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Influence of Environmental Education on Community Awareness in Nigeria

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Abstract

Environmental degradation resulting from pollution, deforestation, poor waste management, oil spillage, and climate change has become a major challenge in Nigeria. This paper examined the influence of environmental education on community awareness in Nigeria. The study discussed the concepts of environmental education and community awareness, as well as methods of promoting environmental education through school curricula, media campaigns, community sensitization programmes, adult education, religious organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The paper revealed that environmental education significantly improves environmental knowledge, promotes positive behavioural change, encourages community participation in conservation activities, and supports sustainable resource management. However, challenges such as poor funding, inadequate instructional materials, low literacy levels, and weak policy implementation hinder effective environmental education in Nigeria. The paper concluded that environmental education is essential for promoting environmental consciousness and sustainable development in Nigeria. It recommended stronger government support, improved environmental literacy programmes, and increased stakeholder collaboration in environmental awareness campaigns.

Keywords: Environmental Education, Community Awareness, Environmental Sustainability, Nigeria

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Introduction

The environment represents the complete system of natural and human-made surroundings within which humans live and

carry out their daily socio-economic activities. It includes land, water bodies, air, forests, wildlife, vegetation, minerals, climate, and the physical and social conditions that influence human existence and development. The

environment serves as the foundation for human survival by providing essential resources such as food, water, shelter, energy, and raw materials for industrial and economic activities. Consequently, the sustainability of the environment is directly linked to human health, economic growth, food security, and overall societal well-being (Adeolu, Enesi & Adeolu, 2014).

Over the years, environmental sustainability has become a major global issue due to the increasing rate of environmental degradation arising from human activities such as industrialization, urbanization, population growth, deforestation, mining, overgrazing, oil exploration, poor agricultural practices, indiscriminate waste disposal, and climate change (UNEP, 2021). The rapid exploitation of natural resources without adequate conservation measures has led to severe ecological imbalances across the world. Environmental scholars have noted that human activities have contributed significantly to global warming, biodiversity loss, desertification, pollution, and depletion of natural resources (Ezeabasili & Mojekwu, 2019). According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021), climate change has intensified environmental disasters such as flooding, drought, rising sea levels, and heat waves, thereby threatening livelihoods and sustainable development globally.

Globally, governments and international organizations have increasingly recognized the importance of environmental protection and sustainability. The United Nations has consistently emphasized that environmental sustainability remains central to achieving sustainable development goals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 3, 6, 11, 12, 13, and 15,

advocate healthy living, clean water and sanitation, sustainable cities, responsible consumption, climate action, and ecosystem preservation (United Nations, 2022). In response to these environmental concerns, several international conferences and declarations such as the Stockholm Conference of 1972, the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, and the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015 have called for greater environmental awareness, education, and collective action toward environmental conservation (UNESCO, 2020).

In Nigeria, environmental degradation has become increasingly alarming due to rapid population growth, poverty, poor environmental management systems, weak policy implementation, urban congestion, and unsustainable utilization of natural resources. The country faces numerous environmental challenges including flooding, desertification, erosion, deforestation, pollution, poor waste management, and oil spillage. These environmental problems have negatively affected both urban and rural communities, resulting in loss of lives, destruction of properties, food insecurity, health hazards, and economic instability (Nwankwoala, 2015).

Flooding has become one of the most devastating environmental problems in Nigeria. In recent years, severe flooding has displaced thousands of residents and destroyed homes, farmlands, schools, roads, and other infrastructure across states such as Kogi, Bayelsa, Rivers, Benue, Anambra, and Lagos. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) reported that recurring floods have contributed significantly to humanitarian crises and economic losses in many Nigerian communities (NEMA, 2022). Similarly, gully erosion has destroyed agricultural lands and residential areas in

southeastern Nigeria, particularly in states such as Anambra, Imo, and Abia, thereby threatening livelihoods and community development (Ofomata, 2018).

Northern Nigeria is also experiencing increasing desertification due to climate change, deforestation, and unsustainable agricultural practices. Desert encroachment has reduced arable land, affected food production, and increased rural poverty in states such as Borno, Yobe, Sokoto, and Katsina (Adebayo, 2017). The shrinking of Lake Chad, which serves as a major source of livelihood for millions of people, further demonstrates the severity of environmental degradation in the region.

