

Perception and Attitudes of Students in the University Of Ibadan Towards Ecotourism In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the University of Ibadan students' level of ecotourism awareness, level of participation in ecotourism and perception, attitudes towards ecotourism in Nigeria. The study used primary data which was analyzed statistically using SPSS 6.0. The study used Multiple Stage random sampling technique to arrive at a total of 2235 respondents consisting of undergraduates and postgraduates students of the University of Ibadan. Using Krejcie (1970) sampling formula, 327 copies of the structured questionnaires were distributed to respondents and a total number of 296 valid questionnaires were retrieved, representing a return rate of 90.5%. Findings showed that 82.4% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that ecotourism attractions in Nigeria are underdeveloped but despite the state of underdevelopment, the students are very much interested in ecotourism (57.3%) and the aesthetic beauty of the ecotourism attraction greatly inspires them to visit. 50% of the respondents still find ecotourism attractions fulfilling and rewarding despite the state of underdevelopment. This goes a long way to show that indeed, the students have positive attitudes and perceptions towards ecotourism in Nigeria. This study recommended that managers of ecotourism attractions should develop their attractions by introducing adequate sustainable recreational facilities that would make university students' visits remarkable.

KEYWORDS: *Ecotourism, Students, Perception, Attitudes, Attractions*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings perceive things differently and this affects their views and relationships with their physical and social environment to a large extent. Perceptions are socially and culturally constructed, and are oftentimes interrelated with many influencing factors such as education, religion, ethnic and family background, societal pressure, physical environment laws and regulations amongst others. All these factors account for people's opinions and attitudes towards things. In a way, the extent to which an individual is aware of ecotourism is directly related to his/her perception of it. Several definitions of ecotourism exist, and these definitions depend on whom you talk to. Tour operators, government officials, business owners, conservationists, and researchers have spent a great deal of time trying to agree on a common definition, but in a way, have failed to do so. Some people are of the opinion that nature tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, educational tourism, and historical tourism are all parts of ecotourism; others believe that ecotourism is a separate category by itself (Patterson, 2007; Urias et al., 2009). For this paper, ecotourism is simply defined as a form of tourism that involves visit to exotic natural places with the intention of enjoying nature, observing wildlife and supporting conservation efforts.

The importance of ecotourism resources to the society, and the need to conserve ecotourism cannot be overemphasized. Ecotourism has numerous benefits, that include being a source of food, a form of natural heritage and tourist attraction, a reservoir for genes, a source of employment, and a principal component of the ecosystem, to name but a few. All these ecotourism values and benefits influence tourism development either directly or indirectly. In summary, ecotourism is a natural resource of biological, economic, social, recreational, educational, environmental, and nutritional value to the present as well as future generations. Ecotourism is a valuable resource that should be protected and conserved (Sifuna, 2006).

Shaw (2018) rightly stated that Ecotourism contributes to the national economy of Nigeria, with much of it centered around the wildlife on display in game reserves and national parks. Although when people think of Nigeria, Ecotourism is the last thing that comes to mind. But wildlife parks and game reserves around the globe are huge sources of income to any nation's economy. Ecotourism has become a major tourism product as many destinations now parade it on their tourism brochures; most vacation seekers seek destinations with huge stock of wild animals and unspoiled green reserves, and Nigeria is not lacking in this regard. With the seven National Parks in Nigeria, spanning across various ecological zones of Nigeria, ecological processes and life support

systems are enhanced. These national parks are controlled and managed by the Federal Government; however, the Federal Government in recent times has been struggling with the challenges of effectively funding and managing these parks thereby resulting in the poor and very inadequate awareness of these national parks, and the attendant gains/benefits are not reaped.

Ecotourism in Nigeria is at its lowest level as little attention is given to this sector generally because of the striving oil industry. Prominent ecotourism potentials in Nigeria includes the seven national parks and thirty three game reserves, several waterfalls – each unique in beauty, hills, mountains and rocks, a suspended lake, salt lakes, rivers and beaches. Due to the very little attention given to these ecotourism attractions, the level of awareness and patronage of these attractions is low. The revenue accrued from these attractions annually does not rank with those accrued from other ecotourism attractions of equal caliber in East-Africa and other parts of the world. Despite the rich ecological and biological diversities present in Nigeria, many Nigerians still prefer to take their holidays in several ecotourism destinations outside Nigeria. Sadly, the reason for this could be attributed to the negative perceptions they have towards the Nigerian ecotourism sector.

