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## Perception of Undergraduates on Government Interventions in Environmental Issues in Southwest, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examined the perception of undergraduates on government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria. This study further examined the differences in the perception of undergraduates on government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria based on gender and ownership of University. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all university undergraduates in Southwest, Nigeria. A sample of 1752 male and female Undergraduates in Federal, State and Private Universities were used for the study. Multistage sampling procedure was employed for the sample selection. Questionnaire on Perception of Undergraduates on Government Interventions in Environmental Issues {QPUGIEI} was used in this study. The validity of the instrument was ensured through face and content validity procedures and the reliability of the QPUGIEI was established using Cronbach Alpha method and the alpha value of 0.74 was obtained. The data generated for this study were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics of frequency counts, mean and percentages were used to provide answers to the research question while inferential statistics of t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The finding of the study showed that university undergraduates had favourable perception of government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria, there was a significant difference in the perception of male and female undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues, there was a significant difference in the perception of undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues based on the ownership of University. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that irrespective of the gender of undergraduates and ownership of the university government should intensify effort on environmental education programmes such that all undergraduates will have same favourable perception on government interventions in environmental issues.*

**Keywords:** perception, undergraduates, government interventions, environmental issues, gender and ownership of university

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The environment refers to both the physical and social circumstances which surround people and have influence on them. It is both objective and subjective. In quest for economic development, which seeks to increase the quantum of economic output without caring about the short- and long-term changes of human and material resources arising from the process, the activities of people and nations conquer and wreck the world, rather than sustain it for the present and future generations. Progress in agriculture, industry, transportation and technology is usually the barometer of economic development of any nation. Such activities of man have created adverse effects on all living organisms in the biosphere. In the light of the above, the core of achieving sustainable growth and development in any country is to have a sustainable environment free from any form of life-threatening hazards. Thus, to create such an environment, governments at all levels are expected to intervene in environmental issues by formulating and implementing environmental protection laws to solve different environmental problems caused by human activities to ensure industrial and technological development to meet the growing population of each country.

Environmental issues are harmful effects of human activity on the biophysical environment. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA, (2017) stated that the environmental destruction caused by humans is a global problem that is ongoing every day. Major current environmental issues may include climate change, erosion, flooding, deforestation, pollution, environmental degradation and resources depletion.

Government intervention in the environmental issues is the act of environmental protection. Environmental protection is a practice of protecting the natural environment on individual, organizational or governmental levels, for the benefit of both the environment and humans. Environmental protection is a practice of caring for the environment, on individual, organizational or governmental levels, for the benefit of the natural environment and future generations. The practice of taking care of the environment is not restricted to the government or to corporate organizations alone, individuals and communities at various levels are also expected take responsibilities for the environment in order to sustain it for the present and for the future generations.

Government interventions on these environmental issues are the policies put in place by the government to protect or sustain the environment. This involves setting up of policies, establishment of environmental protection agencies by the states and the federal government, creation of ecological fund etc. Government intervention in the environmental issues is the act of environmental protection. Environmental protection is a practice of protecting the natural environment at individual, organizational or governmental levels, for the benefit of both the

environment and humans (Ayodele, et al., 2019). According to Ayodele and Olorunsola (2016), the increased awareness of the importance of education development of citizens in terms of perception, is on the increase. It is not enough to develop the right perception of something like government intervention on environmental issues; it is equally good to have knowledge about it. It appears that the more reason why environmental problems continue to linger in Nigeria and particularly in Southwest is that quite a few numbers of people develop right perception of environmental laws and policies for controlling impending environmental challenges. Generally, perception is a process of receiving, selecting, organising, interpreting, checking and reacting to stimuli.

