

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS OUTDOOR EDUCATION ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ENUGU EDUCATION ZONE

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Teachers' Perception Toward Outdoor Education Activities in Teaching the English Language in Enugu Education Zone

Abstract

This study examines teacher's perception of outdoor education activities in teaching the English Language in secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone. The researchers adopted descriptive survey research design such that a portion of a bigger population was sampled for study and the findings generalized to the entire population. This study was carried out in secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone of Post Primary School Management Board (PPSMB) Enugu. The population for the study comprises of all the English Language teachers in Enugu Education Zone, comprising of three hundred and twenty eight (328) teachers. The researchers used the entire population as the sample size. The study reveals that majority of the English Language teachers had positive attitude to outdoor education activities in the teaching of the English Language in secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone. It also revealed that teachers' gender has influence on the perception of outdoor education activities in teaching of the English Language in secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone. Appropriate recommendations were made based on the findings of the study some of which include; that adequate welfare should be made available to teachers of the English Language so as to increase their level of motivation and enthusiasm towards outdoor educational activities in secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone; that curriculum developers should develop an outdoor educational activities handbook to serve as a guide to teachers on the use of outdoor educational activities.

INTRODUCTION

The outdoor classroom provides a meaningful way to engage learners in practical activities, giving them experience of collecting and analyzing data, and making predictions in the real world, beyond the limitations of the classroom or laboratory. The wider educational benefits of teaching and learning English through fieldwork in the outdoor environments include teamwork, motivation and its potential to influence positively the choice of English as a future subject of study. The outdoor environment simply refers to "human-made space in which people learn, live, work, and recreate on a day-to-day basis". The "outdoor environment encompasses places and spaces created or modified by people including buildings, parks, and transportation systems.

According to Gandini (2010), the outdoor environment impacts the learning and development of children, making educational spaces essential elements of any educational approach. Outdoor education activities especially in the teaching of the English Language

provides opportunities for students to experience the world first-hand and construct their own approaches to problems, thereby gaining skills necessary to put them in the right mind-set to effectively learn.

The term outdoor education emerged in the early 1940s to describe the instructional use of natural areas to meet student's learning objectives in a variety of subject-matter disciplines through direct experiences (Gandini, 2010). The term, outdoor education is used broadly to refer to a range of organized educational activities that take place in variety of ways, predominantly, in the outdoor environments. Eriksson-Dobrovich (2012) defines Outdoor Education as a method of learning with the use of all senses that takes place out-of-doors in a natural environment or other outdoor learning spaces. Ford (2016) defined outdoor education as education 'in', 'for' and 'about' the outdoors. Ford went further to explain that the 'In', tells us that outdoor education can occur outside the school classroom setting from a school yard in an urban neighborhood to a remote wilderness setting, in swamps, meadows, forests, shores, lakes, prairies, deserts, estuaries, and all other biomes, including the school playground and garden or any built up area.

The 'About' explains that the topic that is to be learnt is about the things found outside of school classroom environment that are related to the natural or surrounding environment. And 'For' tells us that the purpose of outdoor education is related to implementing the cognitive, psycho-motor, and affective domains of learning for the sake of learning.

Conway (2010) also defined Outdoor Education as a method of teaching and learning process in the 'outdoors' for exploration and discovery about the environment using first-hand experience involving all courses of study.

From these definitions above, one can say that outdoor educations are those instructions either formal or informal that takes place outside the school classroom. It describes the kind of education that takes place in the natural or any other relevant environment in order to acquire knowledge through direct experience. Therefore, outdoor education is activity based or activity oriented. This type of contextual learning involving the local surroundings has also been referred to as taking field trips, excursions, journeys, or doing field studies.

This study is focusing on the formal use of the outdoor education activities in teaching the English Language in accordance with the 9-year Basic Education Curricula for lower and middle basic education levels in Nigeria. Therefore, this study specifically intends

to determine the teacher's perception to outdoor education activities in teaching the English Language.

All over the world, attention has been focused on the English Language so that there can be social, economic and even political development. Nigeria is no exception to this drive. The National Policy on Education (FRN 2013) and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2014 reflect this global desire. Indeed the UBE Act 2014 stipulated that:

"Every learner who has gone through nine years of basic education should have communicative competency and lifelong skills; as well as ethical moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning; as the basic for reflective thinking" (p.16)

The National Policy on Education (FRN 2013) and the UBE both provide for 6 years of primary school and 3 years of junior secondary school. One of the subjects through which the aim of education could be achieved in the first six years is the English Language being language of instruction. This body of knowledge has two components - the process skills and the content. The process skills involve the ways by which the knowledge is gathered and these are observation, inference, measurement, classification, prediction and communication. The knowledge gathered make up the content of the subject needed to help someone acquire skill, attitude, knowledge, appreciating information and ideas. Teaching includes provision of conditions that can promote the building of attitudes, skills development and other aspects of learning. Unless learning takes place as a result of some efforts, we cannot conclude that teaching has taken place.

