

# Perception and Awareness of Secondary Schools Students towards Ecotourism in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria

Lameed, A. A.; Adesunloye, D. T. and Christopher, A. C.

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Corresponding Author; Email: [dtadesunloye@lautech.edu.ng](mailto:dtadesunloye@lautech.edu.ng)

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper investigates perception and awareness of secondary schools' students towards ecotourism in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo state, Nigeria. Stratified random and purposive sampling techniques were employed for the study. A total of two hundred and forty students (240) were selected from 12 schools (six public and six private) for the study. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings from this study showed that 55.8% of the students were female, 80.4% and 15.0% were within the age range of 11-15 years and 0-10years respectively, 60.0% were Christian, and 39.2% were Islam. The findings also revealed how students felt about ecotourism. 88.8% of students believed that ecotourism is important, 92.5% agreed that it need to be taught in schools, and 89.6% felt that ecotourism destinations should have support by the government. Furthermore, the results showed the students' level of awareness regarding ecotourism: 50.8% of them did not know about it, 68.3% were taught about it in school, 89.2% reported that their school did not have an ecotourism social club, 50.8% was aware about ecotourism sites, and 56.7% had visited them. The mean weight score and perception score of students for ecotourism awareness and perception were all positive. There is no significant relationship between ecotourism awareness of the students and their perception about ecotourism. Also, the correlation between awareness and perception is 0.101, which is positive but not statistically significant ( $p$ -value = 0.118). This suggests that there is a weak positive relationship between ecotourism awareness and perception, but this relationship is not strong enough to conclude that there is a significant relationship. The study recommends that ecotourism education should be integrated into the school curriculum to increase the awareness and knowledge of students about ecotourism and the government should support ecotourism sites by providing necessary infrastructure and policies that promote conservation of natural resources.*

**KEYWORDS:** Awareness; Ecotourism; Ecotourism initiatives; Secondary school; Students

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## INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism, is a form of tourism that takes place in an ecological setting (Ayodele and Ajayi, 2020). It is a type of tourism that focuses on responsible travel to natural areas, has gained popularity in recent years due to its potential for sustainable development and environmental conservation (Chen and Wu, 2019). Ecotourism has been shown to have numerous benefits, including the preservation of biodiversity, the promotion of environmental education, and the sustainable development of local communities (Mondino & Beery, 2019). However, the success of ecotourism relies on the awareness and responsible behaviour of tourists, particularly young people who represent the future of sustainable tourism (Warren *et al.*, 2018). Ecotourism education and awareness programs have been found to have a significant impact on tourists' behaviour, attitudes, and understanding of environmental conservation (Renet *et al.*, 2021). These programs have been successful in promoting sustainable tourism practices and enhancing visitors' appreciation of the natural environment (Fennell, 2021). Additionally, ecotourism education can promote the development of pro-environmental attitudes and values, which can lead to long-term changes in behaviour (Lee *et al.*, 2021). Studies have shown that secondary school students are at a critical stage of their personal and social development, making them an important demographic group to target for ecotourism education and awareness programs (Punzalan, 2020). Research suggests that education programs that target young people can have a positive impact on their environmental attitudes, values, and behaviours (Orbanic & Kovac, 2021). Moreover, incorporating ecotourism education into the school curriculum can provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become responsible and sustainable tourists in the future (Arrobas *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, it is important to understand the level of ecotourism awareness among young people, especially secondary school students who are at a critical stage of their personal and social development (Salman *et al.*, 2021). In Nigeria, ecotourism is an emerging industry that has the potential to contribute to the country's economic growth and environmental conservation (Akinyemi *et al.*, 2019). However, there is limited research on ecotourism awareness among secondary school students in Nigeria, despite their potential to promote sustainable tourism in the future. This study can provide insights for policymakers, educators, and tourism stakeholders to develop effective ecotourism education and awareness programs that promote sustainable tourism practices among young people in Nigeria, as well as the challenges and opportunities for promoting sustainable tourism practices among secondary school students. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the level of awareness of ecotourism among secondary school students in Ibadan.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Area

