

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND RURAL FARMERS' EMPOWERMENT IN OYO TOWNSHIP

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Abstract

This study investigated environmental education and rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township. The issue of low adequate environmental knowledge among the rural farmers has become a subject of debate among stakeholders in recent times. The essence of environmental education is to increase public knowledge and awareness about environmental issues and to provide faults, opinions or the skills to make rational decisions and implement actions in the environment. The population for the study consisted of all rural farmers in Oyo Township. One hundred adult rural farmers represented the sample for the study. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. The instruments titled "Environmental Education Questionnaire" ($r = 0.79$), and "Rural Farmers' Empowerment Questionnaire" ($r = 0.81$) were used to gather relevant data for the study. The validity of the instrument was done by expert in Measurement and Evaluation through checking of the questionnaire and made necessary corrections to establish its validity. Test re-test method was carried out on the instruments on the interval of two weeks. Simple Percentage was used to analyse the data collected. The findings of the study revealed that the level of adult rural farmers' environmental education was low. Also, it was indicated that environmental education contributes significantly to rural farmers' empowerment. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made which include rural farmers should be enlightened to embrace environmental education as a means of empowerment. Also, government should create enabling environment for environmental education for rural farmers in order to be enlightened on ways of coping with environmental challenges.

Keywords: Environmental education, rural farmers, rural farmers' empowerment

Introduction

The contribution of agriculture to African economy are enormous, among which include: the provision of food for teeming population, provision of raw materials for industries, source of foreign exchange earnings, provision of markets for industrial sector products, creation of job opportunities

to youths among others. Agriculture is the bedrock of Africa's economy, and it is evident that 90% of the rural farmers earn their income from agriculture.

The issue of low rural farmers' empowerment has become a subject of debate among stakeholders in community development (Erikotola & Oluwasola, 2022; Mekonneh, Amanuel

& Terje, 2022). The way of maintaining and improving environmental security and the quality of life has become a concerned issue in recent times (Umoh, 2010). There are a lot of public complaints on the incessant cases of bush burning, rural farmers' ignorance of using agricultural inputs, indiscriminate waste disposal, inappropriate application of farm inputs among rural farmers. Although governments at all levels are doing everything possible to ameliorate the problems rural farmers are being confronted with in their communities, still, the stories remain the same. Erikitola, and Oluwasola, (2022), revealed that several factors could be responsible for low rural farmers' community empowerment among which include ignorance on the part of the rural farmers, illiteracy, attitude of the rural farmers, among others. Equally, it has been pointed out that lack of environmental education could also be responsible for this ugly situation among the rural farmers. Environmental education could create healthy human-nature relationships, and mechanism that could empower adult rural farmers.

Bosa (2013) attributed causes of environmental problems to issues such as over population, pollution, death and destruction caused by toxic spills and dumps, massive deforestation of the world's rain forests, oil spills, destruction of wildlife habitats for human development, and release of dangerous gases in the atmosphere. He stressed further that, since Nigeria got her independence in 1960, successive Nigerian governments have introduced policies and programmes to achieve environmental education goals, whereas, many of these policies introduced have failed, and this made it impossible to achieve objectives of environmental issues.

Environmental education according to Ibimula (2015) is the way of developing a world population that is concerned about the environment, associated problems, and explore knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivations collectively directed towards the solution of current problems and the prevention of new ones. Environmental education provides information and it is learning tool that offers synergistic public space to take action on environmental issues (Mekonneh, Amanuel & Terje, 2022) According to Erkal and Gursoy (2013), the essence of environmental education is to create experiences of problem-solving, decision-making and participation, with considerations based on ecological, political, economic, social, aesthetic and ethical aspects. They stressed that the purpose of environmental education and training is to provide individuals with the ways and means to effectively and responsibly protect the environment.

