
PERCEPTION AS A FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN INTERACTION WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY OF BIASE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study considered perception as the basis for human interaction with the environment. The purpose of this study was to examine the remote factors that influence human perception of the environment. A sample of 200 respondents was selected from the residents of Adim, Akpet Cental, Biakpan and Betem through stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection and the data were analysed with the aid of frequencies and percentages. The results indicate that the way individuals perceive the environment forms the basis for human interaction with the environment. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended amongst others that cultural practices should be modified by Biase people to accommodate pro-environmental behaviours that give preference to the environment.

Keywords: Perception, Framework, Human interaction, Environment.

Introduction

The term perception is so broad and according to Ebong, Basse & Bisong (2010), perception ranges from social perception (concerned with the effects of social and cultural factors on peoples' cognitive structuring of their physical and social environment), physical and neurological aspects of the image (the end product of the process). Perception matters to human relations. Many things impact our human relations with others. Perception is no different. Perception can be view as the recognition and interpretation of sensory stimuli based on memory. In other words, it is the way you view and interpret data around you.

The data could come from sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing. Perception begins when the human brain receives data from the body's five senses. The mind then processes and applies meaning to the sensory information. Perception is more complex than just seeing and perceiving. Our conscious perception of the environment, though relatively stable, is not static. Humans are incapable of being fully objective, even in our most mundane observations and impressions. Awareness and knowledge of the objects around us is informed and fine-tuned by any number of transient factors-our strength and energy levels, our sense of confidence, our fears and desires. As human, we see the environment through our own constantly shifting lens.

Interactions between people and the environment are influenced by different forms of perceptions namely auditory, depth and visual. Spatial and sensory perceptions also contribute to how a person's surrounding environment is perceived. The ability to determine spatial relationship between objects is governed by depth perception, and it relies on the other perceptions, especially visual perception. Visual perception gathers information about what a person sees in his environment. This information is combined with all the other perception information to provide a comprehensive picture of a person's environment (Block, 2007).

The environment consists of all the external factors influencing the life and activities of people, plants and animals. It stands to be ruin or made through human activities. Anijah-Obi (2001) asserts that the environment is perceived differently by different people. What is considered a problem for one person may be a relief for the other. For example, a heap of rubbish on the street may be an eyesore to the passerby or visitor but to the inhabitants around, it is a relief because they have been able to dispose of their garbage albeit indiscriminately.

At the moment, the world's attention is drawn to environmental sustainability. This is evident by the adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by United Nations in 2015 that will guide development in the world up to 2030. Before the environment is adequately sustained, human being must as a matter of importance get the basic rudiments of environmental sustainability which include environmental consciousness, awareness and knowledge. According to Joon and Kumar (2009), a person can be called environmentally conscious only if he/she can derive relevant inference from the knowledge he/she possesses and thus modify his/her daily activities in view of the knowledge attained. In the view of Zelezny and Schultz (2000), the concept of environmental consciousness refers to specific psychological factors related to individuals' propensity to engage in pro-environmental behaviours. From an analytical point of view, an ecologically conscious person or pro-environmentalist is someone who engages in a wide range of pro environmental behaviours which incorporates beliefs, values, attitudes, and knowledge. Environmental consciousness is equivalent to what can be considered the attitudinal (or psychological) dimension of pro-environmental behaviour (Sanchez & Lafuente, 2010). Humans have varying levels of consciousness ranging from civil, quality, national, super to green consciousness. A person that has green consciousness (being conscious of the environment, clean energy sources and sustainable uses of the planet that do not waste resources) always relates friendly with the environment all things being equal.

Culture is the beliefs, customs, practices and social behaviour of a particular people. Culture and the environment intersect in diverse and complex ways considering both historical and contemporary institutions. Human responses to landscapes or ecosystems, plants or animals, animate or inanimate features of the environment are shaped by language, media, technology and a range of cultural assumptions and institutions while environmental factors have their shaping influence. These intersections vary among cultures. Culture plays a central role in all human behaviour, cognition, affect, preference and meaning. It is an inescapable aspect of any human phenomenon, including how to shape, use and interact with the environment. It is important to note that culture cannot exist in isolation of the environment; therefore, culture and the environment intertwine (Adebayo & Waziri, 2012).

As humans, there are always some needs we want to satisfy. Once this is accomplished, that particular need no longer motivates us and we turn to another need seeking satisfaction. Human inordinate desire to acquire wealth has caused the use of unsustainable ways in exploiting environmental resources. Physiological/economic needs of human being drive people to behave the way they do with the environment whether sustainable or not. Physiological needs represent basic needs such as food, water, shelter, clothing, sex and the elimination of waste products. Economic needs such as large-scale agriculture, industries and energy plant have driven humanity to interact and relate with the environment.