Ecotourism is perceived differently by different groups of people, and these perceptions can either affect the progress of the Nigerian tourism industry positively or negatively. It is noteworthy to mention that there are several factors influencing these varying perceptions; topmost of these factors are the general insecurity issues facing the country, and the level of the development of these attractions. This study seeks to find out what the perceptions and attitudes of students (particularly of the University of Ibadan) are, towards ecotourism in Nigeria; and also investigate the various factors influencing these perceptions. Perception and attitudes towards ecotourism could best be assessed among tertiary institution students because they are expected to be more informed. It is recognized that education is the most efficient way to change people's thinking or perception about a particular phenomenon; or a way to bring about desired changes in their behaviors; it is however, also a vital tool to a country's sustainable development.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study used a survey design with the purpose of generating and analysing data on the attitudes and perception of students in the University of Ibadan towards ecotourism in Nigeria. This study targeted both the undergraduate and postgraduate students of the university. Data was collected and was analysed using quantitative techniques (SPSS 6.0). The study used multiple stage random sampling whereby 16 Faculties and 4 Academic centres were placed into 5 clusters, each of them containing 3 Faculties and 1 Academic centre. One (1) out of the five (5) clusters was randomly selected. The selected cluster included the Faculties of Education, Technology, and Veterinary Medicine, and one (1) Academic Centre – The Centre for Sustainable Development. This cluster contained a total number of 36 departments and programs, and was further divided into 5 sub-clusters with each containing 7 or 8 departments. A sub-cluster containing 8 departments was randomly selected. The selected departments were Arts and Social Sciences Education, Educational Management, Veterinary Parasitology, Theriogenology, Veterinary Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Civil engineering, Industrial and Production Engineering and Development Practice Program. These departments had a total number of 2,235 students consisting of both undergraduates and postgraduates [see table 1]. Adopting Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling formula, a sample size of 327 was arrived at [see fig.1]. This sampling procedure was used because of the nature of the population of students in the University – Oyedele (2013) stated that the population of students in the University of Ibadan is about 34,481. Efforts to get data on the current number of students in the University proved abortive. Structured survey questionnaires were the sole instrument for data collection.

Table 1: The sampling of the research population

S/N	DEPARTMENTS	NO. OF STUDENTS
1	FACULTY OF EDUCATION	
	Arts and Social Sciences Education	340
	Educational Management	409
2	FACULTY OF VETERINARY MEDICINE	
	Veterinary Parasitology	256
	Theriogenology	300
	Veterinary Public Health and Preventive Medicine	192
3	FACULTY OF TECHNOLOGY	
	Civil engineering	256
	Industrial and Production Engineering	354
4	CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	
	Development Practice Program	128
	TOTAL	2235

Source: Field survey 2019

Fig 1: Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling formula

N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3200	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	100000	384

Note.—N is population size. S is sample size.
Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

All respondents were Nigerians (100%), and there were more people within the age group of 16 to 25 years (63.9%). Age group 26 -35 were a total of 30.1%, while age group 36 – 45 were 4.7%. Only 1.4% of the respondents fell within the age 46 and above category. Interestingly, most of the respondents were undergraduates (48.6%), while 28.7% of the respondents were Masters’ degree students and 3.7% Doctoral students. The result also showed that 59.8% respondents were male and 40.2% were female. Expectedly, 86.4% were single while just 12.6% were married. This substantiated the fact that most of the respondents were undergraduates and the significant number of them fall between the age group of 16 – 25 years.