According to Adejoke (2014), perception is our sensory experience of the world around us and involves both the recognition of environmental stimuli and actions in response to these stimuli. Through the perceptual process, we gain information about properties and elements of the environment that are critical to our survival. Perception creates our experience of the world around us and allows us to act within our environment. Harring, Davies and Lundholm (2019) view perception as the process by which organisms interpret and organise sensations to produce a meaningful experience of the world. Perception literally means perceiving which means giving meaning to the environment around us; it is a process which involves seeing, receiving, organising, interpreting and giving meaning to the environment. Environmental perceptions play an important role in determining environmental behaviour (Bennett et al., 2017). Therefore, successful environmental management cannot be achieved if perceptions regarding the environment are not properly understood (Bennett, 2016).

The researcher observed that gender is an important factor that may influence the perception of students about environmental protection policy. This is attributed to the difference between general characters of females and males. The females appear to be more delicate than males and females seem to pay more attention to environmental changes than the males. Males and females may see many issues completely differently. Aoyagi-Usui et al. (2013) examined gender differences in environmental attitudes and behaviors among university students in Japan. The results showed that females tended to have higher levels of environmental concern and were more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors compared to males. Zahran et al. (2016) investigated gender differences in environmental concern and activism in the United States. The findings indicated that females exhibited higher levels of environmental concern and were more likely to engage in environmental activism compared to males.

Hackman, et al., (2014) defined gender as social roles that men and women play and the power relations between them. Gender relations influence how communities, household and institution are organised, how decisions are made and how resources are utilized. Furthermore, university type could also affect undergraduates' perception, knowledge and attitudes towards the Government intervention on environmental issues. University type according to NERDC, (2013)

is the grouping of the university based on the ownership. These are the Public and private universities. Public Universities in Nigeria were established and managed by the Government. The public Universities have continually dominated the higher education landscape in Nigeria for several decades.

The ownership of university might be a factor that will determine the perception of students towards government interventions on environmental issues in southwest Nigeria. This may be due to the exposure of the undergraduates in each of the types of university to information, their level of awareness of government policies etc. Hoalst-Pullen et al., (2012) stated that the type of environment people found them will determine their behaviours. Students in private schools are more concerned with environmental policies than those in the public schools

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study generally examined the perception of undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria. This study specifically:  
examined the differences in the perception of undergraduates towards government interventions in environmental issues based on gender and ownership of university.

### **Research Question**

One research question was raised to guide this study:

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

### **Research Method**

The descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for this study. The population of the study consisted of 872,100 undergraduates (male and female) in the 17 public and 27 private Universities in Southwest, Nigeria (NUC, 2023). The sample of this study consisted of 1752 undergraduates who were selected using multistage sampling procedure. The first stage involved the use of a simple random sampling technique to select three out of the six states that made up Southwest, Nigeria, the states are Ogun, Oyo and Ekiti. The second stage involved the use of stratified random sampling technique to select three Universities in each of the states using forms of ownership of Universities as basis for stratification, (one federal, one state and one private). The last stage involved the use of proportional random sampling technique to select

undergraduates from each of the Universities. One instrument designed by the researcher was used to collect data for this study. This instrument was tagged ‘Questionnaire on Perception of Undergraduates towards Government Interventions in Environmental Issues’ (QPUGIEI), QPAUGIEI consisted of two sections A and B. Section A, elicited demographic information of the respondents such as gender of the respondents and name of university. Section B consisted of 15 items that measured undergraduates’ perception on government interventions in environmental issues, its response was rated on 4-point likert-type rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) –4, Agree (A) –3, Disagree (D) –2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) –1.

The face and content validity of the instrument was ensured while the reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's Alpha reliability method and reliability coefficient of 0.73 was obtained. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The research questions were answered descriptively using frequency counts, means, standard deviation and percentages. The hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics such as ANOVA. All these hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

**Question:** What is the perception of undergraduates on government interventions in environmental issues?

To determine undergraduates’ perception on government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria, (favourable or unfavourable) scores of item 1-15 of section B of QPAUGIEI was subjected to frequency count, percentage and mean rating. The unfavourable perception was determined by scores below the mean cut off point (2.50) while the favourable perception 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’ perception of government interventions in environmental issues