The study was conducted in three local governments in Ibadan, namely Ibadan North, Ibadan Northwest, and Ibadan Southwest. Ibadan (Oyo state, Nigeria) is the largest city in West Africa

and the second largest in Africa, with land size covering an area of 240km<sup>2</sup>. The city is located on geographic grid reference longitude 3° 5E, latitude 7° 20N (Adedokun *et al.*, 2008). Ibadan is situated at an average height of 200m above sea level, drained by three major river basins (Ogunpa, Ona and Ogbere) and surrounded by secondary rainforest as well as a savanna. Spatially, it sprawls over a radius of 12-15 km and experiences a mainly tropical climate with an estimated annual rainfall of about 1250 mm (Ojo and Awokola, 2012). The choice of these three local governments was based on their proximity to nature reserves, such as the University of Ibadan Zoological Garden and the Agodi Gardens, which are potential ecotourism sites.

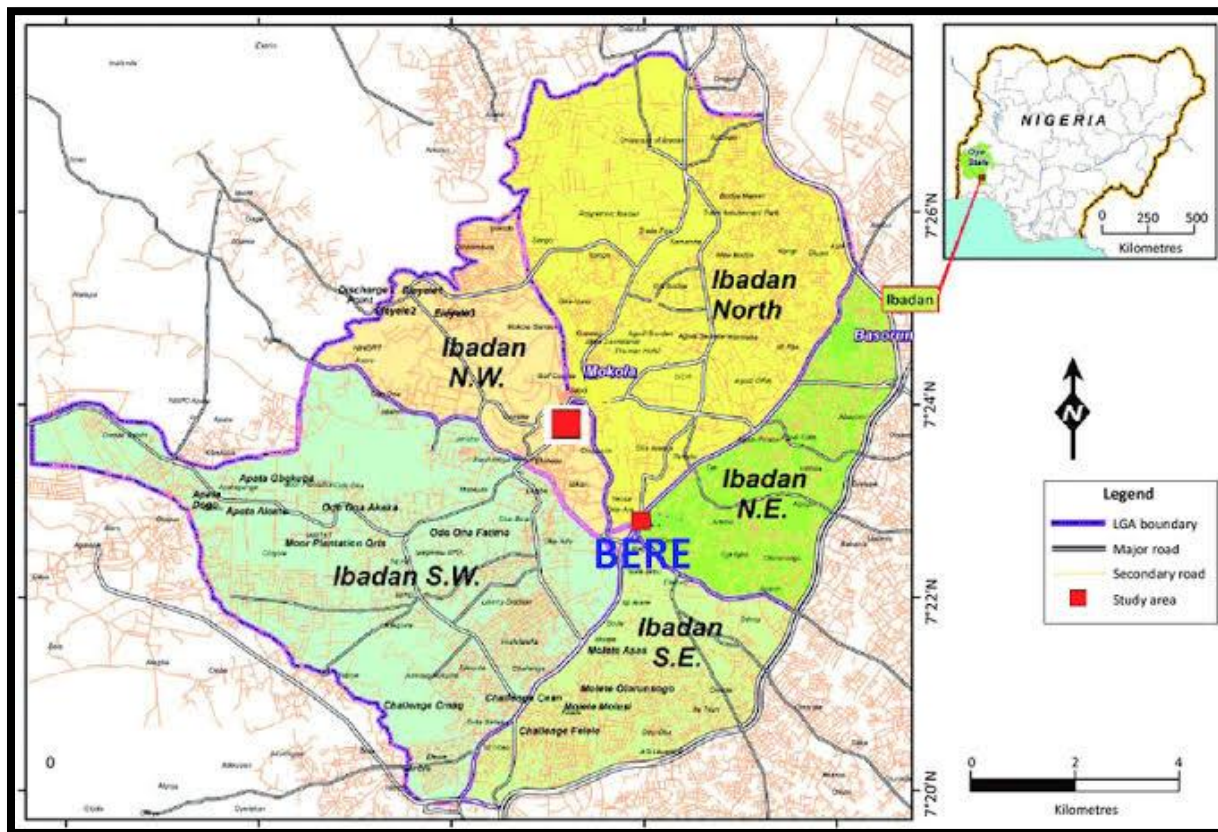


Fig.1: Map of Oyo state showing the study locations

Source: Field Survey, 2023

### Data Collection

The target population for the study was secondary school students in these areas. A total of twelve schools (six public and six private) were selected for the study. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, as the schools were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. A total of two hundred and forty (240) students were selected, with 20

