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LEVEL OF AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ON THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract:

The study examined the level of awareness and perception of Nigerian undergraduate students on the United Nations sustainable development goals using gender, level of education and university type as variables. The study adopted descriptive method to evaluate awareness of undergraduates and their perception regarding sustainable development goals. It was conducted in the two public universities in Anambra state with a population of 20,626 undergraduate students. The sample of 392 students was composed using simple Yamane formula and simple random sampling technique. Two research questions guided the study. The reliability of 0.82 was ascertained through test retest. Data were collected using two instruments; Sustainable Development Awareness scale and Sustainable Development Knowledge Scale. Data collected were analyzed using percentages and represented graphically. It was revealed that the level of awareness and perception of female undergraduate students with 47.5% was greater than the level of awareness and perception of their male counterparts with 48.8%. Also, it indicated that 300L undergraduate students were more aware than 200L undergraduate students with 55.7% and 37.5% respectively among others. It recommended the institutionalization of sustainable development studies in the universities, adoption of innovative strategies to increase awareness of male students, organization of action-based programmes to enhance awareness and perception towards sustainable development goals among undergraduate students in Nigerian university among others.

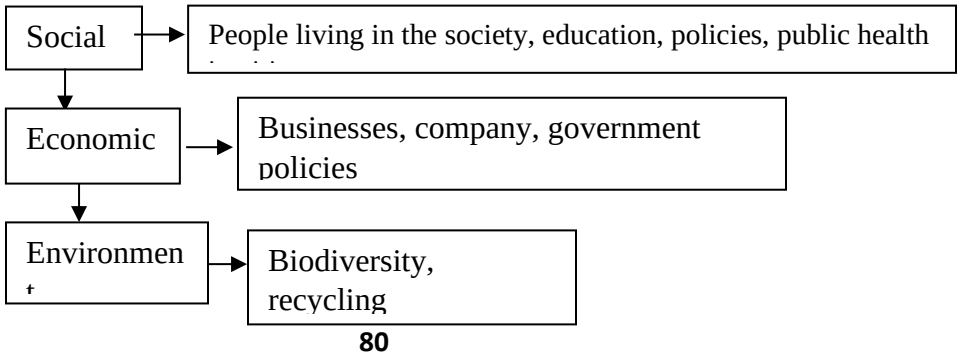
Keywords: *Awareness, Perception, Sustainable Development Goals, Undergraduates.*

Introduction

The use of the environmental resources continues to increase in quest for industrialization which poses a great challenge to human and environmental sustainability. This is in line with the assertion that industrialization in the 20th century with the destruction of the environment cause by the unconscious steps taken in the name of development under the influence of rapid population growth together with urbanization brought concerns about human health and the future of the world (Atmaca, Kiray & Pehlivan, 2019). The scholars stated that in the aftermath of the destruction of natural life and the unconscious use of resources, many parts of the world begun to suffer from food and water scarcity and, consequently, many deadly problems such as hunger, diseases, and poverty. In addition, climate change and global warming have become the most important issues affecting the future of our planet (Yerdelen, Cansiz, Cansiz, & Akcay, 2018). According to Atmaca, et al (2019), it has been noticed by all the communities that the Earth's self-renewal capacity is severely damaged and if it continues, the Earth will lose its ability to become a livable planet. To lieu of this, the UN general assembly adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development which converged in setting 17 sustainable developments goals. These goals link the conceptual understanding of sustainability to specific focus areas where actions are needed; and became the common framework for governments and organization in developing sustainability plans, assessing new initiatives and emerging technologies and tracking progress.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The concept of sustainability has been conceived variously by scholars. Summarily, it seeks to prevent the depletion of natural and physical resources so that they will remain available for the long term and can be broken into three core concept of economy, environmental and social aspects. Rinkish (2023) opined that importance of sustainability includes key to preserving the planet, reduce pollution, conserve resources, create jobs and stimulate economy, improve political health, protects biodiversity and make good life achievable. Sustainable development is achievable if there is political will and public support. When the government and people work together, they can make things happen with determination in an approach to development that balances different and competing objectives with the right policies and measures put in place.



Source: Anyaeji and Amaonye, (2023).