<i>Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SA</i>		<i>A</i>		<i>D</i>		<i>SD</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Remark</i>
		<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>		
Observing environmental sanitation is very important	1737	1467	84.5	249	14.3	6	0.3	15	0.9	3.82	<i>Favourable</i>
Environmental pollution control law will help in the prevention of environmental issues	1746	1002	57.4	666	38.1	60	3.4	18	1.0	3.52	<i>Favourable</i>
Government law against open defecation will help in preventing environmental issues	1725	1065	61.7	618	35.8	42	2.4	-	-	3.59	<i>Favourable</i>
Law against bush burning will not stop people from	1740	441	25.3	801	46.0	411	23.6	87	5.0	2.92	<i>Favourable</i>

burning bushes												
The law against the indiscriminate dumping of waste will be effective	1704	678	39.8	711	41.7	282	16.5	33	1.9	3.19	<i>Favourable</i>	
People are aware of the law against effluent	1728	441	25.5	747	43.2	456	26.4	84	4.9	2.89	<i>Favourable</i>	
Government law on the recycling of waste will help in the prevention of environmental issues	1728	987	57.1	630	36.5	105	6.1	6	0.3	3.50	<i>Favourable</i>	
Law against the improper dumping of waste is a very good policy	1740	1089	62.6	588	33.8	54	3.1	9	0.5	3.58	<i>Favourable</i>	
The river basin development authority act will help in protecting water bodies and conserve water	1743	822	47.2	801	46.0	114	6.5	6	0.3	3.40	<i>Favourable</i>	
The regulation against the illegal falling of trees might help in preventing erosion	1713	789	46.1	738	43.1	138	8.1	48	2.8	3.32	<i>Favourable</i>	
Ecological fund has helped in the prevention of environmental issues	1725	567	32.9	792	45.9	333	19.3	33	1.9	3.10	<i>Favourable</i>	
I think drought and desertification can be prevented through the release of ecological fund	1719	537	31.2	846	49.2	282	16.4	54	3.1	3.09	<i>Favourable</i>	
Government policies on environmental protection has been effective	1725	447	25.9	657	38.1	426	24.7	195	11.3	2.79	<i>Favourable</i>	
The creation of waste management agencies by the government has yielded good result	1689	579	34.3	636	37.7	393	23.3	81	4.8	3.01	<i>Favourable</i>	
The law against the unlawful falling down of trees might prevent erosion and desertification	1713	639	37.3	852	49.7	165	9.6	57	3.3	3.21	<i>Favourable</i>	
<i>Mean Cut off = 2.50</i>												

The information in Table 1 showed that 98.8% of the respondents were of the opinion that observing environmental sanitation is very important. Also, 95.5% of the respondents believed that environmental pollution control law will help in the prevention of environmental issues while 97.6% of the respondents were of the opinion that government law against open defecation will help in preventing environmental issues. In addition, 93.6% of the respondents perceived



that government law on the recycling of waste will help in the prevention of environmental issues. The table further showed that law against improper dumping of waste is a very good policy, river basin development authority act will help in protecting water bodies and conserve water as well as the regulation against the illegal falling of trees might help in preventing erosion as perceived by 95.7%, 93.1% and 89.1% of the respondents respectively. Finally, 87% of the respondents were of the opinion that law against the unlawful falling down of trees might prevent erosion and desertification. The information in Table 1 shows that participants had favourable perception of the entire 15 items. Thus, the overall perception of participants was considered favourable.

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

To test this hypothesis, scores on male and female undergraduates' perception of 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 the perception of male and female undergraduates on government interventions in environmental issues

<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>t<sub>cal</sub></i>	<i>P-value</i>
Male	732	48.86	5.712	1750	4.152*	0.000
Female	1020	47.79	4.952			

***P < 0.05 (Significant Result)***

The result in table 2 shows that  $t_{cal} = 4.152$ ;  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ . Since the P value is less than 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference in the perception of male and female undergraduates on government interventions in environmental issues.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in perception of undergraduates on government interventions in environmental issues based on the ownership of University.