students selected from each school. The instrument of data collection was structured questionnaire which was self-administered to the students.

### Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics were used to test hypotheses and make generalizations about the population. The statistical software SPSS (version 25.0) was used for data analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-economic characteristics of sampled respondents:

The result of the demographic characteristics of the study population is presented in Table 1. The dominant gender was female with (55.8%), while male had 44.2% of the sampled population. This is inconsistent with the findings of Adetola and Adedire (2018), who reported that majority of visitors to ecotourism destinations were females. Majority (80.4%) of the students fall within the age group of 11-15 years, followed by respondent between 0-10 years with (15%) and the least was age group of 16-20 years with (4.6%). This implies that respondents are still in their prime ages and the quest for knowledge is expected to be high. This is inconsistent with the findings of Ikyaaagbaet *al.* (2018), who reported that majority of students was below 17 years, an indication of early child education. The study further revealed that majority (60.0%) of the respondents was Christians. This result conforms with the findings of Bankole *et al.* (2017), who reported that 60.0% of the respondents were Christians.

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristic of the study respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	106	44.2
Female	134	55.8
<b>Age</b>		
0-10	36	15.0
11-15	193	80.4
16-20	11	4.6
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	144	60.0
Islam	94	39.2
Others	2	0.8

**Source:** Author's field survey, 2023



### Perception of Students about Ecotourism

The table 2 comprises two parts: the first part shows the frequency distribution of responses to three questions about the importance of ecotourism, the need to teach ecotourism in school, and the role of government in supporting ecotourism sites. The second part presents the mean and standard deviation of responses to seven statements that assessed the perception of students towards ecotourism. Regarding the importance of ecotourism, 213 students (88.8%) believed that ecotourism is essential, while 27 students (11.3%) did not think so. Similarly, 222 students (92.5%) indicated that ecotourism should be taught in their schools, while 18 students (7.5%) believed otherwise. Additionally, 215 students (89.6%) agreed that the government should support ecotourism sites, while 25 students (10.4%) disagreed. The result of this study is consistent with Mirjam (2013) who found that tertiary students had favourable perception towards ecotourism. The second part of the table shows that the students' perception of ecotourism was generally positive. The mean scores for statements that assessed the positive impacts of ecotourism, such as the promotion of conservation of wild plants and animals, encouragement of infrastructural development, provision of employment for local people, increase in recreational opportunities, and a source of revenue for the government, were all below 2. The statement that received the highest mean score was that ecotourism leads to overcrowding in the locations, with a mean score of 2.80. Finally, the results indicate that the students have a positive perception of ecotourism and recognize its importance in promoting conservation, development, employment, and revenue generation. However, they also acknowledge the negative impact of overcrowding that may result from ecotourism. Overall, these studies provide valuable insights into different aspects of tourism and environmental awareness among students. They suggest that promoting environmental education and engagement in environmental activities can lead to more responsible tourism practices and contribute to environmental sustainability.