Table 2: Level of Ecotourism Awareness

S/N	Statement	Responses: Frequencies/Percentage								Total
		Yes	%	Partially	%	No	%	Indifferent	%	
1.	Ecotourism is one of the most popular forms of tourism	87	29.4%	167	56.4%	35	11.8%	7	2.4%	296
2.	Ecotourism is the visit to natural areas abundant in diverse wildlife, plant species, beautiful landscapes and sceneries	135	45.6%	147	49.7%	9	2%	5	1.7%	296
3.	There are notable ecotourism attractions in Nigeria	94	31.8%	161	54.4%	34	11.5%	7	2.4%	296
4.	Zoological Gardens, National Parks, Games Reserves, Bird Sanctuary, Beaches and other similar attractions are examples of ecotourism sites.	138	46.6%	142	48%	10	3.4%	6	2%	296
5.	Ecotourism attractions are the best places to relieve stress, depression, anger, and other negative emotions.	87	29.4%	168	56.8%	33	11.1%	8	2.7%	296

Source: Field Survey, 2019

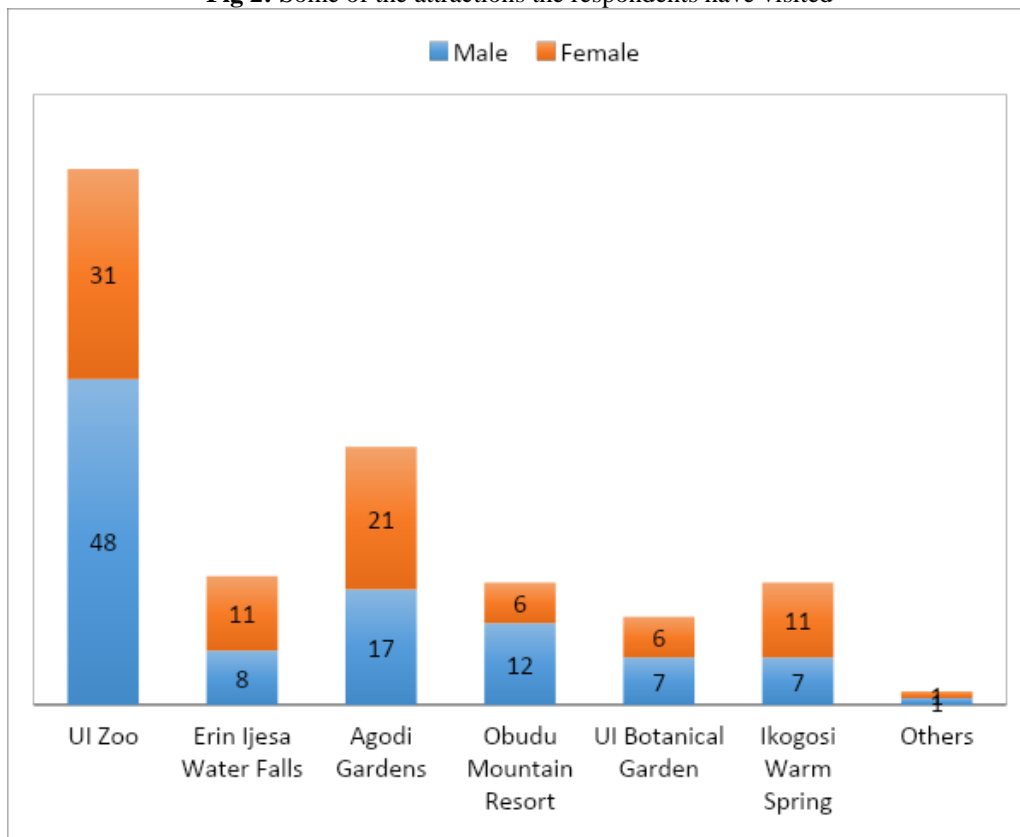
Table 3: Level of Participation in Ecotourism (Whether the respondents have ever visited any ecotourism attraction in Nigeria)

