

Research Article

Youth Engagement in Eco-Poetry for Enhancing Climate Change Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Climate change is a global challenge which must be tackled with alacrity to achieve the sustainable development goals in Nigeria. Through literature review and participant observation, this study highlights how youths can effectively engage eco-poetry in climate change education thereby enhancing good health, environmental sustainability and climate resilience in Nigeria. This study vividly defines the concept of eco-poetry and identifies the need for climate change education. It also explores the role of eco-poetry in enhancing climate resilience for sustainable development in Nigeria. It concluded with clarion call for youths who are passionate about solving the problems initiated by climate change to maximizing the potentials of eco-poetry in enhancing climate change education for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Climate Change, Eco-Poetry, Education, Sustainable Development, Youth Engagement.

Introduction

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate change as a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods [1]. Climate change is the most significant challenge to achieving sustainable development, not only because it affects the global physical environment directly, but also because it affects nearly all aspects of socio-economic development [2]. Climate change is recognized as a true global emergency that requires concerted efforts by countries, businesses, and even individuals to achieve the Paris Agreement goals aimed at addressing the crisis. Climate resilience is the capacity for a socio-ecological system to absorb pressures and maintain function in the face of external stresses imposed upon it by climate change [3-5]. It also includes the ability and capacity of an ecosystem to adapt, reorganize, and evolve into more desirable configurations that improve the sustainability of the system, leaving it better prepared for future climate impacts [6,7]. Climate change education is therefore very vital in order to enable individuals and communities to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate towards sustainability in Nigeria [8,9]. Poetry has been identified as a valuable tool for climate change education for sustainable development in Nigeria [10]. "In terms of political and civic engagement, youths are vital for a healthy democracy as their participation in politics, advocacy, and community service fosters civic responsibility and ensures that diverse voices and perspectives are represented in decision-making processes. They are also in the forefront of education and research contributing to advancements in science, technology, and the humanities, driving intellectual and academic progress. Youths are champions of social justice, as well as human rights, environmental sustainability, and equality advocates. Their activism and commitment to social causes help to achieve systemic changes and address pressing societal issues" [11]. Youth engagement in eco-poetry for enhancing climate change education is an innovative strategy for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study examined "Youth engagement in eco-poetry for enhancing climate change education in Nigeria" through existing literature review and participant observation. The main purpose of this research work was to survey theoretical backgrounds and previous studies on the subject matter and the current progress with the implementation for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Results and Discussion

Youths form the active sector with agility, liveliness, innovation, and potential to mobilize the other community members into taking due and effective climate action. Climate change remains one of the most pressing issues of our time, impacting every corner of the globe and every aspect of human life. It is an existential threat which can only be overcome by a collective resolve cutting across various strata of the society [11]. Climate change has been described as an existential threat to human well-being. Climate change impact is intensely felt on soil fertility in Nigeria and also on her biodiversity which affects sustainable development and economic growth of the nation [12,13]. The impacts of climate change on sustainable economic growth in Nigeria is quite profound [14]. In Nigeria, youths should be educated on issues of climate change and well equipped in order to enable them carry out their role of enhancing climate resilience at their various localities. There is also a need to strengthen climate change knowledge architecture in Nigeria to reach policymakers, youths, students and researchers as well as community based organizations and NGOs, who are ready to deliver adaptation projects [15]. There is also a great need to educate the youths on the green entrepreneurial opportunities available for enhancing climate resilience and sustainable economic growth in Nigeria [16]. Undoubtedly, youths hold immense importance in society for several reasons, encompassing social, economic, and cultural dimensions. They drive innovation and positive change through fresh perspectives, creativity, and new ideas [11]. Youth engagement in ecopoetry for enhancing climate change education in Nigeria is therefore noble and timely.

What is Eco-Poetry?