According to Thamizhmani and Hassan (2010), empowerment is a concept that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems and proactive behaviours to social policy and social change. In other words, empowerment links individual and his or her well-being to wider social and political environment in which he or she functions. Conceptualizing rural farmers' empowerment in this study has to do with the ability of rural farmers to possess relevant and required skills so as to be able to tackle environmental challenges. Apparently, studies had been carried out on environmental education and other variables such as public awareness (Agboola, 2014), community empowerment (Brian, 2022) among others. Little studies had been carried out on environmental education and rural farmers' empowerment, especially within Oyo Township.

Against this background, this study investigated environmental education and rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township.

Statement of the Problem

The re-occurring incidence of poor waste disposal, bush burning, deforestation, poor usage of chemicals such as pesticide and fertilizers, pollution and other practices among rural farmers have become subject of concerns among stakeholders in Oyo Township. Although, several efforts had been initiated by government to curb this unpleasant development, yet, the problems persist. Many factors could be responsible for low rural farmers' empowerment among which include non-challant attitude of rural farmers, lack of awareness, high level of illiteracy among others. Lack of environmental education among adult rural farmers could also be responsible for this unfortunate situation, considering the fact that majority of the rural farmers do not take cognizance of importance attached to environmental education. Against this background, this study examined environmental education and rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township.

Environmental education is defined by Erikitola and Oluwasola (2022) as situation whereby individuals explore environmental issues, engage in problem solving, and taking steps for improving her environment. Environmental education programs can facilitate an understanding of inappropriate behaviors that are harmful to the environment. Advocates of environmental education would agree that the major goals of environmental education programs are to raise consciousness about environmental conditions and to teach environmentally appropriate behavior (Milbrath, 1989; Bowers, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Cole, 2007; Potter, 2010). Also,

Brian (2015) stressed that the aims of environmental education aims is to create an environmental ethic that fosters awareness about the ecological inter-dependence of economic, social and political factors that influence community development

Ongori and Shunda (2008) stated that empowerment is the process of ensuring workers do what is expected of him or her rather than doing what they are told and it involves delegation, individual responsibility, autonomous decision making and feelings of self-efficacy. Ijeoma (2022) conceptualizes rural farmer empowerment as process of giving training and skills to rural farmers so as to live a good life, improve their environment, contribute to the boarder social economic growth of the state.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to investigate environmental education and rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo metropolis. Specifically, this study sought to:

- i. investigate the level of environmental education among rural farmers in Oyo Township.
- ii. examine whether environmental education contributes to rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised:

- i. What is the level of environmental education among rural farmers in Oyo Township?
- ii. Does environmental education contributes to rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised all adult

farmers in Oyo Township. Simple random sampling method was used to select one hundred adult rural farmers which represented the sample used for the study. This was drawn from the four local government areas in Oyo Township. Questionnaires were used to gather relevant data for the study titled 'Environmental Education Questionnaire' (EEQ, $r = 0.79$), and 'Rural Farmer' Empowerment Questionnaire' (RFEQ, $r = 0.81$). Section A deals with the personal information of the respondents while section B comprised of information on the subjects of the study. Validity of the instrument was carried out by the experts in Measurement and

Evaluation who scrutinized the instrument and offered necessary corrections while test re-test method was used on interval of two weeks to establish the reliability of the instrument. The rating of the instrument was a four-Likert format such as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Simple Percentage was used to analyse the data collected.

Results

Research Question i:

What is the level of environmental education among rural farmers in Oyo Township?

