IMPACTS OF INTERPRETATIVE AMENITIES ON TOURIST EXPERIENCE IN UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN ZOOLOGICAL GARDEN, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study investigated the impacts of interpretative amenities on tourist experience in the University of Ilorin Zoological Garden, Kwara State, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from 120 tourists using the accidental sampling method. Data obtained were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. The demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that the majority (54.2%) of the respondents were female and the age group 26-35 years is the highest with 30.8%. The majority (55.8%) of the respondents are were unmarried and 40.8% are civil servants. The findings also revealed that 65.0% of the respondents are Muslim and 61.7% of the respondents were of Kwara state residency. The majority (82%) of the respondents make use of the interpretative amenities available in the study area and the interpretative board is the most preferred one by the visitors. the perception of the visitors shows that I am willing to use the interpretative amenities had the highest mean of 3.99. The effect of the interpretative amenities on visitors experience revealed that the interpretative amenities improved my knowledge about the environment with the mean of 3.99 and visitors obtained satisfaction with the interpretative amenities. The study recommends that more interpretative amenities should be provided and more trained tour guides should be employed.
Keywords: Tourist, Zoological, Garden, Experience

Introduction

A zoological garden is where wild animals and sometimes strange domestic animals are kept and exhibited to the public, and where they are studied, bred and protected (Omonona and Ayodele, 2011). Although most people visit zoos for entertainment and it also educates the public about animal behaviour. By visiting zoos, people will become more aware of the importance of conserving nature, having lesser emissions and sawing the blames which the animals depends on (Ayodele *et al.,* 1999). The focus of zoos on conservation has been reinforced in the recent World Association of Zoos and Aquaria (WAZA) conservation strategy (2005) which asserts that zoos can play a vital role in conservation. It was suggested that education is the zoos primary function in conservation. Encapsulated within this larger goal of conservation through education are the more specific goals of influencing visitor's knowledge, attitude and behaviour through interpretation and formal education. Viewing animals is usually the main reason for the zoo visit (Roe *el at.,* 2015). Thus, zoos can be seen as choreographed and constructed places for controlled interaction between human and non-human animals, guiding the interaction between the visitors and the captive animals in many concrete, subtle and practical ways (Braverman, 2011).

Interpretation is a communication tool that is used to facilitate the way visitors engages with the places they visit (Wijeratine *et al.,* 2014). Interpretation amenities offered a key tool for managers to communicate conservation message and thereby Influence attitudes and knowledge seen as a central element of sustainable tourism practice. Good interpretation is fun, interesting and engages people even if only for a short time. Key messages must be simple and straight forward and accessible to every age and ability. To achieve this, it draws on a range of disciplines including educational psychology, sociology and philosophy to inform its practice. A characteristic of interpretation in protected areas is that it is done on-site; a factor that potentially increases the capacity of visitors to make connections, and form attachments to that particular park.

The importance of interpretation is reflected in the organizational mission and vision statements of many parks and protected area agencies with most agencies having a clear understanding of the benefit of interpretation throughout their organization, at all levels of management (Wearing, *et al*.2006). However much of the provision of interpretative services in zoos is driven by ad hoc approaches with little reference to a systematic theoretical context and/or theory-based research. This will be done by isolating interpretation variables and visitor variables associated with visitor satisfaction levels. Wearing *et al.* (2006) state that one of the main roles that interpretation can play in the management of sustainable tourism in natural heritage areas is enhancing tourists' experiences and satisfaction. There are clear links between enjoyment of an interpretive program and learning and attitude change (Moscardo, 1999). With evidence to suggest that when visitors to national parks/zoos obtain a satisfying experience, often they will come

closer to supporting the underlying philosophy of park management (McArthur, 1994). Quality interpretation can enhance tourist satisfaction and through this can contribute to the commercial viability of tourist operations (Wearing *et al.* 2006) Visitors come to zoos for a variety of reasons and can undertake a range of activities in a zoo without engaging with the visitor centre, guide or other forms of interpretation. The range of facilities and infrastructure that a visitor engages within a zoo has been termed by (Wearing *et al.* 2006) as 'the setting' and includes all the services provided to facilitate visitor interaction with a zoo, such as base information from brochures or websites, direction signage, car parks, camping areas, toilets, food and interpretation, together with the more serendipitous influences such as other visitor behaviour, numbers of visitors, weather and staff attitudes.