In the Niger Delta region, environmental pollution resulting from oil exploration activities remains a major concern. Frequent oil spills, gas flaring, and industrial waste disposal have contaminated water bodies, destroyed aquatic ecosystems, and reduced agricultural productivity. Communities in the region continue to experience severe environmental and health challenges associated with prolonged exposure to polluted environments. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2019), environmental degradation in the Niger Delta has contributed significantly to poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, social unrest, and community conflicts. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2011) also revealed that oil contamination in Ogoniland had severely affected drinking water sources and public health conditions.

Urban centres in Nigeria such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Kano, Abuja, and Ibadan continue to face serious waste management and sanitation problems. Indiscriminate dumping

of refuse, blocked drainage systems, poor sewage disposal, and air pollution have increased environmental health risks and disease outbreaks in many cities (Oyelola, Babatunde & Odunlade, 2009). Rapid urbanization and inadequate waste disposal systems have further compounded environmental pollution in these urban centres.

One major factor responsible for the persistence of environmental problems in Nigeria is inadequate environmental awareness among citizens. Many individuals lack sufficient knowledge regarding environmental conservation, sanitation, climate change adaptation, waste recycling, and sustainable management of natural resources. Consequently, environmentally harmful activities such as bush burning, illegal logging, water pollution, open defecation, indiscriminate waste disposal, and encroachment on environmentally sensitive areas continue to thrive in many communities (Akinbode, 2018). Scholars have argued that low environmental literacy contributes significantly to poor environmental attitudes and unsustainable practices among community members (Olalekan, 2019).

Environmental education therefore emerged as an important strategy for addressing environmental ignorance and promoting sustainable environmental practices. Environmental education refers to the process of developing environmental knowledge, awareness, attitudes, values, skills, and participation necessary for understanding environmental challenges and solving environmental problems. UNESCO (1978) defines environmental education as a process aimed at creating a population that is aware of and concerned about the environment and its associated challenges, and which possesses

the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivation, and commitment required to work individually and collectively toward environmental solutions.

Environmental education seeks to encourage behavioural change, environmental responsibility, and active participation in environmental protection. It equips individuals and communities with the understanding required to make informed decisions regarding sustainable resource utilization and environmental conservation (Palmer, 1998). According to Stapp et al. (1969), environmental education enables citizens to acquire the competencies needed to identify environmental problems and participate effectively in resolving them.

Environmental education can be achieved through formal, non-formal, and informal learning processes. Formal environmental education occurs within schools and tertiary institutions through structured curricula and classroom instruction. Non-formal environmental education includes workshops, seminars, adult education programmes, environmental campaigns, and community sensitization initiatives. Informal environmental education takes place through media broadcasts, religious organizations, social interactions, environmental clubs, and public awareness campaigns (Egunyomi, 2018).

In Nigeria, environmental education has increasingly gained attention through school curricula, media campaigns, environmental sanitation exercises, adult education programmes, and the activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Agencies such as the Federal Ministry of Environment and the National Environmental Standards and Regulations

Enforcement Agency (NESREA) have organized public enlightenment campaigns aimed at improving environmental consciousness among citizens. Environmental non-governmental organizations and community-based groups have also intensified advocacy programmes on climate change, sanitation, waste management, and conservation practices (NESREA, 2021).

Despite these efforts, environmental degradation remains widespread in many Nigerian communities, suggesting that existing environmental education programmes may still be inadequate or ineffective in producing the required level of environmental awareness and behavioural transformation. Many schools lack adequate instructional materials, trained environmental educators, and practical environmental learning experiences. Rural communities also face challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, poor access to information, and inadequate government support, which limit the effectiveness of environmental education programmes (Nwabueze, 2010).

Furthermore, public participation in environmental conservation activities remains relatively low due to weak environmental literacy and poor enforcement of environmental regulations. Several scholars have argued that environmental education remains essential for fostering environmental ethics, responsible citizenship, and sustainable community development in Nigeria (Fien, 1993; Tilbury, 1995). Through effective environmental education, communities can become more conscious of environmental issues and actively participate in environmental sanitation, afforestation, pollution control, recycling, and climate change mitigation initiatives.