Research questions

The following research questions are meant to guide the study:

- (i) Is there any relationship between the environment and individual environmental consciousness?
- (ii) Does culture influence human perception of the environment?
- (iii) Do human physiological/economic needs influence the way the environment is perceived?

Purpose of the study

This study examines the remote factors that influence human perception of the environment, with specific interest to;

- (i) determine whether there is a relationship between the environment and individual environmental consciousness.
- (ii) examine the influence of culture on the environment.
- (iii) ascertain whether physiological/economic needs influence human relationships with the environment.

Methodology

Design

The design adopted for this research is the survey design, which involves the collection of data to accurately and objectively describe phenomena in the current time and the focus is to ascertain facts. The researchers adopted the survey method because the work is aimed at

examining the remote factors that influence perception of the environment as it applies as at the time of carrying out this research.

Area of study

This study was carried out in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Biase is one among the seven Local Government Areas that made up Southern Cross River State. Biase has 11 wards, its headquarter is at Akpet Central. It has an area of 1,310km² and a population of 169,183 at the 2006 census. The people of Biase are direct descendants of Obutong town in Calabar. History has it that they migrated to present day Biase due to a brief conflict with their Efik brothers. The ancient killing of twin was widely practiced by Biase people and their Efik brothers before the intervention by Mary Slessor over a century ago. Biase people observe all Efik traditions and dance including Ekpe, Ekombi and Abang. The Ekpe Society is the authority in some parts of Biase whilst Agban is observed in Ubaghara, while Abu is observed by the Erei North mostly which comprises (Umuolor, Ipene, Elu, Egbor, Obum) and Ijom across Calabar River. Efik language is the main language of Biase people but variations of language, such as Arum, Ubaghara, Ukwa, and Erei are also spoken in Biase. Biase people are good in farming, fishing, hunting and are hospitable. Their major occupation is farming because they have fertile land and tropical rain forest.

Population

The population of this study comprises of civil servants, traders, farmers and students residing in Adim, Akpet Cental, Biakpan and Betem communities in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Sample

The sample for this study comprises 200 respondents (civil servants, traders, farmers and students) selected from, Akpet Cental, Biakpan and Betem communities through stratified random sampling technique. A breakdown of the sample size is shown in Table 2.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained two sections. Section A contained items on respondent's demographic data while section B contained items measuring individual environmental consciousness, culture, human physiological/economic needs and the environment. A closed-ended questionnaire was designed with response options; SA stand for strongly agree which attracted 4 points, A stand for agree which attracted 3 points, D stand for disagree which had 2 points and SD stand for strongly disagree which attracted 1 point only for all worded items that are positive. For worded items that are negative, the researchers reversed the scoring. The researchers developed the instrument and were validated by two experts in measurement and evaluation. The researchers ensured that the items chosen for inclusion in the instrument have potential to get objective responses from respondents.

Data Analysis**Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondent by sex**

Sex	No of respondent	Percentage (%)
Male	103	51.5
Female	97	48.5
Total	200	100

Researchers' fieldwork, 2018

Table 1 indicates that out of the population of 200 respondents, 103 respondents were males which constitute 51.5% of the population sample while 97 respondents were female which constitute 48.5% of the population.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondent by occupation

Occupation	No of respondent	Percentage (%)
Civil servant	50	25
Trading	50	25
Farming	50	25
Student	50	25
Total	200	100

Researchers' fieldwork, 2018

Table 2 shows that out of a total of 200 respondents, civil servants, traders, farmers and students were administered 50 questionnaire each, each representing 25% of the sample population.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondent by communities

Communities	No of respondent	Percentage (%)
Adim	50	25
Akpet Central	50	25
Betem	50	25
Biakpan	50	25
Total	200	100

Researchers' fieldwork, 2018

Table 3 shows that each of the communities had a share of 50 questionnaire, each representing 25% of the population sample.

Table 4: Environment and individual environmental consciousness

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1. Human relationships with the environment are based on environmental consciousness of the individuals	75 37.5%	44 22%	29 14.5%	52 26%	200 100%
2. Environmental consciousness of individual does not influence human relationships with the environment	45 22.5%	48 24%	76 38%	31 15.5%	200 100%
3. I am not environmentally conscious	15 7.5%	49 24.5%	67 33.5%	69 34.5%	200 100%
4. There is a relationship between the environment and individual environmental consciousness	63 31.5%	97 48.5%	21 10.5%	19 9.5%	200 100%
5. People with environmental consciousness relates positively with the environment	77 38.5%	92 46%	17 8.5%	14 7%	200 100%

Researchers’ fieldwork, 2018

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between the environment and individual environmental consciousness.