Using the schematic diagram above, sustainability is conceived as the interconnectivity of the social life, economic activities and environmental protection of a given nation at a given time. This connectivity is regarded as driving force and the ingredients that promote human existence. In addition, it could be regarded in terms of the quality of life of people living in a given nation, the viability and quality of education system, creation of job, employment and how government policies affect the social and economic activities, quality of health care, as well as the protection of the environment. This necessitates the need to pursue sustainable development.

There are three key dimensions of sustainable development: social, environmental, and economic dimensions. The society dimension of sustainable development includes the concepts of human rights, gender equity, peace and human security, cultural diversity and inter-cultural understanding (UNESCO, 2006), social services, health and education right, and social justice (Atmaca, Kiray, & Pehlivan, 2018; Özmete & Akgul-Gök, 2015). Environmental dimension includes issues such as the protection of natural resources (water, air, soil, energy, agriculture, and biodiversity), sustainable urbanization (UNESCO, 2006), reduction of environmental pollution (water, air, soil pollution), the use of renewable energy sources (geothermal, wind energy, etc.) instead of non-renewable energy sources (coal, petrol, etc.), protection of forests and increasing green areas, reduction of resource usage and environmental pollution by recycling of wastes, ecological footprint minimization, and stopping the global warming (Atmaca, et al., 2018; Koçak & Balcı, 2010). Economic dimension, on the other hand, includes issues such as conservative use of resources, income and expense balance, elimination of income distribution inequality, sustainable production and cost, reliable environments for investments, investments in high-income sectors, investments in vital sectors, and research and development (Atmaca, et al., 2018; Kuşat, 2013; Olsson, Gericke, & Chang Runghen, 2016; Şahin & Kutlu, 2014). From the foregoing, it can be stated that any development that neglects the conservation, continuous consumption of and recycling of natural resources, cannot be said to be sustainable development. Therefore, sustainable development can be regarded as any development that ensures judicious and continuous use of natural, environmental and social resources in the ecosystem while recycling same for the good of the present, future and the posterity. It becomes imperative that awareness is created among the populace particularly the students in the universities who will champion the course of environment in the near future.

It is essential to note that the university education is expected to quips the learners with the requisite knowledge, skills, attitude, values and competences of sustainable development goals which will help them manage the environment resources sustainably. But when it is not propagated, it will affect the achievement of the goals. Therefore, ascertaining the level of awareness and perception of undergraduate student towards SD, which may vary between gender and level of education, is a step to realizing its overall goals. At undergraduate

education comprises different levels from 100 to 500. However, the study was limited to 200 and 300 levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pouratashi, and Zamani, (2022), studied university students' knowledge, attitude and behavior (KAB) toward sustainable development using 567 students studying humanities, agriculture or engineering at public universities of Iran according to their gender, membership in academic associations, academic major, educational and informing activities and social units; abbreviated as GAMES. The results indicated that students had a medium level of KAB, with mean scores of 55.15 out of 75 (for knowledge), 45.68 out of 65 (for attitude) and 36.03 out of 50 (for behavior). Differences and similarities were found on students' KAB by GAMES. The results suggest that education and social units are useful to improve individuals' KAB toward sustainable development. In addition, positive correlations were identified between knowledge, attitude and behavior toward sustainable development.

Dlamini, Block, Mathibela (2022) investigated knowledge of and attitudes towards the attainment of sustainable development goals using selected adults in South Africa. The results revealed that more females than men claimed to have been taught about SDGs and that more young people than elderly claimed to have adequate knowledge of SDGs. Also, it was found that those in high schools claimed not to have been taught SDGs; and that half of the Ph.D. graduates indicated that they had not been taught about SDGs which indicated that increased level of education do not translate into a better knowledge.

Novieastari, Pujasari, Rahman, Ganefianty, and Rerung (2022) examined knowledge, perception and awareness about sustainable goals among students of south public university in Indonesia using 14 faculties and 2 schools with a total of 138 students from 3 clusters- health, science and social sciences. The results indicated that 76.8% had good knowledge about SDGs and 73.9% had a positive perception towards SDGs. However, it was found that 42% of the students were not aware of the SDGs. From the above, researches on SDGs is dominated by international scholarship with varying results pointing to the context-dependent nature of this field and the need for local research as little has been done on the subject-matter in Nigeria, particularly in Anambra State. Therefore, this study sets to fill the knowledge void.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