Given the increasing environmental challenges confronting Nigeria, there is an urgent need to strengthen environmental education as a strategic tool for improving community awareness and promoting sustainable development. Effective environmental education can empower citizens with the knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills necessary for environmental protection and responsible environmental behaviour. It can also promote active community participation in environmental management and contribute to national development.

It is against this background that this position paper examines the influence of environmental education on community awareness in Nigeria, emphasizing its role in promoting environmental consciousness, behavioural change, environmental responsibility, and sustainable environmental practices.

Concept of Environmental Education

Environmental education is a multidisciplinary field of study and practice aimed at creating awareness, knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills necessary for understanding and solving environmental problems. It focuses on developing environmentally responsible citizens who are capable of participating actively in environmental protection, conservation, and sustainable development. Environmental education equips individuals and communities with the understanding needed to make informed decisions concerning the environment and natural resources.

The concept of environmental education emerged prominently during the global environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s when environmental degradation

became a major international concern. The increasing rate of pollution, deforestation, industrial waste, climate change, and depletion of natural resources prompted governments, educational institutions, and international organizations to emphasize environmental literacy and sustainability education (Palmer, 1998).

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1978), environmental education is:

“A process aimed at developing a world population that is aware of and concerned about the total environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, attitudes, motivations, commitments, and skills to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current environmental problems and prevention of new ones.”

This definition highlights environmental education as both a learning process and a practical strategy for promoting environmental responsibility and problem-solving abilities among individuals and communities.

Similarly, Stapp et al. (1969) defined environmental education as a process that aims at producing citizens who are knowledgeable concerning the biophysical environment and its associated problems, aware of how to help solve these problems, and motivated to work toward their solution. This definition emphasizes knowledge acquisition, awareness creation, and active participation in environmental management.

Environmental education has also been described as an educational process that promotes environmental literacy and sustainable behaviour. According to Fien (1993), environmental education seeks to

encourage critical thinking, value formation, and behavioural change necessary for environmental sustainability. It enables learners to understand the interrelationship between humans and the environment while promoting responsible environmental actions.

In the Nigerian context, environmental education refers to educational efforts directed toward improving public understanding of environmental challenges such as flooding, erosion, pollution, desertification, deforestation, poor sanitation, and climate change. It involves teaching individuals and communities how to manage environmental resources sustainably and adopt environmentally friendly practices (Nwabueze, 2010).

Environmental education therefore goes beyond theoretical knowledge; it involves practical actions aimed at protecting the environment and improving the quality of life. It encourages individuals to become environmentally conscious citizens who actively participate in environmental sanitation, tree planting, waste recycling, conservation, and climate change mitigation programmes.

Objectives and Importance of Environmental Education

Environmental education plays a significant role in promoting environmental sustainability, community awareness, and responsible citizenship. The objectives of environmental education are broad and designed to equip individuals with the competencies necessary for environmental protection and sustainable development.

Objectives of Environmental Education

The major objectives of environmental education include:

1. Creating Environmental Awareness: One of the fundamental objectives of environmental education is to create awareness about environmental issues and challenges. Environmental education helps individuals understand the causes and consequences of environmental degradation such as pollution, flooding, deforestation, erosion, and climate change (UNESCO, 2020). Through awareness creation, people become more conscious of the need to protect and preserve the environment.

2. Promoting Environmental Knowledge: Environmental education aims to provide individuals with adequate knowledge about the environment and its associated problems. It enables learners to understand ecological systems, environmental processes, biodiversity conservation, waste management, and sustainable resource utilization (Palmer, 1998). Knowledge acquired through environmental education helps citizens make informed environmental decisions.

3. Developing Positive Environmental Attitudes and Values: Environmental education seeks to promote positive attitudes, ethics, and values toward the environment. It encourages respect for nature and fosters environmental responsibility among individuals and communities. According to Tilbury (1995), environmental education helps individuals develop a sense of commitment toward environmental conservation and sustainability.

4. Encouraging Behavioural Change; Another important objective of environmental education is behavioural transformation. Environmental education promotes

environmentally friendly behaviours such as proper waste disposal, energy conservation, tree planting, water conservation, and pollution control. It discourages environmentally harmful activities including indiscriminate refuse dumping, bush burning, illegal logging, and environmental pollution (Olalekan, 2019).