Interpretation: Analysis of the data in Table 4 shows that 80% of the respondents were of the opinion that there is a relationship between the environment and individual environmental consciousness. This percentage is relatively high, so the null hypothesis is rejected. 84.5% of the respondents were of the opinion that people who have environmental consciousness, relates positively with the environment. A total of 68.0% agreed that majority of the residents of Biase are environmentally conscious.

Table 5: Environment and culture

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1. Cultural background influence people’s perception of the environment	74 37%	79 39.5%	21 10.5%	26 13%	200 100%
2. The culture of bush burning preserves the environment	26 13%	53 26.5%	69 34.5%	52 26%	200 100%
3. The practice of bush fallowing destroys the environment	24 12%	53 26.5%	68 34%	55 27.5%	200 100%
4. There is no relationship between culture and the environment	78 39%	42 21%	53 26.5%	27 13.5%	200 100%
5. Environment and culture intertwine	79 39.5%	73 36.5%	30 15%	18 9%	200 100%

Researchers’ fieldwork, 2018

Hypothesis two: Culture does not significantly influence human perception of the environment.

Interpretation: Analysis of data in Table 5 shows that 76.5% of the respondents agreed that cultural background has influence on people’s perception of the environment. Also, 40.0% of the respondents disagreed that there is no relationship between culture and the environment. A total percentage of 76.0% of the respondents acknowledged that environment and culture intertwine, that is, there are closely connected. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 6: Environment and human physiological/economic needs

Items	SA	A	SD	D	Total
1. Basic human needs cannot be derived outside the environment	77 38.5%	59 29.5%	33 16.5%	31 15.5%	200 100%
2. Human physiological/economic needs drive our interactions with the environment	66 33%	88 44%	27 13.5%	19 9.5%	200 100%
3. Human physiological/economic needs have altered the nature of the environment	58 29%	105 52.5%	24 12%	13 6.5%	200 100%
4. Human physiological/economic needs cannot exceed the earth’s carrying capacity	38 19%	34 17%	85 42.5%	43 21.55	200 100%
5. Human physiological/economic needs influence the way the environment is perceived	85 42.5%	76 38%	23 11.5%	16 8%	200 100%

Researchers’ fieldwork, 2018

Hypothesis three: Human physiological/economic needs does not significantly influence the way the environment is perceived.

Interpretation: Analysis in Table 5 reveals that 68.0% of the respondents agreed that basic human needs can be derived from the environment. 77% of the respondents accepted that human physiological/economic needs drive our interactions with the environment. In addition, 80.5% agreed that human physiological/economic needs influence the way the environment is perceived. This percentage is high and therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of findings

The result of hypothesis one indicates that there is a significant relationship between the environment and individual environmental consciousness. This finding is in consonant with an approach to environmental responsibility called Ecocentrism which Enger and Smith (2006) maintain that because of human consciousness, the environment deserves direct moral consideration and not one that is merely derived from human (and animal) interests.

The environment has direct right, which qualifies for moral personhood. That is, the environment, by itself, has right of existence and inherent worth just as human has.

The second research question yielded responses to five items that focus on how culture influence people's perception of the environment. From the analysis of these five items, it became clear that culture influence human perception of the environment. This is in agreement with the submission of Anijah-Obi (2001), that people from different cultural bloc perceived environmental resources differently from others. What is considered a means of living in one's culture is considered as detrimental to environmental resources in another culture. In addition, Ebong, Basse and Bisong (2010), postulate that every society has its rules, regulations and conventions which dictate how the environment is regarded and used by its members.

The result of the findings of hypothesis three shows that our relationships with the environment are influence by human physiological/economic needs. The result of the findings is in agreement with the assertion of Pahl-Wostl, Schmidt, and Jakeman (2004) that environmental resources management tries to identify factors affected by conflicts that arise between meeting human needs and protecting the environment.

Conclusion and recommendations

Humans have hitherto perceived the environment as a free gift from God and use the environment at will. Recently, human beings discovered that our actions and inactions are causing grave dangers to humans, animals and the environment. This is because of divergence in perception among human beings which from the research findings is a framework for human interaction with the environment.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were made;

- (i) Cultural practices should be modified by Biase people to accommodate pro-environmental behaviours that give preference to the environment.
- (ii) In seeking for satisfaction of physiological/economic needs, humans should explore and exploit the environment sustainably.

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