One of the challenges affecting the attainment of SDGs in many countries particularly in Nigeria is low level xz ZzXSSX, z> of awareness of the populace especially the students regarding the goals of sustainable development, what they entail and how their perception impacts on the sustainability of the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the society. In agreement with the above, Enebechi (2018), stated that about 50% of Nigerian population is unaware of what the sustainable development goals are or how they affect their own development. This has affected the achievement of goals. Importantly, it has bene ascertained that the only way for sustainable development activities to reach

its goal and become a way of life particularly in Nigeria is to raise individuals who have sustainable development awareness and who shape their lives in the direction of sustainable development principles. This implies that education remains the pivotal means of creating awareness and influencing perceptions towards sustainable development. However, it is not known if the students who are already in institutions of learning are aware and acquired positive perception in relation to SD. More so, research on awareness is dominated by international scholarship. These studies which focused on awareness, knowledge, attitude at lower and doctoral levels of education show conflicting and varying results (Pouratashi, & Zamani, 2022; Dlamini, Block, &Mathibela, 2022; Novieastari, Pujasari, Rahman, Ganefianty, & Rerung, 2022), pointing to the need for local research, yet little research has been carried on the subject-matter in Nigeria, particularly in Anambra State on level of awareness and perception of Nigerian undergraduate students on the united nations sustainable development goals.. Therefore, this study sets to fill the knowledge void.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The study purposed to evaluate the level of awareness and perception of Nigerian undergraduate students on the united nations sustainable development goals. Specifically, the study evaluated the following:

1. The level of awareness of undergraduate students of state and federal universities on the United Nations sustainable development goals.
2. The level of perception of undergraduate students of state and federal universities on the United Nations sustainable development goals.
3. The level of awareness of male and female undergraduate students on the United Nations sustainable development goals.
4. The level of perception of male and female undergraduate students on the United Nations sustainable development goals.
5. The level of awareness of undergraduate students on the United Nations sustainable development goals based on level of education.
6. The level of perception of male and female undergraduate students on the United Nations sustainable development goals based on level of education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the level of awareness of undergraduate students of state and federal universities on the United Nations sustainable development goals?
2. What is the level of perception of undergraduate students of state and federal universities on the United Nations sustainable development goals?
3. What is the level of awareness of male and female undergraduate students on the United Nations sustainable development goals?
4. What is the level of perception of male and female undergraduate students on the United Nations sustainable development goals?
5. What is the level of awareness of undergraduate students on the United Nations sustainable development goals based on level of education?

6. What is the level of perception of male and female undergraduate students on the United Nations sustainable development goals based on level of education?

METHOD

This study adopted descriptive survey research design and was carried out in two public universities in Anambra state. The population for the study consisted 20,626 undergraduate students, while The sample consisted 30% of the population with 392 students from two universities were composed using simple Yamane formula and simple random sampling technique. The choice for 30% is in line with Nworgu (2015) who recommended that 30% to 80% of the population is adequate for a research work if the parameters of the population must be fully investigated. The instrument for data collection was adopted from Michalos et al, 2009 and Atmaca et al, 2019. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages and represented graphically.

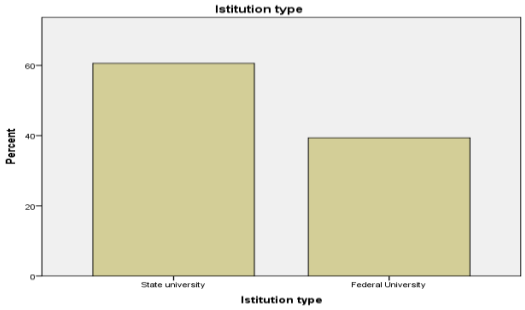
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

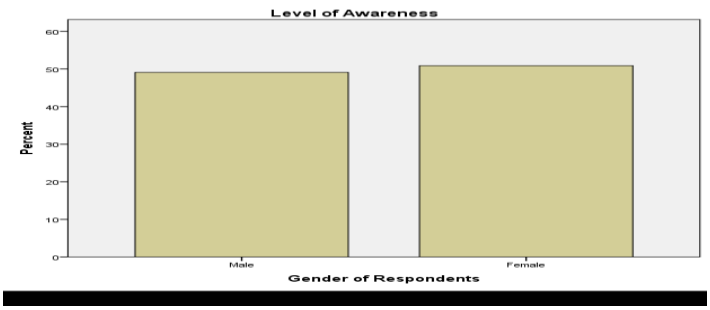
Level of Awareness of SDGs

Table 1

Level of Awareness of SDGs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
LoE	200	157	37.5	40.2	40.2
	300	234	55.8	59.8	100.0
Gender	Male	192	45.8	49.1	49.1
	Female	199	47.5	50.9	100.0
Inst. Type					
	State	237	56.6	60.6	60.6
	Federal	154	36.8	39.4	100.0