5. Developing Problem-Solving Skills:

Environmental education equips individuals with critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary for addressing environmental challenges. Learners are trained to identify environmental problems, analyze their causes, and develop sustainable solutions (Fien, 1993). This objective is particularly important in developing countries where environmental challenges continue to increase.

6. Promoting Community Participation:

Environmental education encourages active participation in environmental protection and community development activities. It motivates individuals and groups to engage in environmental sanitation exercises, conservation programmes, afforestation campaigns, recycling initiatives, and climate change adaptation projects (Egunyomi, 2018).

7. Supporting Sustainable Development:

Environmental education promotes sustainable development by encouraging the responsible use and management of natural resources. It teaches people how to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 2022). Through environmental education, communities learn sustainable agricultural practices, conservation methods, and environmentally responsible lifestyles.

Concept of Community Awareness

Community awareness refers to the level of knowledge, understanding, consciousness, and sensitivity possessed by members of a community regarding issues that affect their lives, environment, health, security, and overall well-being. It involves the ability of individuals and groups within a community to recognize societal problems, understand their causes and consequences, and participate actively in finding solutions to such problems. Community awareness is an essential component of sustainable development because it promotes informed decision-making, social responsibility, collective action, and community participation in developmental activities (Nwankwo & Peters, 2020).

In the context of environmental sustainability, community awareness refers to the extent to which members of a community understand environmental issues and their implications for human existence and ecological balance. Environmental community awareness involves educating people about environmental challenges such as pollution, flooding, erosion, climate change, deforestation, desertification, poor sanitation, and improper waste disposal. It also involves developing positive attitudes and behaviours that encourage environmental protection and sustainable resource management (Akinbode, 2018).

Community awareness is not merely the possession of information; it also includes the willingness and ability of individuals to apply environmental knowledge in their daily activities and participate in environmental conservation efforts. According to UNESCO (2020), awareness creation is one of the major foundations for promoting environmental responsibility and sustainable development. Communities that possess high environmental

awareness are more likely to support environmental policies, participate in sanitation programmes, conserve natural resources, and discourage environmentally harmful practices.

Environmental community awareness is particularly important in developing countries such as Nigeria where environmental problems continue to increase due to rapid urbanization, industrialization, poverty, and population growth. In many Nigerian communities, poor environmental awareness contributes significantly to indiscriminate refuse dumping, open defecation, illegal logging, bush burning, pollution of water bodies, and encroachment on environmentally sensitive areas (Olalekan, 2019). Consequently, promoting community awareness has become a critical strategy for addressing environmental degradation and improving environmental sustainability.

Environmental community awareness encompasses several dimensions which collectively influence how communities perceive and respond to environmental issues.

Knowledge of Environmental Problems

One of the major components of community awareness is knowledge of environmental problems. This involves understanding the nature, causes, and effects of environmental challenges affecting society. Environmental education helps community members become aware of issues such as climate change, flooding, oil spillage, erosion, deforestation, desertification, pollution, and waste management problems (UNEP, 2021).

Knowledge of environmental problems enables individuals to understand how human activities contribute to environmental degradation. For instance, communities

become aware that indiscriminate dumping of refuse blocks drainage systems and contributes to flooding, while bush burning and deforestation contribute to climate change and soil erosion. According to Palmer (1998), environmental knowledge serves as the foundation for developing environmentally responsible behaviour and sustainable lifestyles.

In Nigeria, environmental awareness campaigns organized by governmental agencies, schools, non-governmental organizations, and media institutions have helped increase public knowledge about sanitation, pollution control, climate change adaptation, and environmental conservation. Nevertheless, several rural communities still experience low levels of environmental literacy due to poverty, illiteracy, and inadequate access to environmental information (Nwabueze, 2010).

Understanding Environmental Consequences

Another important dimension of community awareness is understanding the consequences of environmental degradation. Environmental awareness enables individuals and communities to recognize the social, economic, health, and ecological effects of environmental abuse and unsustainable practices.

Environmental degradation has far-reaching consequences including disease outbreaks, food insecurity, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, displacement of people, destruction of farmlands, and economic losses. For example, flooding in many Nigerian states has resulted in loss of lives, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement of thousands of residents. Similarly, oil pollution in the

Niger Delta has contaminated water sources, destroyed aquatic ecosystems, and negatively affected farming and fishing activities (UNDP, 2019).