Interpretation is an educational activity that aims to reveal meaning and embrace the educational concept of communication natural, physical, cultural and historical information. But improper interpretation leads to decrease in the visitors understanding, awareness and appreciation of nature, heritage and site resources. Poor interpretation limits tourism experience and satisfaction in the zoo. With evidence to suggest that when visitors or tourists to the zoo obtain a satisfying experience, often they will come closer to supporting the underlying philosophy of the zoo management. (MC Arthur 1994). If this gap is bridged, it will enhance tourist satisfaction and through this can contribute to the commercial viability of tourist operation.

Materials and Methods

Description of the Study Area

The University of Ilorin Zoo was established in 1985 to complement the University's biological sciences departments in teaching and research. The zoo is located at the main gate of the University within latitude 8′30˚N and longitude 4′35˚E. It has a children playground and picnic grounds. A major attraction to the zoo is the 150meters long and 45meters high suspended canopy walkway which has continued to draw visitors to the zoo. The fact that most of the forest vegetation has been left undisturbed and the presence of a stream that flows through the zoo creates a serene and near-natural environment that makes the zoo unique. The zoo drew over 55,000 visitors in comprising of schools, religious bodies, clubs and societies on excursion and picnics as well as individuals and families on sightseeing.

Data Collection and Sampling Method

One hundred and twenty (120) copies of the structured questionnaires were administered to visitors using accidental sampling technique for the period of the study. Secondary information was also collected from records and files while experienced zoo staff were interviewed to augment data generated from questionnaires and administrative files.

Data Analysis

Data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics where results will be expressed in tables, frequency and percentage.

Results and Discussion

Results

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents, it was observed that 45.8% of the respondents were male, while 54.2% were female. 9.2% of the respondents were ≤15 years of age, 34.2% were between 16-25 years of age, and 30.8% were between 26-35 years of age, while only 8.3% were between 46 years and above. It can equally be noted from the table that 7.5% of the respondents had primary school certificates, 39.2% had secondary school certificates while 53.3% are graduates. The table also revealed that 44.2% of the respondents were married while 55.8% were unmarried. The table also showed that most of the respondents are civil servants (40.8%) while 6.7% are artisanal which is the least. The table also revealed that 65.0% of the respondents are Muslim while 35.0 are Christian.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	55	45.8
	Female	65	54.2
Age Group	≤15	11	9.2
	16-25	41	34.2
	26-35	37	30.8
	36-45	21	17.5
	46 and Above	10	8.3
Marital Status	Married	53	44.2
	Unmarried	67	55.8
Level of Education	Primary	9	7.5
	Secondary	47	39.2
	NCE/ND/HND/Bsc	64	53.3
Occupation	Students	44	36.7
	Civil Servant	49	40.8
	Farming	7	5.8
	Trading	12	10.0
	Artisanal	8	6.7
Religion	Muslim	78	65.0
	Christianity	42	35.0
Residence	Kwara	74	61.7
	Other states	36	30.0
	Foreign	10	8.3
	Total	**120**	**100.0**

