) who carried out a similar study among tertiary institution students in Abeokuta Metropolis Nigeria and reported same age distribution of their respondents. The result also implies that respondents are still in their prime ages and the quest for knowledge is expected to be high.

Sex plays a key role in any human endeavour; most of the respondents (56.8%) were males. This is at variance with Alarape and Oladele (2018) and Ogunjimi (2016) who reported more female respondents than males in their similar studies. The marital status of respondents as also indicated in table 1 showed that an overwhelming proportion (75.8%), were single, indicating or implies that respondents can fully concentrate on their studies with minimum or no distraction.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that majority of sampled respondents (62.9%) are students of OOU while (37.1%) are from TASUED Agricultural Science Department. The difference between the sampled population numerically may die to the fact that OOU is a conversional University while Tasued is a specialized University of education where various areas of Agriculture that can stand as a department merged together to form a single department.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Personal Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Age	Less than 20 years	1	0.8
	20-30 years	125	94.7
	31- 40 years	6	4.5
Sex	Male	75	56.8
	Female	57	43.2
Marital Status	Single	100	75.8
	Married	32	24.2
Institution	TASUED	49	37.1
	OOU	83	62.9

3.2 Respondents' participation in ecotourism

The result of analysis regarding respondents' participation in ecotourism as indicated in Table 2 revealed that most (59.8%) participated in ecotourism. This result is in disagreement with Guany and Akinci (2017) cited by Alarape and Oladele (2018) where less than half (38.8%) of respondents participated in ecotourism activities engaged in visitation (32.6%), sightseeing (28.0%), walking/ tracking (19.7%) and rock/mountain climbing (9.1%).

This result implies or connotes high level of students' participation in ecotourism activities. Consequently, students after graduation will be encouraged to engage in any endeavour that is associated with ecotourism. The result further showed that more than quarter respondents (34.1%) participated in ecotourism activities monthly, yearly (22.7%) and once in a while (17.4%). This may be attributed to their fair interest in ecotourism and other myriads of constraints that limit their participation in ecotourism frequently.

Table 2. Respondents' Participation in Ecotourism

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Participation in ecotourism activities	Yes	79	59.8
	No	53	40.2
Activities	Rock/ Mountain climbing	12	9.1
	Sight seeing	37	28
	Visitation	43	32.6
	Walk/ trekking	26	19.7
	Cruising	10	7.6
Frequency of participation	Fortnightly	11	8.3
	Monthly	45	34.1
	Seldom	30	22.7
	Yearly	30	22.7
	Once in a while	23	17.4

3.3 Respondents' constraints to participation in ecotourism

Respondents' participation in ecotourism in the study area associated with some challenges. Result as revealed in table 3a shows that most respondents (78.0%), (77.3%) and (72.0%) identified lack of information, lack of interest and lack of safety as severe constraints militating against meaningful participation of respondents in ecotourism. Also 67.4% and 65.2% respectively observed lack of time and high cost of embarking on ecotourism as constraints that significantly limit their participation in ecotourism. The result of categorization of respondents' constraints in table 3bS revealed that most (84.8%) observed constraints being faced in participating in ecotourism at high level. This result is in consonant with what obtained during in-depth interview where respondents affirmed that they being constrained by lack of time and high cost to engage in ecotourism. Corroborated this result Ojewola (2008) and Ogunjimi (2016) in their similar studies reported that students' of higher institution participation or engagement in ecotourism was limited due to aforementioned constraints in Nigeria. The implication of this result is that respondents' participation in ecotourism may be limited due to high constraints.

Table 3a. Respondents' Constraints to Participation in Ecotourism

Constraints	High constraint		Mild constraint		Not a constraint	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Lack of safety	103	78.0	89	67.4		
Lack of interest	102	77.3			95	72.0
High cost	86	65.2			95	72.0
Lack of time	103	78.0	89	67.4		
Lack of information	95	72.0	103	78.0		

Table 3b. Categorization of respondents based on Constraints to ecotourism

Level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD	Min.	Max
Low	112	84.4	2.4	1.9	0	10
High	20	15.2				
Total	132	100				

3.4 Perception of Ecotourism

The result in table 4a presents respondents' perception of ecotourism. It was found out that most respondents 76.5%, 74.2%, 73.5%, 72.0% and 71.2% positively perceived that ecotourism will encourage infrastructural development, bring about positive change in value system of the community and change to traditional culture. Furthermore, the result showed that most respondents 68.9%, 67.4% and 66.7% favourably disposed and asserted that ecotourism creates employment opportunity for indigenous population, enhances acculturation, promotes local culture and boosts preservation of nation integrity.