Understanding environmental consequences helps communities appreciate the urgency of environmental protection and motivates them to support environmental sustainability initiatives. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021), public understanding of climate-related risks is necessary for effective climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. When communities understand the dangers associated with environmental degradation, they are more likely to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours and participate in conservation activities.

Furthermore, environmental awareness promotes understanding of the relationship between environmental quality and human health. Poor sanitation, polluted water, and improper waste disposal contribute significantly to diseases such as cholera, typhoid fever, malaria, and respiratory infections (Oyelola, Babatunde & Odunlade, 2009). Consequently, environmental awareness campaigns often emphasize sanitation practices and environmental hygiene as important measures for improving public health.

Positive Environmental Attitudes

Community awareness also involves the development of positive environmental attitudes, values, and ethics. Environmental attitudes refer to individuals' feelings, beliefs, and dispositions toward the environment and environmental protection. Positive environmental attitudes encourage people to respect nature, conserve resources, and avoid

practices that may harm the environment (Tilbury, 1995).

Environmental education plays a major role in shaping environmental attitudes by promoting environmental ethics, responsibility, and sustainability consciousness. Through awareness programmes, individuals learn the importance of maintaining clean surroundings, conserving forests, protecting wildlife, and preserving natural resources for future generations.

According to Fien (1993), environmental attitudes influence environmental behaviour and determine the extent to which individuals participate in environmental conservation efforts. Communities with positive environmental attitudes are more likely to engage in environmental sanitation exercises, tree planting campaigns, recycling activities, and pollution control measures.

In Nigeria, the promotion of positive environmental attitudes has become increasingly important due to growing environmental challenges. Government agencies and environmental organizations have continued to organize campaigns aimed at discouraging practices such as indiscriminate waste disposal, open defecation, illegal mining, and bush burning. Religious organizations, schools, and community leaders also contribute to environmental value orientation by encouraging cleanliness, stewardship, and environmental responsibility.

Participation in Environmental Conservation Activities

An important indicator of community awareness is the level of participation in environmental conservation activities. Environmental awareness is expected to

motivate individuals and communities to take practical actions aimed at protecting and improving the environment. Participation may occur at individual, group, or community levels through organized environmental activities and programmes.

Environmental conservation activities include:

- Tree planting campaigns
- Environmental sanitation exercises
- Waste recycling initiatives
- Drainage clearing activities
- Community clean-up programmes
- Conservation of forests and water bodies
- Climate change advocacy campaigns
- Sustainable farming practices

Community participation is essential for successful environmental management because environmental protection cannot be achieved by government alone. According to UNEP (2021), sustainable environmental management requires active collaboration among governments, communities, civil society organizations, and individuals.

High environmental awareness encourages communities to organize sanitation exercises and environmental campaigns aimed at maintaining clean surroundings and reducing pollution. In many Nigerian communities, monthly sanitation programmes have been introduced to improve environmental cleanliness and public health conditions. Similarly, tree planting campaigns organized by schools, NGOs, and environmental agencies help combat deforestation and climate change.

Participation in environmental conservation activities also promotes community development and social responsibility. Communities that actively engage in environmental management often experience improved sanitation, reduced disease outbreaks, cleaner surroundings, and better quality of life (Egunyomi, 2018).

Importance of Community Awareness in Environmental Sustainability

Community awareness is essential for achieving environmental sustainability and sustainable development. Environmental problems can only be effectively addressed when people understand their causes, consequences, and solutions. Communities that possess environmental awareness are more likely to support environmental policies, comply with environmental regulations, and adopt environmentally sustainable lifestyles.

Community awareness contributes to:

- Reduction of environmental degradation
- Improvement of sanitation and public health
- Conservation of natural resources
- Promotion of sustainable development
- Increased public participation in environmental programmes
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Promotion of environmental responsibility and citizenship

According to the United Nations (2022), environmental sustainability depends largely on public awareness, education, and

community participation. Therefore, strengthening environmental awareness through environmental education remains an important strategy for addressing environmental challenges in Nigeria and promoting sustainable national development.

Influence of Environmental Education on Community Awareness

Environmental education plays a vital role in shaping community awareness, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development. It serves as an important tool for informing individuals and communities about environmental challenges and equipping them with the knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills required to protect and sustain the environment. Through environmental education, people become more conscious of the consequences of environmental degradation and are encouraged to participate actively in environmental conservation and community development activities.