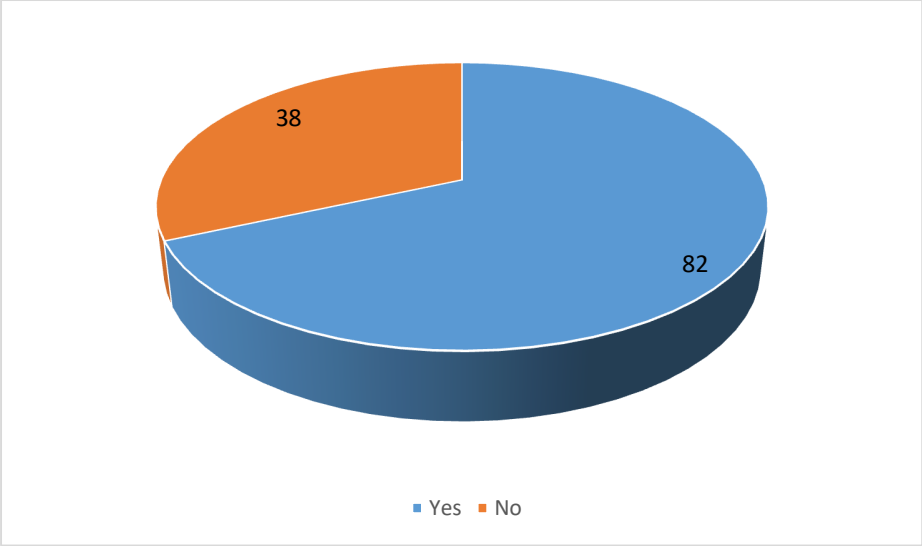


Figure 1: Making Use of Interpretative Amenities

Fig1 shows that 82 respondents make use of interpretative amenities available in the study area while 38 respondents did not make use of the facilities.

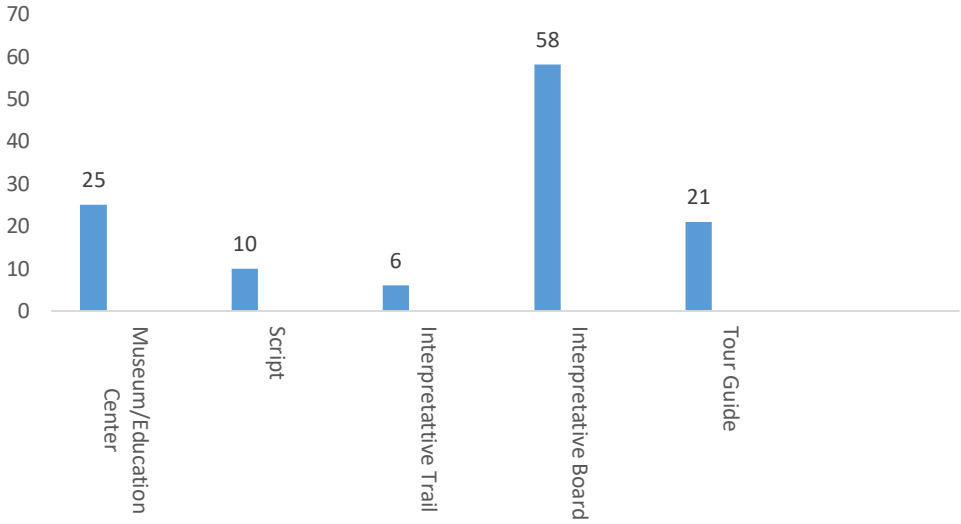


Figure 2: Preference of the Interpretative Amenities

The preference of the interpretative amenities available in the study area shows that interpretative board/sign is most preferred by the visitors (58 respondents), followed by museum/education centre and tour guide with 25 and 21 respondents respectively and the least is the interpretative trail with 6 observation.

The visitors' assessment of the interpretative amenities is shown in table2, in which 1-2 minutes recorded the highest number of the average number of

times use with the signage (60.0%) while 5 minutes and above is the least with 14.2%. the table further reveals what fascinate the visitors to the reading of the facilities in which picture/caption recorded the highest with 57.5% and both caption/picture and type/species of animal is the least with 5.8%.