To test this hypothesis, scores on undergraduates' perception of 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' perception of 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	236.379	2	118.189		
Within Groups	48895.649	1749	27.956	4.228*	0.015
Total	49132.027	1751			

*P* < 0.05)

Information contained in table 3 shows that  $F_{cal} = 4.228$ ;  $P = 0.015 < 0.05$ . Since the P value is less than 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference in the perception of undergraduates on 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' perception of government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest, Nigeria based on forms of ownership of university

<i>Variables</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>
<i>Federal</i>				846	47.42
<i>State</i>			*	678	48.12
<i>Private</i>		*		228	48.57

*P* < 0.05 (Significant Result)

The information in table 4 showed that significant difference only existed in the perception of state and private university undergraduates on government interventions in environmental issues.

## DISCUSSION

This study found that undergraduates had favourable perception of government interventions in environmental issues in Southwest Nigeria. This favourable perception indicates that the efforts made by the government in addressing environmental issues are seen as valuable and necessary. The study's findings align with the submission of Bennett (2016) that understanding individuals' perceptions of the environment can provide insights into their pro-environmental behaviour, understanding the determinants of environmental perceptions may also assist in understanding pro-environmental behaviour. In this case, the favourable perception of government interventions in environmental issues among the undergraduates may indicate a greater likelihood of engaging in pro-environmental behaviour. When individuals perceive government interventions positively, they are more likely to support and participate in environmental initiatives. This positive perception can foster a sense of responsibility and commitment towards environmental



sustainability, leading to actions such as proper waste disposal, energy conservation, and support for environmental policies.

The finding of the study found that there is significant difference in the perception of male and female undergraduates on government interventions in environmental issues. The significant difference suggests that male and female undergraduates may have distinct perspectives, values, or experiences that influence how they perceive government interventions in environmental matters. Understanding these gendered perspectives is essential for crafting more inclusive and effective environmental policies. This finding aligns with previous research that has explored gender differences in environmental perceptions. For example, a study by Aoyagi-Usui et al. (2013) examined gender differences in environmental attitudes and behaviors among university students in Japan. The results showed that females tended to have higher levels of environmental concern and were more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors compared to males. Another study by Zahran et al. (2016) investigated gender differences in environmental concern and activism in the United States. The findings indicated that females exhibited higher levels of environmental concern and were more likely to engage in environmental activism compared to males.

The finding of the study showed that there is significant difference in the perception of undergraduates on government interventions in environmental issues based on the ownership of University. The variation in perception could be attributed to several factors associated with the ownership of the university. Public universities, for example, are often funded and governed by the government, which may influence students' perception of the effectiveness or impact of government interventions. On the other hand, private universities may have different funding sources and organizational structures, which could shape students' perspectives on the government's role in addressing environmental issues. This finding is line with Hoalst-Pullen et al., (2012) stated that the type of environment people found themselves will determine their behaviours. Students in private schools are more concerned with environmental policies than those in the public schools. On the other hand, students in public schools are devoted to develop sustainable land management practices. This suggests that students from public schools are also more environmentally conscious than those in private schools. Students growing up in developed versus less developed countries, their environmental settings had significantly different levels of environmental awareness despite their common shared exposure to institutionalized environmental education.

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the government has implemented a range of interventions to address environmental challenges, and these efforts are generally perceived favourably by students. Gender differences in perception, attitude, and knowledge also emerge as significant factors, emphasizing the importance of considering gender-sensitive approaches in environmental policies and education. Furthermore, the study identifies variations

in perception and attitude based on university ownership, indicating the influence of institutional factors on students' views of government interventions.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the government has implemented a range of interventions to address environmental challenges, and these efforts are generally perceived favourably by students.

## Recommendation

Based on the conclusion, it was recommended that:

Irrespective of school ownership, government should extend awareness campaign to all universities in order to ensure that students are well-informed about government interventions in environmental matters. This could favourably change their perception on government interventions in environmental issues.

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