In developing countries such as Nigeria, where environmental challenges such as flooding, pollution, erosion, desertification, deforestation, poor sanitation, and climate change continue to threaten livelihoods and public health, environmental education has become increasingly important. Scholars have argued that environmental education contributes significantly to improving environmental literacy, promoting behavioural change, strengthening public participation, and enhancing sustainable resource management (Palmer, 1998; UNESCO, 2020).

Environmental education influences community awareness in several important ways.

Promotion of Environmental Knowledge

One of the major influences of environmental education on community awareness is the promotion of environmental knowledge. Environmental education provides individuals and communities with information about environmental issues, ecological systems, environmental risks, and sustainability practices. Through educational programmes, people learn about environmental challenges such as pollution, climate change, flooding, desertification, erosion, oil spillage, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and improper waste management (UNEP, 2021).

Environmental knowledge helps individuals understand the relationship between human activities and environmental degradation. For example, communities become aware that indiscriminate dumping of refuse contributes to flooding and disease outbreaks, while deforestation increases soil erosion and climate instability. According to Stapp et al. (1969), environmental education helps individuals acquire the knowledge necessary for identifying and solving environmental problems.

Environmental education also promotes awareness regarding environmental laws, conservation strategies, and sustainable lifestyles. Through schools, media campaigns, workshops, seminars, and community outreach programmes, citizens become more informed about environmental sustainability and the importance of environmental protection. In Nigeria, environmental sanitation campaigns and climate change awareness programmes organized by government agencies and non-governmental organizations have contributed significantly to improving public understanding of environmental issues (NESREA, 2021).

Furthermore, environmental knowledge enables communities to make informed decisions regarding the utilization of natural resources and environmental management. According to UNESCO (1978), environmental education seeks to create environmentally informed citizens capable of taking responsible actions toward environmental sustainability.

Behavioural Change

Another important influence of environmental education is behavioural change. Environmental education promotes positive environmental attitudes and encourages individuals to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours and practices. It discourages harmful activities such as indiscriminate waste disposal, bush burning, illegal logging, pollution of water bodies, and environmental vandalism.

Environmental education helps individuals understand the consequences of environmentally irresponsible behaviours and motivates them to adopt sustainable alternatives. According to Tilbury (1995), environmental education is intended not only to provide knowledge but also to influence attitudes and behaviours toward environmental sustainability.

People exposed to environmental education are more likely to:

- Dispose of waste properly
- Participate in sanitation activities
- Conserve water and energy
- Engage in recycling activities
- Plant trees and protect vegetation

- Avoid pollution and environmental destruction

Behavioural change is particularly important in Nigeria where many environmental problems are linked to poor environmental attitudes and practices. Studies have shown that environmental awareness programmes contribute significantly to reducing environmentally harmful behaviours within communities (Olalekan, 2019).

Environmental education also promotes environmental ethics and responsibility. Individuals begin to recognize that protecting the environment is a collective responsibility necessary for present and future generations. According to Fien (1993), environmental education encourages value reorientation and sustainable lifestyles that support environmental conservation.

Increased Participation in Environmental Activities

Environmental education significantly increases community participation in environmental protection and conservation activities. When people become aware of environmental problems and their implications, they are more likely to participate actively in environmental management programmes and community development initiatives.

Environmental education encourages communities to engage in:

- Environmental sanitation exercises
- Community clean-up campaigns
- Tree planting programmes
- Waste recycling initiatives
- Conservation projects

- Drainage clearing activities
- Climate change advocacy campaigns

Community participation is essential for effective environmental management because environmental sustainability cannot be achieved through government efforts alone. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2021), sustainable environmental protection requires active collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and local communities.

In Nigeria, environmental sanitation exercises conducted in many states have helped improve environmental cleanliness and public awareness regarding sanitation practices. Environmental clubs in schools and universities also encourage students to participate in environmental advocacy and conservation activities.

Environmental education further promotes volunteerism and collective responsibility within communities. Community members become more willing to support environmental campaigns and contribute toward maintaining clean and healthy environments. According to Egunyomi (2018), increased community participation resulting from environmental education strengthens environmental governance and sustainable development efforts.