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%
1.	Rural farmers are conscious of the environment they live in	25	25%	15	15%	50	50%	10	10%
2.	The issues of bush burning, deforestation, poor waste disposal rampant in your area	40	40%	32	32%	18	18%	10	10%
3.	Rural farmers possess skills to utilize agricultural inputs	20	20%	15	15%	45	45%	20	20%
4.	Rural farmers can conveniently use farm resources without being guided	15	15%	10	10%	42	42%	33	33%
5.	The level of profitability is low due to inadequate environmental education among rural farmers in my area	32	32%	38	38%	18	18%	12	12%

From the table above, it is indicated that 50% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 10% disagreed that rural farmers are conscious of the environment they live in while 25% strongly agreed and 15% agreed. 20% of the respondents strongly agreed, 32% agreed that the issues of bush burning, deforestation, poor waste disposal rampant in their area while 18% strongly disagreed and 10% disagreed. Also, 45% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 20% disagreed that rural farmers possess skills to utilize

agricultural inputs while 20% strongly agreed and 15% agreed. The table also showed that 15% respondents strongly agreed, 10% agreed that rural farmers can conveniently use farm resources without being guided while 42% respondents strongly disagreed and 33% disagreed. Lastly, 32% respondents strongly agreed, 38% agreed that the level of farming profitability is low due to inadequate environmental education among rural farmers in their area while 18% strongly disagreed and 12% disagreed.

Conclusively, it is evident from the analysis that the level of rural farmers' environmental education is low in Oyo Township.

Research Question ii:

Does environmental education contributes to rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township?

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%
1.	Environmental education assist rural farmers to have knowledge of their environment	56	56%	14	14%	13	13%	17	17%
2.	Adequate knowledge of environmental education enable rural farmers to understand the menace of indiscriminate use of environment	43	43%	37	37%	12	12%	8	8%
3.	Knowledge of environmental education improves socio economic status of rural farmers	32	32%	38	38%	14	14%	16	16%
4.	Environmental education does not positively affect rural farmers' empowerment	7	7%	13	13%	65	65%	15	15%
5.	Environmental education, does not allow rural farmers to solve their environmental challenges	11	11%	9	9%	35	35%	45	45%

The table above revealed that 56% of the respondents were strongly agreed, 14% agreed that Environmental education assist rural farmers to have knowledge of their environment, while 13% of the participants were strongly disagreed and 7% disagreed. 43% of the respondents strongly agreed that adequate knowledge of environmental education enable rural farmers to understand the menace of indiscriminate use of environment, 37% agreed, while 12% strongly disagreed, and 8% participants disagreed. Also, it is indicated in the result that 32% of the respondents strongly agreed that knowledge of environmental education improves socio economic status of rural farmers, 38% agreed, while 14% strongly

disagreed and 6% disagreed on this. 7% of the rural farmers strongly agreed that environmental education does not positively affect rural farmers' empowerment, 13% agreed, however, 65% of the participants strongly agreed, and 15% disagreed. Lastly, 11% of the participants strongly agreed that environmental education does not allow rural farmers to solve their environmental challenges, 9% agreed, while 35% rural farmers strongly disagreed and 45% disagreed. Summarily, the result of this study showed that environmental education significantly contributes to rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township.

Discussion

The first research question states that what is the level of environmental education among rural farmers in Oyo Township? The responses of the respondents revealed that there was low level of environmental education among rural farmers in Oyo Township. This result is in line with the findings of Erikitoa and Oluwasola (2022) who investigated environmental education as a determinant of empowerment among rural farmers in Odeda Local Government Area, Ogun State and found out that reasonable numbers of rural farmers are after profit making at the expense of environmental safety.

The second research question says that does environmental education contributes to rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township? The result of the study showed that environmental education significantly contributes to rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township. This result is in agreement with the findings of Mekonneh, Amanuel and Terje (2022) who found out that skills and knowledge gained through environmental education were important to execute community projects, improving community participation in raising environmental quality, enhancing farming methods and means of livelihood.

Conclusion

From the findings of this, it is concluded that level of rural farmers' environmental education is low. Also, environmental education significantly contributes to rural farmers' empowerment in Oyo Township. Apparently, the need to embrace environmental education for rural farmers' empowerment becomes necessary so as to have better knowledge of coping with environmental problems.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Rural farmers should be encouraged to embrace environmental education as a mechanism for empowerment.
2. Government should continue to create enabling environment for environmental education for rural farmers so as to keep them abreast of ways of handling environmental issues.

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