Ecopoetry is any poetry with a strong ecological or environmental emphasis or message [17]. Furthermore, Ecopoetry generally refers to poetry about ecology, ecosystems, environmental injustice, animals, agriculture, climate change, water, and even food [18]. Poetry just like other forms of art such as environmental photography have been identified as an innovative tool which can be used in climate change education across various communities, cities and campuses in Nigeria [10]. An ecopoem is a kind of nature poem [19]. Ecopoetry therefore describes the beauty of nature and our role both as individuals and as a community in keeping it clean and green. "Many poets and poems in the past have expressed ecological concerns, but only recently has there been an established term to describe them; there is now, in English-speaking poetry, a recognizable subgenre of poetry, termed Ecopoetry, which can, on occasions, form a major strand of a writer's career, preoccupy entire poetry collections, or be the theme of international competitions" [17]. Eco-poetry involves the use of poems in conveying the message of climate change adaptation and mitigation for sustainable development locally, nationally and globally. "The 'pastoral' is another important topic in ecopoetics, referring to a long tradition of poetry about idealized rural life. The pastoral goes back to ancient Greece, with poets like Hesiod and Theocritus, and to Rome, with Virgil, and through the literary renaissances of Italy, Britain, and America [18]." In terms of ecopoetics, the death and destruction caused by climate change has brought the necro-pastoral to the forefront of our imaginations" [18]. Through ecopoetry we can express the beauty and wonders of nature in a pleasant manner thereby helping to achieve environmental sustainability. Ecopoetry has been identified as a valuable tool which can be used in climate change education for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Case Study One: Youth Climate Incubation Hub 2019

The Youth Climate Incubation Hub is a special initiative by Federal Ministry of Environment in partnership with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Home of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) to address critical issues of climate change and innovations in Nigeria to achieve sustainable development [20]. It was indeed a great privilege for the Benjy Poetry And Music Global Concepts to participate in the Youth Climate Incubation Hub South East Zone held on the 26th to 28th of August, 2019 at the City Global Hotel, Owerri, Nigeria. It presented a great opportunity for some of the youths to engage eco-poetry in expressing their climate views and to enhance climate change education [20]. Furthermore, the selected youths from the South East Zone who participated in the event presented their unique ideas on waste management, climate change education, clean energy, green technology, etc. The event was a huge success and a big thank you goes to the Federal Ministry of Environment in Nigeria through the Department of Climate Change for making the Youth Incubation Hub a reality [20]. Additionally, The International Youth Day 2020 event which was held on the 12th of August, 2020 @ Kenneth Dike Library, Aroma, Awka was hosted by the Anambra State Library Board in collaboration with Benjy Poetry And Music Global Concepts [21]. The theme of the event "Youth engagement for global action" identified that youths are an integral part of the society, hence, should not be sidelined when making decisions concerning every member of the state. It is therefore imperative that youths dutifully and actively participate in any matters of the nation especially as it concerns climate action and the use of eco-poetry [22].

Case Study Two: The Benjy Poetry and Music Global Concepts

The Benjy Poetry and Music Global Concepts is notably one of the companies in Nigeria which among other things is very passionate about climate change education, adaptation and mitigation for global sustainability [10]. This passion to see the environment kept clean and green has led to a lot of study and research work on climate change education, adaptation and mitigation. This passion has also inspired multi-stakeholder partnerships with various institutions and investors towards scaling up climate resilience in Nigeria and in Africa. A good example is the poem "Our Climate, Our Health" advanced by the Benjy Poetry And Music Global Concepts which illustrates how eco-poetry can be used in climate change education for sustainable development in Nigeria [23].

POEM: OUR CLIMATE, OUR HEALTH

Climate change is real
Its impacts we can feel
Our climate, our health
Our health affects our wealth.

Great and untapped wealth we possess
Nature's gift to be judiciously harnessed
These vast potentials we begin to maximize
When we choose to live healthy and wise.

Dirtiness will tamper and hinder
The health of the planet we desire
Reduce waste, recycle and make some gains
Save our planet from climate plight and pains.

Help make the world a better place
 Earth's pollution we must efface
 By going green and keeping clean
 With determination, diligence and discipline.

Improve our health systems' resilience capacity
 Adopting the use of eco-friendly technology
 Better choices will lead to a healthy people and planet
 Deal with adverse climate change effects.

Think beyond the erosion and pollution
 Think beyond the flooding and deforestation
 Think change, Take action
 Live within climate adaptation and mitigation.

Climate change is real
 Its impacts we can feel
 Our climate, Our health
 Deal with adverse climate change effects! [23].

The Benji Poetry and Music Global Concepts is also passionate about helping the youths maximize their talents and potentials towards enhancing climate resilience in Nigeria. This poem "Our Youth, Our Future" below advanced by the Benji Poetry And Music Global Concepts further buttresses the role of youths in enhancing climate resilience in Nigeria [22].