In the teaching - learning process, both the teacher and the learner must be active. English is the foundation upon which the bulk of present technological breakthrough is built. It is through the application of language and technology that man ensures the longevity of his existence. The English Language teachers should always seize the opportunity of making pupils appreciate the fact of the subject as a means of achieving technological development and economic survival (Ezirim 2010).

To teachers' ability to plan lessons, address divergent student responses, and reflect on their teaching effectiveness and their ability to stimulate student inquiry. Akinyele (2011) and Conway (2010) commented that experience improves teaching skills while students learn better at the hand of teachers who have taught them continuously over a period of years. Furthermore, teachers with long years of experience are confident

that even the most difficult student can be reached if they exert extra effort; while teachers without experience feel a sense of helplessness when it comes to dealing with unmotivated students (Gandini, 2017). With adequate pedagogical exposure, the teacher exhibits cordial relationships with students and participation in class increases especially in outdoor education activities.

Okey (2012) classified teachers with less than five years of teaching experience as being less experienced and those with more than five years of teaching experienced as more experienced. This study sought to find out if the teacher's experience has anything to do with the teacher's perception towards outdoor educational activities.

Nwogu (2010) found that gender was significant in learning aspects of mathematics and basic science that involve angles, with male students exhibiting more learning difficulties than their female counterparts do. Ahiaba and Igweonwu (2013) investigated the influence of gender on the performance of English Language students in male and female students at the SSC examination and found that female students performed better with superior grades, than their male counterparts while failure rate was higher among male students. With all these inconsistencies still existing, the researcher is poised to find out if gender is a factor in determining teachers' perception of outdoor education activities.

This present study is also interested in teacher's gender as a variable that can affect the teaching and learning of the English Language. Teachers' gender simply refers to the teacher being male or female.

Talking about influence of teacher's gender on students' education, John (2015) noted that male teachers tend to be more authoritative whereas female teachers tend to be more supportive and expressive. Also, John (2015) revealed that teachers interact differently with students on similar gender than they do with students of opposite gender.

Chijide (2012) noted that male teachers are likely to select a more aggressive disciplinary approach towards boys while teachers of either gender tended to ignore boys' disruptive behaviour than that of girls when the behaviour was non aggressive. Similarly, Study conducted (2015) on teacher gender revealed that students of the same gender as their teacher score better on reading and writing and were overall more likely to pass the final examination than students opposite gender than their teachers. This simply suggests that students benefit from being instructed by teachers of similar gender

especially in during outdoor education activities. However, the case of teachers' gender in their perception of outdoor education activities has not been established.

Perception is a settled way of thinking about something (Ozer, 2008). It can also be defined as viewpoint, outlook, perspective or approach. Perception can alter every aspect of a person's life, including their education. Student perceptions on learning determine their ability and willingness to learn. If negative perceptions are not altered, a student is unlikely to continue his education beyond what is required. Changing students' negative perceptions towards learning is a process that involves determining the factors driving the perception and using this information to bring about change (Can, 2011).

Teaching being a dynamic activity requires a favourable perception and certain specific competencies from its practitioners. Teachers' proficiency depends on the perception he/she possesses for the profession. The positive perception helps teacher to develop a conducive learner friendly environment in the classroom. This also casts a fruitful effect on learning of the students. Perception being a social construct is influenced by many factors like gender social strata, age, streams of education and previous experience of the job. Outdoor activities provide ample opportunity for the learner to change learning environment which has obvious positive implications for cognitive, affective and psycho-motor development of the learner. Many teachers appear not to recognise the numerous benefits that can emanate from outdoor activities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to ascertain Teachers' perception to outdoor educational activities in teaching the English Language in Enugu education zone.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the attitude of English Language teachers to outdoor educational activities in the teaching of the English Language in Enugu Education Zone?
2. To what extent does gender influence teachers' perception to outdoor educational activities in teaching the English Language in Enugu Education Zone?

One null hypotheses was formulated to guide the study

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers in their perception to outdoor education activities in teaching English Language in Enugu Education Zone.

Methods

The survey design was adopted for the study. Population for the study was 328 science teachers in Enugu Education Zone. The entire population of 328 served as the sample because of its small size. Instrument for data collection was questionnaire, which comprised of 9 items with 4-option modified Likert type responses of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by three experts in Science Education. Test re- test was employed to establish the reliability of the instrument. Twenty copies of the questionnaire were administered on teachers in Udi Education Zone on two occasions at interval of one week. The two sets of scores were correlated using Cronbach Alpha statistics. The correlation coefficient value was 0.98 and was considered high enough to adjudge the instrument as reliable. Data collection was done by the researchers. The entire 328 copies were duly completed. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The response options of SA, A, D and SD were assigned values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. A criterion mean of 2.50 was established by dividing the sum of the values by 4. Mean scores of 2.50 and above were regarded as significant and therefore concerned while mean scores below 2.50 were regarded as insignificant and therefore unconcerned. The t-test statistic was employed in testing the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1. Mean Responses on the Teachers Perception to outdoor Educational Activities.