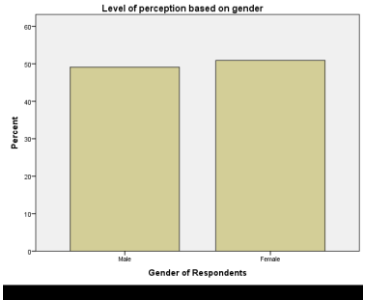
The results above shown the percentage level of awareness of undergraduate students based on gender, institution type and level of education in public universities in Anambra

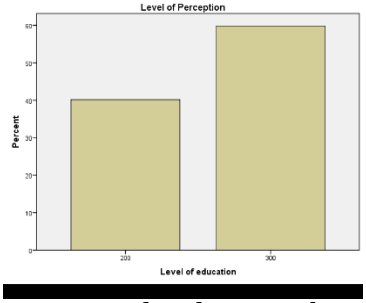
state. It was revealed that the awareness of female undergraduate students of 47.5% was greater than the level of awareness of their male counterparts with 48.8%. Also, it indicated that 300L undergraduate students were more aware than 200L undergraduate students with 55.7% and 37.5% respectively. In addition, the results found that undergraduate students of state university were more aware of SDGs with 56.6% than their counterparts in federal university with 36.8%. It concluded that the level of awareness of female 300L students in state university is more that the counterparts in other lower level of education in federal university.

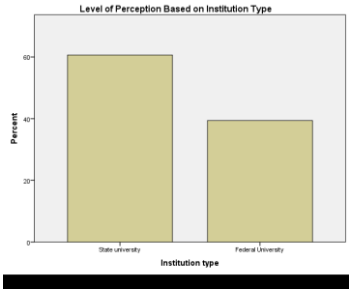
Level of Perception
Table 2

Level of Awareness of SDGs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
LoE	200	157	60.0	-	-
	300	234	40.0	-	-
Gender	Male	192	49.0	-	-
	Female	199	50.0		100.0
Inst. Type	State	237	60.2	60.6	
	Federal	154	39.0	100.0	







The results above shown the percentage level of perception of undergraduate students towards SDGs based on gender, institution type and level of education in public universities in Anambra state. It was revealed that the perception of female undergraduate students of 50% was greater than the level of perception of their male counterparts with 49.0%. Also, it indicated that 300L undergraduate students were more aware than 200L undergraduate students with 60.0% and 40.0% respectively. In addition, the results found that undergraduate students of state university were more aware of SDGs with 60.2% than their counterparts in federal university with 39.0%. It concluded that the level of perception of female 300L students in state university is more that the counterparts in other lower level of education in federal university. The findings agreed

with Pouratashi, and Zamani, (2022) who found that students had a medium level of KAB, with mean scores of 55.15 out of 75 (for knowledge); Novieastari, Pujasari, Rahman, Ganefianty, and Rerung (2022) who also found that 42% of the students were not aware of the SDGs and Enebechi (2018), stated that about 50% of Nigerian population is unaware of what the sustainable development goals are or how they affect their own development

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that undergraduate students are aware of SDGs and have positive perception. However, the levels are relatively low. Therefore, awareness should be increased through various actionable programmes, integration and deployment of technology to enhance awareness and perception of SDGs among male students in universities particularly federal institutions

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made;

1. Integration of SD studies into curriculum to increase awareness among undergraduate students especially male students in federal universities.
2. Integrated approach of innovative strategies to increase awareness among undergraduate students especially male students.
3. Provision of resources and materials on SDGs to the universities increase awareness among undergraduate students especially male students in federal universities.
4. Adequate awareness and involvement of young people with consistent actionable programme on SDGs.
5. Institutionalizing SD centres for students on SDGs across universities in the country of action-based programmes to enhance awareness and perception towards sustainable development goals among undergraduate students in Nigerian university.
6. Incorporating technology into learning of SDGs: Through various digital platforms and information-sharing tools, technology enables the widespread distribution of information, research findings, and best practices related to environmental sustainability.

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