The overall result in table 4b corroborated and affirmed above findings and as well as revealed clearly that majority of the respondents' (75.0%) had favourable perception to ecotourism. This result implies that any initiation on ecotourism promotion will be welcomed by the respondents. Students are mostly youths and when they are groomed with the nitty-gritty of ecotourism while in school, they will be able to influence the larger society, thereby paving way for a better economy that is well productive and balance. This result is consistent with Mirjam (2013) who submitted in his similar study that tertiary institution students had favourable perception towards the positive economic and socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism.

Table 4a. Respondents' perception of ecotourism

	SA F %	A F %	D F %	SD F %
Ecotourism will encourage infrastructural development	101 (76.5)	22(16.7)	0 (0.0)	9(6.8)
Ecotourism brings about positive changes in values system in the community	98(74.2)	23(17.4)	2(1.5)	9(6.8)
Ecotourism bring change to traditional culture	97(73.5)	25(18.9)	1(0.8)	9(6.8)
Ecotourism creates employment opportunity for indigenous population	91(68.9)	31(23.5)	1(0.8)	9(6.8)
Ecotourism enhance acculturation	91(68.9)	26(19.7)	6(4.5)	9(6.8)
Ecotourism provides incentives for the protection and conservation of natural resources	94(71.2)	27(20.5)	3(2.3)	8(6.1)
Ecotourism promotes the conservation of wild plants and animals	94(71.2)	23(17.4)	4(3.0)	11(8.3)
Ecotourism increases recreational opportunities	95(72.0)	23(17.4)	5(3.8)	9(6.8)
Ecotourism increases revenue of local government through visitation by tourist	97(73.5)	22(16.7)	2(1.5)	11(8.3)
Ecotourism boosts preservations of nation integrity	88(66.7)	29(22.))	5(3.8)	10(7.6)
Ecotourism encourages sustenance of cultural activities by local residents	97(73.5)	21(15.9)	5(3.8)	9(6.8)
Ecotourism make awareness of the potentials of the community possible	89(67.4)	29(22.0)	2(1.5)	12(9.1)
Destruction of natural beauty by establishment or presence of hotel and other tourist facilities	91(68.9)	24(18.2)	5(3.8)	12(9.1)
Ecotourism promotes erosion of local culture preserving	90(68.2)	28(21.2)	2(1.5)	12(9.1)

Table 4b. Categorization of respondents based on perception of ecotourism

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD	Min.	Max
Unfavourable	33	25	35.5	10.2	1	42
Favourable	99	75				
Total	132	100				

3.5 Perception of Ecotourism by Institution

The result of analysis of difference between students' perception of ecotourism in TASUED and OOU in table 5 revealed that there is significant difference in ecotourism perception of students of TASUED and OOU ($t= 4.162, p= 0.000$). This may be due to difference in their interest in ecotourism as revealed in earlier findings of this study and myriads of constraints militating against their effective participation in ecotourism activities.

Table 5. Difference in students' perception of ecotourism by institution

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
TASUED	49	-5.25	8.82	4.81	-4.162	0.000	Significant
OOU	83						

3.6 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated perception of ecotourism among undergraduate students of Agricultural science in TASUED, Ijagun and OOU, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria. Result showed that most respondents were males that are still in their prime ages and quest for high knowledge through ecotourism. Their level of participation in ecotourism was found to be moderately high among 55.3%. Lack of safety, interest, high cost and inadequate infrastructural facilities were severe constraints hindering respondents' effective participation in ecotourism activities in the study area. Respondents' perception of ecotourism was favourable among agricultural students in TASUED and OOU. The following recommendations are made:

1. Government and NGOs should provide adequate funding for promotion and accessibility of ecotourism among students for them to surmount financial constraint.
2. University curricula should be repackaged to accommodate teaching of potentials of ecotourism to undergraduate students. This will go a long way to increase their interest and participation in ecotourism and as well as receiving tourism education.
3. The stakeholders in ecotourism industry must be adequately enlighten the public, potentials embedded in ecotourism and the need to tap various opportunities within it, particularly among students of higher institutions.
4. Qualified personnel who are well grounded in ecotourism should be allowed to teach it effectively under conducive environment in our higher institutions of

learning in order to eradicate fallacy often associated with the concept of ecotourism not only in the study area but in the nation at large.

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