Responses	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	189	107	296

Percentage	63.85	36.15	100%
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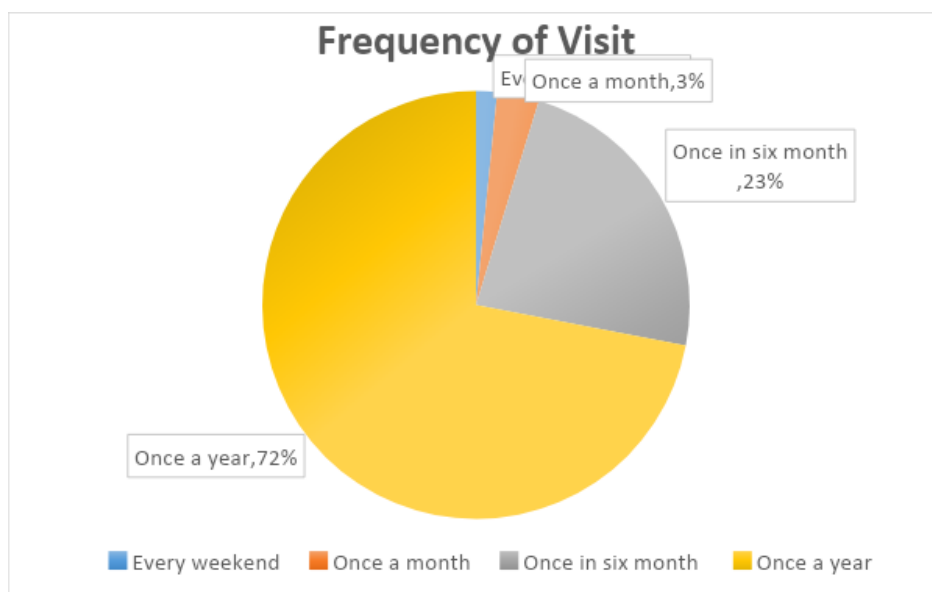
Source: Field Survey, 2019

Fig 2: Some of the attractions the respondents have visited



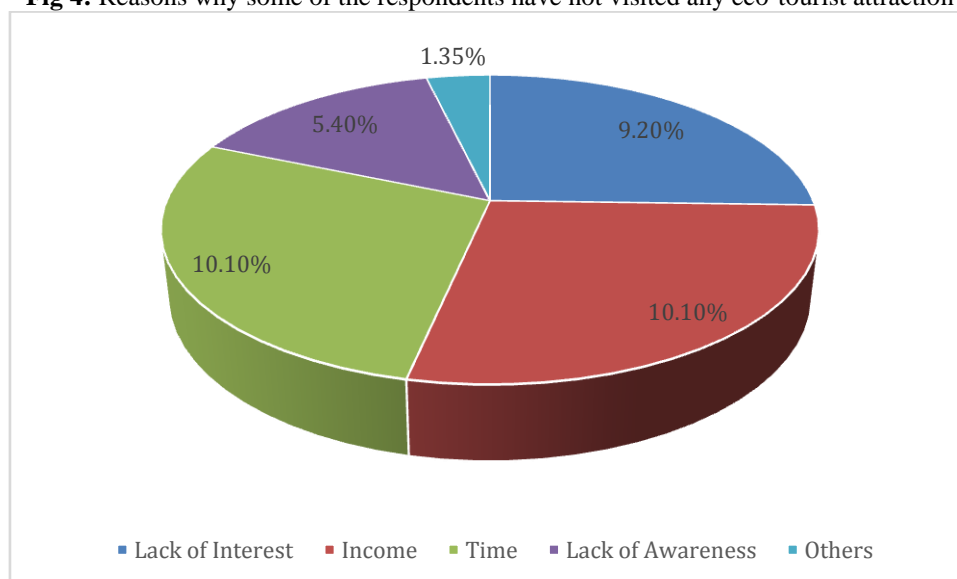
Source: Field Survey, 2019

Fig 3: Frequency of Visit to the ecotourism sites the respondents have been before



Source: Field Survey, 2019

Fig 4: Reasons why some of the respondents have not visited any eco-tourist attraction



Source: Field Survey, 2019

The tables 2 and 3, and figures 2, 3, 4, show that ecotourism is one of the most popular forms of tourism in Nigeria, although most of the available sites are not in good condition for tourism practices. Some 46.6% of the respondents feel that zoological gardens, national parks, games reserves, bird sanctuary, beaches and other natural sites are good for ecotourism practices. The findings also has it that 63.85% of the respondents have been to at least one ecotourism attraction before with most of them mentioning University of Ibadan Zoological Garden, OlumirinWaterFalls at Erin Ijesa, Agodi Gardens, Obudu Mountain Resort, University of Ibadan Botanical Garden, Ikogosi warm spring and Olumo rock among prominent places they have been to. A higher level of 72% of the respondents visit ecotourism sites only once in a year which means there is ample awareness but the participation is low especially among the students. For some of the respondents that have not visited any ecotourism attraction before, 10.1% attributed it to lack of disposable income, another 10.1% blamed time and busy schedule while 9.2% revealed that they do not have interest in ecotourism. Just 5.4% claimed they are not aware of any ecotourism sites.