Table 2: Visitors Assessment of the Interpretative Amenities

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Average Time Use with the Amenities		
1-2 Minutes	72	60.0
3-4 minutes	31	25.8
5 minutes and Above	17	14.2
What Fascinate the reading of the amenities		
Picture/caption	69	57.5
Species/Type of Animal	44	36.7
Both	7	5.8

The visitors' perception towards the interpretative amenities as shown in table3, in which visitors willing to use the amenities have the highest mean of 3.99, follows by it reduced my ignorance with a mean of 3.97 and I don't use the facilities because it is a waste of time recorded the least with a mean of 3.92.

Table 3: Visitors Perception Towards the Interpretative Amenities

Variables	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
I am willing to use the interpretative amenities	3.99	0.79
It Reduced my level of ignorance about the animal	3.97	0.80
I don't use the amenities because it is a waste of time	3.92	0.81
Using the amenities was a fun	3.95	0.76
Using the amenities have no benefit to me	3.94	0.81
The amenities will increase my knowledge about the animals	3.96	0.82

Table 4 shows the impacts of the interpretative amenities on visitor's experience, it was revealed that the amenities improve visitors' knowledge about the natural history of the animal has the highest mean of 4.03±0.81, follows by the status of the animal in their natural ecosystem is clearly understood with a mean of 4.01±0.82 and Inspired/Influence me to donate to the conservation of wild animal is the least with a mean of 3.94±0.89.

Table 4: Impacts of the Interpretative Amenities on the Visitors Experience

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Improve my knowledge about the environment	3.99	0.83
Improve my knowledge about the natural history of the animal	4.03	0.81
The status of the animal in their natural ecosystem is clearly understood	4.01	0.82
I am entertained by the facilities	4.00	0.80
Increased my interest in the conservation of animals	3.97	0.87
Inspired/Influence me to donate to the conservation of wild animal	3.94	0.89

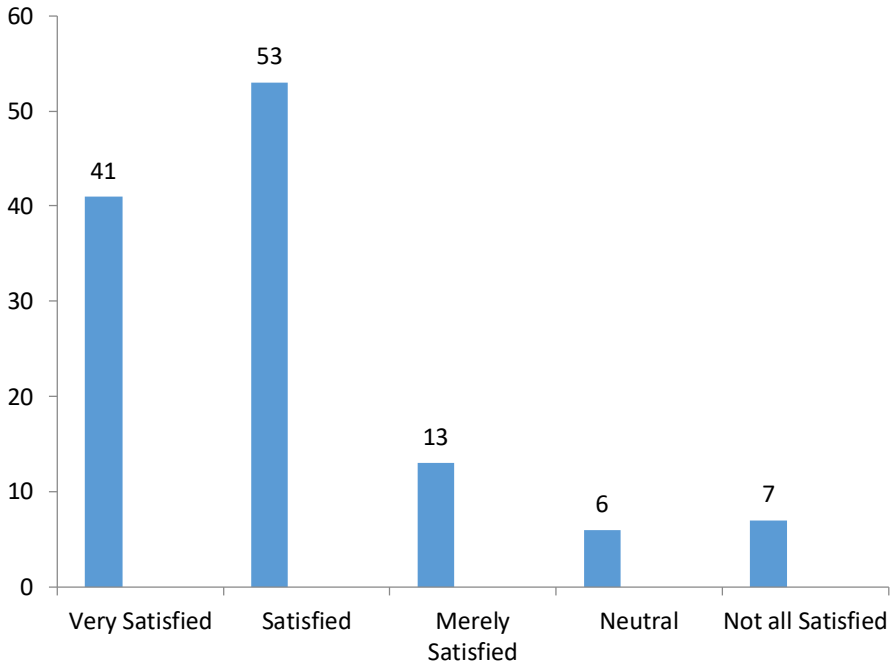


Figure 3: Visitors Satisfaction With Use of Interpretative Amenities

How satisfied with the use of the amenities in the study area is shown in Fig1, it was revealed that satisfied scores had the highest frequency (53) follow by very satisfied (41) while neutral recorded the lowest frequency (6).