POEM: OUR YOUTH, OUR FUTURE

Let love lead the way
 With a promise steadfast and sure
 It's the dawn of a new day
 Our glimpse into a brighter future.

Let love pave the way
 For our youths, our future
 Let love lead the way
 In their formative structure.

Let not our youths be despised
 Though presently in masks;
 These are our eagles in disguise
 Discovering their talents is our task.

Let the eagles find their wings
 Accessing their greatness where it lies
 To enrich others, their treasures they bring
 Soaring with pleasure above the skies.

Let courage and confidence rise
 As we invest in their lives
 We must be willing to pay the price
 To see them survive and thrive [22].

Poetry can be a powerful tool to enhance youth engagement in climate action in Nigeria by:

1. Inspiring creativity: Poetry can inspire young people to express their thoughts and feelings about climate change in a creative and meaningful way.

2. Raising awareness: Poetry can raise awareness about climate change causes, impacts, and solutions among Nigerian youths.

3. Fostering empathy: Poetry can help young people connect with the experiences of others affected by climate change,

fostering empathy and compassion.

4. Encouraging action: Poetry can motivate young people to take action on climate change by conveying the urgency and importance of the issue.

5. Providing a platform: Poetry can provide a platform for young people to share their voices, perspectives, and ideas on climate change.

6. Building community: Poetry can help build a community of young people passionate about climate action, fostering collaboration and support.

7. Promoting cultural relevance: Poetry can be used to explore climate change impacts and solutions within Nigerian cultural contexts, making the issue more relatable and accessible.

8. Supporting education: Poetry can complement climate change education in Nigerian schools, making learning more engaging and memorable.

9. Amplifying youth voices: Poetry can amplify the voices and concerns of Nigerian youth on climate change, ensuring their perspectives are heard by policymakers and leaders.

10. Inspiring hope: Poetry can inspire hope and optimism among young people, encouraging them to work towards a more sustainable and climate-resilient future.

By leveraging poetry, Nigerian youths can become more engaged and empowered to address climate change, driving positive change and promoting sustainability. Furthermore, Eco-poetry can play a significant role in enhancing climate change education in Nigeria by:

1. Raising awareness: Using poetic language to convey climate change issues and spark conversations.

2. Emotional connection: Evoking emotions and empathy through personal experiences with environmental changes.

3. Cultural relevance: Drawing on Nigerian folklore, myths, and legends to connect climate change to cultural heritage.

4. Accessible language: Simplifying complex climate concepts into engaging, easy-to-understand poetry.

5. Inspiring action: Motivating readers to take action through powerful imagery and calls to responsibility.

6. Intergenerational connections: Bridging the gap between older and younger generations through shared environmental concerns.

7. Environmental appreciation: Fostering a deeper appreciation for Nigeria's natural beauty and the importance of conservation.

8. Climate justice perspectives: Highlighting the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable populations.

9. Educational tool: Utilizing eco-poetry as a teaching aid to facilitate climate change discussions and workshops.

10. Community engagement: Encouraging community members to share their own eco-poetry and environmental stories.

11. Language preservation: Preserving and promoting Nigerian languages through eco-poetry.

12. Artistic expression: Providing a creative outlet for climate change concerns and emotions.

By incorporating eco-poetry into climate change education, Nigerian youths can leverage the power of art to inspire environmental awareness, action, and sustainability.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Youth Climate Incubation Hubs should be strategically planned and established across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria for the purpose of climate change education for sustainable development. Youth Leadership Environmental Summits should be organized across communities, cities and campuses in Nigeria regularly towards enhancing youth engagement in climate change education. Nature education research should be encouraged among the young researchers as it can help them appreciate the beauty of nature and the role of eco-poetry in enhancing climate resilience in Nigeria [24]. Grants, awards and promotions(both online and offline) should be given to young climate champions towards enhancing their use of eco-poetry in enhancing climate resilience in Nigeria. Green financing from Multilateral Organizations such as the World Bank Group is also recommended to enhance youth engagement in climate change education in Nigeria [25]. Youth engagement in eco-poetry for climate change education will provide employment, enjoyment and entertainment while enhancing climate resilience and socio-economic growth in Nigeria

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