Table 4: Personal factors that shapes respondents' attitude towards ecotourism

S/N	Research Statements	Degree of Effects				Total
		Responses	To a Large Extent	To Some Extent	Moderately	
1.	My family background influences my visitations to ecotourism attractions. Percentage	30	67	63	136	296
2.	My religion restricts my involvement in ecotourism. Percentage	8	20	11	257	296
3.	My gender and role in the family does not allow me participate in ecotourism activities. Percentage	17	23	17	239	296
4.	My age and health status allows me to visit ecotourism attractions conveniently. Percentage	62	69	47	118	296
5.	Friends and relatives motivate me to visit ecotourism attractions. Percentage	50	134	53	59	296
6.	My allergies and phobia for some natural features discourages me from visiting ecotourism attractions. Percentage	6	31	32	227	296
	Percentage	2%	10.5%	10.8%	76.7%	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 5: External factors that shapes respondents' attitude towards ecotourism

S/N	Research Statements	Responses	Degree of Effects				Total
			Very much	Moderately	Fairly	Not at all	
1.	The aesthetic beauty of the ecotourism attractions inspires me to visit them.		138	83	55	20	296
		Percentage	46.6%	28%	18.6%	6.8%	100%
2.	Being in a natural environment boosts my mental health and improves my physical wellbeing.		116	108	49	23	296
		Percentage	39.2%	36.5%	16.6%	7.8%	100%
3.	The positive publicity of the ecotourism attraction(s) motivates me to visit them.		72	93	64	67	296
		Percentage	24.3%	31.4%	21.6%	22.6%	100%
4.	Ecotourism is not as fascinating as other forms of tourism.		23	73	83	117	296
		Percentage	7.8%	24.7%	28%	39.5%	100%
5.	The cost effectiveness of Nigerian ecotourism attractions really encourages me to visit them.		24	92	95	85	296
		Percentage	6.1%	31.1%	32.9%	28.7%	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

In Table 4 above, most of the respondents submitted that they were not influenced by family backgrounds, religion, phobia/allergies, and gender in participating in ecotourism. They were not also limited by their health status (39.9%) from conveniently visiting ecotourism attractions. 80.2% collectively said they were moderately motivated by friends and relatives to visit ecotourism attractions to some large extent. It is significant to note that 46.6% of the respondents are very much inspired by the aesthetic beauty of the ecotourism attractions they have visited. 39.2% revealed that being in a natural environment has a great impact on their mental health and improves their physical wellbeing. However, the responses of the respondents carry a competitive value as regards positive publicity of ecotourism attraction with 31.4% saying it has a moderate influence and a significant 22.6% objecting to it. Interestingly, a massive 39.5% refuted the claim that ecotourism is not as fascinating as other forms of tourism. Fair enough, the cost effectiveness of participating in ecotourism in Nigeria moderately encourages people to visit ecotourism sites with 31.1% of the respondents accenting to this.

Table 6: The perceptions of respondents towards ecotourism

	Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percent
1.	Hanging out at other attractions is better than visiting nature-based/ecotourism attractions	Strongly Agreed	28	9.5%
		Agreed	73	24.6%
		Disagreed	164	55.4%
		Strongly Disagreed	31	10.5%
		Total	296	100%
2.	Ecotourism attractions in Nigeria are underdeveloped compared to similar attractions in other developing or developed countries	Strongly Agreed	99	33.4%
		Agreed	145	49%
		Disagreed	47	15.9%
		Strongly Disagreed	5	1.7%
		Total	296	100%
3.	Visiting ecotourism in Nigeria is not fulfilling and the experience is not remarkable.	Strongly Agreed	24	8.1%
		Agreed	82	27.7%
		Disagreed	147	49.7%