Discussion

Visitors experience, satisfaction and understanding of nature and ecotourism is hinged on the tour guide and his ability to stimulate visitor's interest in the resources being interpreted. The results of the findings indicate that the majority of the respondents are females and fall between the age group of 16-25 years. This result indicates that the respondents are in their active age. This is in line with the work of Gadzama, (1999) that females usually visiting recreation centres more than the male sex. Also, the highest percentage of the age group are youths, this implies that younger people are involved in recreational activities than their elderly counterparts.

Also, majority of the respondents are educated with tertiary certificates having the highest score. This can be because educated populace knows more about the importance of visiting recreation centre. 82% of the respondents make use of different interpretative amenities available in the Zoological garden. According to Davidson *et al.* (2010), interpretation facilities or tour guides, without doubt, the most important component of ecotourism. Interpretation aims to stimulate interest, promote learning, guide visitors inappropriate behaviour for sustainable tourism and encourage enjoyment and satisfaction (Moscado, 2001). Most park management agencies reported that the benefits of interpretation and environmental education should be clearly understood throughout their organization (Wearing *et al.,* 2006). Interpretation facilities are considered as a vehicle for sustainable tourism as it minimizes the adverse environmental and social impacts of tourism by creating pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. There are various interpretative amenities available at the University of Ilorin Zoological Garden, this includes interpretative board, tour guide, script, museum education centre and an interpretative trail.

The majority of the respondents prefer to make use of the interpretative board and tour guide. This corresponds with McArthur and Hall, (1993) who stated that some benefits of having an interpretative board on-site include the ability to attract the attention of visitors, to display the natural history of the animal, to tailor the information given to visitors to match what they are seeing at the time and the way they behave in their natural ecosystem. Ogunjinmi *et al.,* (2010) further stated that interpretation is considered to be an important tool that helps to increase visitors' enjoyment, awareness and understanding of the environment. The picture/caption on the interpretative board is what usually attract the visitors to make use of the facilities. The board are big enough and are very attractive due to the presence of different colours on the board. The majority of the respondents are willing to use the interpretative amenities since it reduces the level of ignorance about the animal and increases the knowledge on the animal. This is in line with

some scholars who investigated concepts regarding tourism and ecotourism agreed that 'guides', in general, hold accountabilities within their tour group and outside the group.

The accountabilities include facilitate learning, client enjoyment, managing interaction between clients, facilitating and mediating the interaction between clients and host communities (Roggenbuck, 1992; Ham, 2003). Covering this wide array of accountabilities also means being a representative of several roles. Interpretative facilities represent the tour operator, the host community, the tourism industry, and act on behalf of land managers. These multi-skilled facilities must also present a meaningful experience to the visitor. The interview conducted among the tour guide, which revealed that all the tour guides at the garden were specially trained on interpretation when employed so that conservation message can be properly communicated to the audience. so that conservation message can be properly communicated to audience This is in tandem with Moscado, (2001) who stated that Tour guides are more effective when trained because they can enforce and demonstrate minimal impact behaviours and can manage interactions between visitors and the wildlife. The majority of the respondents are satisfied with the use of the interpretative amenities.

Conclusion

The study showed that the majority of the respondents makes use of interpretative facilities and interpretative board is the most preferred interpretation strategy at the University of Ilorin Zoological Garden thus it can be accepted that interpretative board is the most effective method for increasing visitor learning. Furthermore, using trained tour guides will help to attract the attention of visitors, answer visitors questions, and to tailor the information given to visitors to match what the visitors are seeing at the time. The effect of the interpretative facilitates on the visitors' experience show that it has improved their knowledge about the natural history of the animal and improve the visitors' knowledge about the environment of the animal.

Recommendations

- More interpretative facilities should be provided
- The interpretative facilities should be updated periodically
- More guide tour should be provided
- Visitors should be encouraged to make use of the educational centre

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