Improved Health Conditions

Environmental education contributes significantly to improved public health by promoting hygiene, sanitation, and environmental cleanliness. Poor environmental conditions such as polluted water, improper waste disposal, blocked drainage systems, and poor sanitation contribute to the spread of diseases including

cholera, typhoid fever, malaria, diarrhea, and respiratory infections (Oyelola, Babatunde & Odunlade, 2009).

Environmental education teaches communities the importance of maintaining clean surroundings, practicing proper hygiene, disposing waste appropriately, and preventing environmental pollution. Through sanitation awareness campaigns, people become more conscious of how environmental conditions affect their health and well-being.

For example, environmental education programmes encourage practices such as:

- Regular hand washing
- Proper sewage disposal
- Keeping drainage systems clean
- Avoiding open defecation
- Proper waste collection and disposal
- Safe water management

These practices contribute to healthier communities and reduction in disease outbreaks. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), improved environmental sanitation and hygiene play a crucial role in disease prevention and public health promotion.

In rural and urban communities across Nigeria, environmental awareness programmes have contributed to improved sanitation practices and environmental hygiene. Government agencies, schools, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations continue to organize environmental health campaigns aimed at reducing environmental health risks.

Environmental education therefore serves as a preventive strategy for improving public health by addressing environmental factors associated with diseases and poor living conditions.

Sustainable Resource Management

Environmental education also influences community awareness by promoting sustainable management and utilization of natural resources. Natural resources such as forests, water bodies, soil, wildlife, and minerals are essential for human survival and economic development. However, overexploitation and misuse of these resources contribute significantly to environmental degradation.

Environmental education teaches communities the importance of conserving natural resources and utilizing them responsibly. Through environmental awareness programmes, people learn sustainable methods of farming, forestry, fishing, water conservation, and land management (Palmer, 1998).

Sustainable resource management practices promoted through environmental education include:

- Afforestation and reforestation
- Soil conservation techniques
- Sustainable agriculture
- Water conservation
- Renewable energy utilization
- Wildlife conservation
- Controlled grazing practices

In Nigeria, environmental education has become increasingly important in addressing

challenges such as deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, and depletion of water resources. Rural communities that depend heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods benefit greatly from environmental education because it helps them adopt environmentally sustainable practices.

According to the United Nations (2022), sustainable resource management is essential for achieving sustainable development and ensuring environmental protection for future generations. Environmental education therefore contributes significantly to environmental sustainability by promoting responsible utilization of natural resources.

Empowerment of Rural Communities

Environmental education empowers rural communities by equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary for environmental protection, sustainable agriculture, and community development. Many rural communities in Nigeria rely heavily on agriculture, fishing, forestry, and natural resources for survival. However, environmental degradation, climate change, and poor farming practices continue to threaten rural livelihoods and food security.

Environmental education helps rural dwellers understand environmental risks and adopt sustainable agricultural and environmental practices. Through community sensitization programmes, workshops, extension services, and adult education initiatives, rural populations acquire practical knowledge regarding:

- Soil conservation
- Organic farming
- Climate-smart agriculture

- Water management
- Afforestation
- Erosion control
- Sustainable fishing methods

Environmental education also improves rural communities' capacity to adapt to climate change and environmental disasters. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021), environmental awareness and education are essential for strengthening climate resilience and adaptation among vulnerable communities.

Furthermore, environmental education promotes self-reliance and community participation in local environmental management. Rural communities become more capable of identifying environmental problems, organizing environmental campaigns, and participating in sustainable development programmes.

In Nigeria, agricultural extension programmes and rural environmental campaigns have contributed to increasing environmental awareness among farmers and rural dwellers. According to Nwabueze (2010), environmental education enhances community empowerment by promoting environmental literacy and active participation in development activities.

Environmental education therefore serves as a powerful tool for improving the socio-economic conditions of rural communities while promoting environmental sustainability and community resilience.

Methods of Promoting Environmental Education in Nigeria

Environmental education is promoted in Nigeria through various formal, non-formal,

and informal methods aimed at increasing environmental awareness, encouraging responsible behaviour, and promoting sustainable development. These methods help individuals and communities understand environmental challenges and participate actively in environmental protection activities (UNESCO, 2020).