		Strongly Disagreed	43	14.5%
		Total	296	100%
4.	Most people including me do not have interest in ecotourism attractions due to the state of tourism.	Strongly Agreed	42	14.2%
		Agreed	86	29%
		Disagreed	115	38.9%
		Strongly Disagreed	53	17.9%
		Total	296	100%
5.	I would rather choose international ecotourism attractions instead of local ecotourism attractions.	Strongly Agreed	93	31.4%
		Agreed	101	34.1%
		Disagreed	75	25.3%
		Strongly Disagreed	27	9.1%
		Total	296	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 6 shows that 55.4% of the respondents disagreed that hanging out at other attractions is better than visiting nature-based/ecotourism attraction. However, a very massive 82.4% strongly agreed and agreed that ecotourism attractions in Nigeria are underdeveloped compared to similar attractions in other developing or developed countries. The crux in this part is that the respondents still find visiting ecotourism attractions in Nigeria fulfilling and with a remarkable experience as approximately 50% of the respondents refuted the claim that visiting ecotourism attractions in Nigeria is not fulfilling and the experience is not remarkable. This means that most of the respondents have interest in ecotourism despite its state of underdevelopment as a significant 56.8% show interest in ecotourism although a huge 43.2% expressed that they do not have interest in ecotourism attractions due to the state of tourism in Nigeria. Hence, 65.5% of the respondents jointly representing those that agreed and those that strongly agreed opined that they would rather choose international ecotourism attractions instead of local ecotourism attractions.

Table 7: Factors influencing Perceptions and Attitudes towards Ecotourism

S/N	Statement	S/A	%	A	%	D	%	S/D	%
1.	Nigerian ecotourism attractions lack adequate amenities and recreational facilities.	98	33.1%	152	51.7%	38	12.8%	8	2.7%
2.	Nigerian ecotourism attractions are not easily accessible.	40	13.5%	106	35.8%	138	46.6%	12	4%
3.	The current state of security discourages tourists from patronising ecotourism sites in Nigeria.	88	29.7%	143	48.3%	52	17.6%	13	4.4%
4.	The state of Nigeria's economy does not afford people time and financial power to engage in ecotourism.	99	33.4%	143	48.3%	47	15.9%	7	2.4%
5.	Lack of basic infrastructures and superstructures at notable ecotourism sites in Nigeria does not encourage people to visit these attractions.	97	32.8%	158	53.4%	32	10.8%	9	3%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Key: S/A – Strongly Agreed, A– Agreed, D – Disagreed, S/D – Strongly Agreed

Most of the respondents expectedly agreed that Nigeria's ecotourism attractions lack adequate amenities and recreational facilities. Although some 50.6% of the respondents feel that Nigerian ecotourism attractions are easily accessible, a massive 78% submitted that the current state of security in Nigeria discourages tourists from patronising ecotourism sites in Nigeria. Equally, 81.7% feel the state of the country's economy does not afford people time and financial power to engage in ecotourism. Similarly, 86.2% of the respondents were of the opinion that lack of basic infrastructure and superstructure at notable ecotourism sites in Nigeria does not encourage people to visit these attractions. It could be deduced from the result that the majority of the respondents would agree to be involved in tourism development within and around the ecotourism sites. The students' perspective may be related to some being members of the conscious availability of ecotourism

attractions within the premises of University of Ibadan which may include but not limited to Awba Dam, University Zoo, University Botanical Garden, and the proposed millennium park.

TEST OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H₀ – Students of the University of Ibadan do not have positive attitudes and perceptions towards ecotourism in Nigeria.

H_a – Students of the University of Ibadan have positive attitudes and perceptions towards ecotourism in Nigeria.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.998 ^a	2	.223
Likelihood Ratio	3.079	2	.215
Linear-by-Linear Association	.303	1	.582
N of Valid Cases	100		

Source: Author's field survey, 2019

Decision rule: - Reject H_0 if the P – value is less than 1.

Conclusion: From the analysis, the asymptotic significance is 0.223, 0.215 and 0.582, since the P – value is not up to 1, the null hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that Students of the University of Ibadan have positive attitudes and positive perceptions towards ecotourism in Nigeria.

These findings concur with those of Tosun, (2006) who alluded that in provincial areas, sustainable natural resource management requires integrating the values and interests of a range of stakeholders who have the most direct interest in the local natural resource base, and so their involvement is especially important in ensuring the sustainability of wildlife conservation initiatives and tourism ventures. Hence development and promotion of ecotourism attraction is basically the expectation of the students who grossly agreed that inadequate facilities is the bane of ecotourism development in Nigeria and they also suggested that more awareness about the values and benefits of ecotourism and solicited for better management of existing ecotourism potentials in Nigeria. Government unavoidably has the role of positioning ecotourism as an important avenue for society to unwind and recreate.