S/n	Items	X	Deciaion
1	The teacher believes that the students are motivated during educational outdoor activities	2.28	Insig
2	The teacher uses audio-visual aids to relax the students during educational outdoor activities	2.45	Insig
3	The teacher believes that learning are more interactive during educational outdoor activities	3.10	Sig
4	The teacher arouse students' interest during outdoor educational activities to enable them feel at home and learn better	2.54	Sig
5	Teacher gives opportunities to all students to experience the real world first-hand during outdoor educational activities.	2.33	Insig
6	Teacher always kindle imagination of the students during outdoor educational activities.	2.21	Insig
7	Teacher endeavours to stimulate the students for active participation.	2.44	Insig
8	Teacher makes the students construct their own approaches to solve problems during outdoor educational activities.	2.31	Insig

9	The teacher's action activates students' memory and recalls the experiences during outdoor educational activities.	2.30	Insig
Grand Mean		2.44	Insig

Data in Table 1 show a grand mean of 2.44 which is below the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that the score is insignificant therefore the teachers are unconcerned to outdoor educational activities.

Table 2. Mean Responses on the Teachers Perception to Outdoor Educational Activities According to Gender.

S/n	Items	Gender	X	SD	Decision
1	The teacher believes that the students are motivated during educational outdoor activities	M	2.18	0.86	Insig
		F	2.10	0.88	Insig
2	The teacher uses audio-visual aids to relax the students during educational outdoor activities	M	2.45	0.81	Insig
		F	2.44	0.82	Insig
3	The teacher believes that learning are more interactive during educational outdoor activities	M	3.10	0.66	Sig
		F	2.98	0.59	Sig
4	The teacher arouse students' interest during outdoor educational activities to enable them feel at home and learn better	M	2.54	0.72	Sig
		F	2.60	0.77	Sig
5	Teacher gives opportunities to all students to experience the real world first-hand during outdoor educational activities.	M	2.33	0.45	Insig
		F	2.31	0.51	Insig
6	Teacher always kindle imagination of the students during outdoor educational activities.	M	2.22	0.65	Insig
		F	2.20	0.66	Insig
7	Teacher endeavours to stimulate the students for active participation.	M	2.44	0.81	Insig
		F	2.45	0.84	Insig
8	Teacher makes the students construct their own approaches to solve problems during outdoor educational activities.	M	2.51	0.59	Sig
		F	2.49	0.53	Insig
9	The teacher's action activates students' memory and recalls the experiences during outdoor educational activities.	M	2.44	0.69	Insig
		F	2.43	0.71	Insig
Grand Mean		M	2.46	0.69	Insig
		F	2.44	0.70	Insig

Data in Table 2 show a grand mean of 2.46 and 2.44 for male and female respectively. The mean scores are below the criterion mean of 2.50. This means that both male and female teachers are unconcerned in their attitude to outdoor educational activities in teaching the English Language.

Table 3. Summary of t-test Statistics Verifying the Significant Difference in the Teachers Perception Based on Gender.

Gender	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	p	Decision
Male	82	2.46	0.69	326	2.181	1.960	.05	Reject
Female	246	2.44	0.70					

Table 3 contains the data that verified the significant difference in the teachers perception to outdoor educational activities based on gender. It is indicative in the Table that the t-cal of 2.181 is higher than the t-critical table of 1.960 at .05 level of significance (t-cal > t-crit). Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that the teachers' perception to outdoor educational activities is dependent on gender.

Discussion of findings

The result of the study reveals interesting findings. The finding that the teachers lack of interest in outdoor education activities leaves much to be desired. This is because outdoor activities create ample opportunities for improvement in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor of the learners. The finding appear to be in disagreement with the belief of Gandini (2010) who observed that outdoor environment creates opportunity for imparting learning and development.

The researchers expressed surprise at this findings because it is their believe that teachers should show great interest in outdoor activities because of its implication in the increase of number of senses applicable during exposure to natural environment as observed by Dobrovic (2012).

The finding reveals that the teachers' perception was dependent on gender. The finding agrees with John (2015) who established that male teachers tend to be more authoritative whereas female teachers tend to be more supportive, expressive and personate. Furthermore, Chijide (2012) observed that teachers' interest on students is gender sensitive.

Implications of the findings

Outdoor activities provide ample opportunity for the learner to change learning environment which has obvious positive implications for learning. Many teachers appear not to recognise the numerous benefits that can emanate from outdoor activities. The finding that the teachers show lack of interest in outdoor activities could promote poor learning.

Summary and Conclusions

The finding shows that teachers show poor perception to outdoor educational activities for the students and that these perceptions were dependent on gender.

Recommendations

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

1. School authorities should accommodate outdoor activities in the school time table.
2. Teachers' lack in outdoor activities interests should be reversed through periodic seminars and workshops.

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