**Table 2** showing the Perception of Students about Ecotourism

<b>Item</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think ecotourism is important?	213 (88.8)	27 (11.3)
Do you think ecotourism should be taught in your school?	222 (92.5)	18 (7.5)
Do you think government should support ecotourism sites?	215 (89.6)	25 (10.4)
<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Ecotourism promotes the conservation of wild plants and animals	1.98	1.870
Ecotourism encourages infrastructural development	2.16	1.237
Ecotourism provides employment for local people	1.73	1.546
Ecotourism increases recreational opportunities	1.96	2.752
Ecotourism serves as source of revenue for government	1.70	1.006
Ecotourism increases income and quality of life of the local people	1.87	1.046
Ecotourism leads to overcrowding in the locations	2.80	1.549

### Level of Awareness of Ecotourism among Secondary School Students

From the result given in Table 2, the study revealed that 49.2% of respondents are aware of ecotourism, while 50.8% are not aware. This implies that awareness of Ecotourism among the secondary school students in the study area is still low. Similar studies by Alarape (2018) and Cini *et al.*, (2015) also confirm that awareness of Ecotourism is still poor among the students. The study also revealed that 31.7% students reported that they are taught about ecotourism in their school, while 68.3% are not. This indicates that majority of the student are not taught about Ecotourism. Previous study by Yager *et al.*, (2022) found that Ecotourism is taught under subject like Agriculture Science, Biology, Social Studies and Basic Science which shows that Ecotourism is not included in the secondary school curriculum. Majority (89.2%) of the students are not aware of the presence of ecotourism social club in their school, but only 10.8% of the students are aware. This connotes that majority of the students have no knowledge and not participating in the activities of ecotourism social club in their schools. Alarape (2018) also found that majority of the students are not aware of Ecotourism club in his study area. Also, the results indicated that highest percentages of the students (50.8%) are aware of ecotourism sites. Furthermore, the results showed majority of students (56.7%) had visited ecotourism sites, while 43.3% of the students had not. This shows that most students are familiar with Ecotourism sites during visit with their parents, excursion and possibly through the help of internet and social media. Students can know many Ecotourism sites and watch wildlife documentary on facebook, whatsapp, Instagram through phones, tablet, cable, television and other devices Yager *et al.*, (2022) confirmed that students have knowledge of Ecotourism sites through the help of internet, cable network and teachers.

**Table 3:** showing the Level of Awareness of Ecotourism among Secondary School Students

S/N	ITEM	YES	NO
1	Are you aware about ecotourism?	118 (49.2)	122 (50.8)
2	Are you taught about ecotourism in your school?	76 (31.7)	164 (68.3)
3	Do you have any ecotourism social club in your school?	26 (10.8)	214 (89.2)
4	Are you aware of any ecotourism site?	112 (50.8)	118 (49.2)
5	Have you been to any ecotourism site?	136 (56.7)	104 (43.3)

**Source:** Author's field survey, 2023

### Relationship between Ecotourism Awareness of the Students and Their Perception about Ecotourism

Table 3 presents the relationship between ecotourism awareness of the students and their perception about ecotourism. The table shows that the mean awareness score is 10.3292 and the mean perception score is 17.4875. This indicates that, on average, the students have a higher perception score than an awareness score. The hypotheses of this study revealed that there is no significant relationship between ecotourism awareness of the students and their perception about ecotourism. The correlation between awareness and perception is 0.101, which is positive but not statistically significant ( $p$ -value = 0.118). This suggests that there is a weak positive relationship

between ecotourism awareness and perception, but this relationship is not strong enough to conclude that there is a significant relationship.

**Table 3:** Relationship between Ecotourism Awareness of the Students and Their Perception about Ecotourism

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Awareness	10.3292	3.41728	240
Perception	17.4875	5.88451	240

<b>Correlations</b>			
		Awareness	Perception
Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.118
	N	240	240
Perception	Pearson Correlation	.101	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.118	
	N	240	240

**Source:** Author's field survey, 2023

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study has provided valuable insights into the perception, level of awareness, of students towards ecotourism. The findings revealed that while a significant number of students were aware of ecotourism, only a few had been to an ecotourism site. The majority of the students believed that ecotourism is essential, and it should be taught in schools. The students had a positive perception of ecotourism, with most of them acknowledging its benefits in promoting conservation, providing employment, and increasing income for the local people. Furthermore, the students had a positive attitude towards ecotourism, with most of them indicating their interest in receiving ecotourism education and training and participating in ecotourism activities. The study recommends that government should provide support for ecotourism sites to encourage more people to visit and participate in ecotourism activities.

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