IV. CONCLUSION

The significantly higher number of respondents agreeing that Nigerian ecotourism attractions lack adequate amenities and recreational facilities proves that there is a high level of awareness about ecotourism among University of Ibadan students. This level of awareness thus has an effect on their attitudes and perceptions towards ecotourism. Almost all the respondents were aware about the importance of ecotourism development and they mostly opined that the aesthetic beauty of some ecotourism attractions they have visited inspired them. The results of this study concurs with Gamassa (2011) assertion that education, training and awareness empower students and are doorways to development of positive attitudes and perceptions towards tourism development. By extension, the cost effectiveness of most ecotourism attractions in Nigeria is the reason some of the respondents have developed a right attitude towards ecotourism; and they feel ecotourism is fascinating.

Byers (1996) reports that a high level of awareness and understanding about the existence of tourism development issues by the students makes them to appreciate their role as stakeholders; and hence encourage them to take appropriate actions, such as organizing excursion and tour programs to ecotourism attractions such as is established by this research; that most of the respondents visit University of Ibadan Zoological Garden and Botanical Garden, Erin Ijesha Waterfalls, Agodi Gardens, Obudu Mountain Resorts among other domestic ecotourism attractions in Nigeria. Students from institutions of higher learning basically have the capabilities to tour through various students' activities or social entrepreneurship projects which have been financed by the government, higher institutions or the industry. These projects mostly target community engagement for social entrepreneurship, particularly in the rural areas. This creates an avenue for some students to get acquainted with ecotourism resources in the rural areas. Thus, it is vital to clearly understand the factors that contribute to Tour intention on ecotourism destinations.

Students are involved in tourism development although they did not actively take part in the tourism development decision making process, and wish to have a voice when decisions are made (through active participation). As key stakeholders in any tourism development, they want the level of ecotourism in Nigeria to move up through active development and sustainable promotion of ecotourism attractions in the country. Ecotourism development in this part of the world is faced with numerous challenges ranging from socio-economic, political, economic dimensions which can only be tackled through the collaboration of stakeholders,

government, public and private enterprise so as to hasten its rapid growth. Moreover, the Government has completely abandoned the development of ecotourism sites to individual stakeholders. The management and the sustainability of ecotourism sites must not be handled casually because it involves a high level of professionalism and it involves putting in place pragmatic strategies that can help to fast track the sustainable development of tourism in Nigeria.

The Study has devised meaningful steps to tackling the challenges faced by the Nigerian ecotourism sector having established that students have a positive attitude and perception towards it. Government and private stakeholders are enjoined to promote ecotourism studies among researchers.

1. The management of various ecotourism attractions should collaborate with private investors to promote the development of ecotourism potentials through the creation of awareness both locally and internationally which could be a major source of revenue generation for the country at large.

2. Ecotourism service providers and sites developers should also seek professional advice from experts and tourism development practitioners on pragmatic steps to take when it comes to maintaining standard and well refined ecotourism parks and gardens.

3. Management of ecotourism sites may introduce adequate recreational facilities such as casino games, indoor games, swimming pools and other entertainment features should be made available to compliment the Ecotourism attractions and also to attract tourist and local residents which could in turn help to generate revenue benefits and also help to create awareness.

4. Conscious and consistent awareness / sensitization must be done by the management of ecotourism sites in Nigeria and other stakeholders to the indigenes through campaigns or seminars so that they can appreciate the benefits of ecotourism so as to support the initiative.

5. The management of wildlife parks must add new wildlife to the ones available and make the Zoos and parks attract more tourists for sight-seeing. Wildlife such as Elephant, Antelope, Rhinos and Aquatic creatures among others should be added to the existing features.

6. Ecotourism service providers must ensure that sufficient training is given to their staff from time to time and also make available adequate equipment needed to protect them and the tourists from danger attack from animals in case of wildlife parks

7. Sales of local products by indigenes such as local foods, local art and crafts etc. must be encouraged at ecotourism sites in order to promote our culture and generate economic benefits for both the management and its immediate community.

8. Ecotourism education should be encouraged and incorporated into curriculums at all levels of education in Nigeria, as this will further create more awareness for students. This is because most of the respondents visit ecotourism attractions but are not aware that they are actually participating in ecotourism by so doing.

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