School Curriculum Integration: One major method of promoting environmental education in Nigeria is through the integration of environmental studies into school curricula. Environmental topics are taught in subjects such as Geography, Biology, Agricultural Science, Civic Education, and Social Studies. Through classroom instruction, students learn about pollution, climate change, flooding, deforestation, waste management, and environmental conservation (Nwabueze, 2010).

Schools also promote environmental education through environmental clubs, sanitation exercises, tree planting campaigns, field trips, and conservation projects. These activities help students develop environmental responsibility and sustainable habits.

Community Sensitization Programmes: Community sensitization programmes are important in promoting environmental awareness, especially in rural areas. Communities are educated through workshops, seminars, town hall meetings, environmental rallies, and outreach programmes. These programmes provide information on sanitation, waste disposal, pollution control, and climate change adaptation (Akinbode, 2018).

Government agencies, local authorities, and community leaders often organize environmental campaigns to encourage public

participation in environmental protection and sanitation activities.

Media Campaigns: The media plays a significant role in spreading environmental awareness in Nigeria. Radio, television, newspapers, and social media platforms are used to educate the public about environmental issues such as flooding, pollution, climate change, and waste management (Olalekan, 2019).

Environmental documentaries, jingles, talk shows, and online campaigns help promote environmental literacy and encourage environmentally friendly behaviour among citizens.

Adult Education Programmes: Adult education programmes also contribute to environmental education in Nigeria. Adult learners receive environmental literacy education through community learning centres, vocational training programmes, and agricultural extension services. These programmes educate adults on sanitation, sustainable farming, water conservation, and environmental management (Egunyomi, 2018).

Adult education is particularly important for rural populations who may not have access to formal environmental education.

Religious Organizations: Religious organizations such as churches and mosques promote environmental education by teaching members about cleanliness, environmental stewardship, and responsible use of natural resources. Religious leaders often encourage sanitation exercises, tree planting, and environmental responsibility through sermons and community activities (Palmer, 1998).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): Environmental NGOs play an important role in promoting environmental awareness through advocacy programmes, workshops, campaigns, and community outreach activities. NGOs educate communities on climate change, pollution control, conservation, and sustainable development (UNEP, 2021).

They also collaborate with schools, government agencies, and local communities to organize environmental sanitation and conservation programmes.

Conclusion

Environmental education has emerged as a critical tool for promoting community awareness, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development in Nigeria. The study has shown that environmental degradation resulting from pollution, flooding, deforestation, desertification, poor waste management, oil spillage, and climate change continues to threaten human health, economic development, and environmental sustainability in many Nigerian communities. These challenges have largely been intensified by inadequate environmental awareness and poor environmental practices among citizens.

The paper established that environmental education plays a significant role in improving community awareness by promoting environmental knowledge, encouraging positive environmental attitudes, influencing behavioural change, and increasing public participation in environmental conservation activities. Through formal, non-formal, and informal educational approaches, individuals and communities become more conscious of environmental problems and the need to adopt sustainable environmental practices.

The study further revealed that methods such as school curriculum integration, community sensitization programmes, media campaigns, adult education programmes, religious organizations, and the activities of non-governmental organizations have contributed significantly to environmental awareness creation in Nigeria. These methods have helped educate citizens on environmental sanitation, waste management, conservation practices, climate change adaptation, and sustainable resource utilization.

Despite these efforts, environmental education in Nigeria still faces numerous challenges including poor funding, inadequate instructional materials, low literacy levels, weak policy implementation, shortage of trained personnel, and limited public participation. These challenges have hindered the effectiveness of environmental education programmes and reduced their impact on community awareness and environmental sustainability.

The paper therefore concludes that strengthening environmental education is essential for improving community awareness and addressing environmental challenges in Nigeria. Effective environmental education will not only promote environmental consciousness and responsible behaviour but will also encourage active community participation in environmental management and sustainable development initiatives. Governments, educational institutions, environmental agencies, religious bodies, media organizations, and non-governmental organizations must collaborate to intensify environmental education programmes and ensure that citizens are adequately informed and empowered to protect the environment.

Ultimately, achieving environmental sustainability in Nigeria depends largely on the level of environmental awareness and commitment demonstrated by individuals and communities. Therefore, environmental education remains a fundamental strategy for building environmentally responsible citizens and creating a healthier, cleaner, and more sustainable society for present and future generations.

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