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Students' Wildlife Values (Ecosystem Services) Awareness in Mudumu South Complex, Zambezi Region, Namibia

Johannes Nangolo
Ecosystem Conservation Foundations, Maun, Botswana

Abstract
Youth, the country's future, must be informed of wildlife values to follow in the present generation's conservation efforts. This research assessed learners' wildlife-based ecosystem service knowledge in Wuparo and Balyerwa community conservancies. The knowledge and awareness procedures that introduce wildlife resources and their benefits shape learners' lifelong wildlife attitudes, values, and behaviours. The target population was students and teachers (control group) were randomly selected from eight indiscriminately selected schools in the two randomly selected conservancies to complete questionnaires. Students knew wildlife offers ecological services. They also recognise temporary services' concrete advantages over other ecosystem services. Awareness did not correlate with gender (P = 0.259), age (P = 0.374), or education (P = 0.129). Awareness and education correlated positively (R2 = 0.9995). The availability of wildlife-related courses, school location, absence of environmental clubs, and misunderstanding about wildlife influenced learner awareness. Supporting young natural resources education and environmental and wildlife groups may help wildlife and environmental conservation.

Keywords: *Ecosystem services; Wildlife conservation; Environmental education*

Introduction

Community livelihoods depend on wildlife resources' many goods and services (Chivian & Bernstein, 2008). Local communities' knowledge and conservation efforts determine the sustainability of wildlife-based ecosystem products and services (Chardonnet et al., 2002). However, local people's awareness of wildlife services' importance to their livelihoods is low, which may hinder ecosystem services-based conservation efforts (Chan et al., 2012) and lead to a lack of wildlife conservation concern (Gandiwa et al., 2014). Youth are the future scientists, lawmakers, and environmental regulators, thus wildlife-based products and services depend on them. These knowledge gaps need effective wildlife education for schoolchildren to better comprehend and conserve wildlife-based products and services (Tesfai et al., 2016). Indigenous and school-based wildlife values knowledge should interact (Bitanyi et al., 2012).

Ecosystem service knowledge, perspectives, and comprehension vary by nation and people (MEA, 2005). Community-based conservation areas (conservancies) demand youth to know the wildlife values that support their livelihoods. They must understand wildlife ecosystem services to do that. Learning about wildlife's significance may help students care about

conservation. Wildlife conservation in conservancies is inadequate because some members don't understand wildlife's relevance to their livelihoods. Poor wildlife conservation in community conservancies may be due to a lack of awareness of animal ecology (Hariohay et al., 2018). Young people are the future wildlife conservationists, thus it's crucial to know their knowledge gap on wildlife values.

Environmental conservation attitudes and practices vary across students (Thapa, 1999; Tehrani et al., 2010). Students with better environmental education (nature conservation) were more aware of wildlife services. Environmental literacy seems to be connected to students' knowledge, sensitivity, and comprehension of evolving environmental issues (Hariohay et al., 2018). Gender (Taskin, 2009; Tesfai et al., 2016), environmental education (Selby, 2004; Ajiboye & Silo, 2008), and age affect learners' awareness. Different gender effects on learners' awareness have been documented. Results from Taskin (2009) research in Turkey indicated that women were more optimistic and concerned about environmental concerns than males. However, MacDonald & Hara (1994) found that males are more sensitive to environmental issues than women. Yilmaz et al. (2004) reported no gender effect on learner awareness. Tuncer et al. (2005) found that gender and school type attendance significantly affected environmental views of Turkish youth, with females scoring higher than boys.

Education and public knowledge of biodiversity are crucial instruments for biodiversity protection, according to UNCED. Youth education, awareness, and training are also promoted in Agenda 21 Chapter 36 (United Nations Committee, 1992). Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) parties adopted a Communication, Education, and Public Awareness (CEPA) programme to communicate the Convention's scientific and technical work in a language that many groups can understand, integrate biodiversity into their education systems, and raise public awareness of biodiversity's importance to their livelihoods. The CBD Secretariat and UNESCO are mainstreaming biodiversity through various dimensions of biodiversity education for Sustainable Development, including all biodiversity educational initiatives for children and youth. Namibia has signed the CBD and UNESCO agreements, which recognise that biodiversity conservation requires awareness (MEA, 2005). Article 95 of Namibia's constitution emphasises sustainable wildlife resource utilisation to promote people's lives (Government Republic of Namibia, 1990). The Namibia Environmental Education Network (NEEN) helped the Ministry of Education (MoE) design a National Environmental Education in 1999 to encourage environmental education in all disciplines. Studies have examined the incorporation of environmental education in several topics and teachers' abilities to teach them. Fewer research have assessed students' environmental awareness. This study aimed to assess learners' awareness of wildlife's value (services), with three specific objectives: a) to assess learners' awareness of provisional ecosystem services, b) cultural ecosystem services, and c) support services.

Methods and Materials

The research was done in Balyerwa and Wuparo community conservancies in Mudumu South Complex, Zambezi Region, Namibia. Primary, junior, and senior secondary students from Balyerwa and Wuparo community conservancies were targeted. Eight schools were chosen from Balyerwa and Wuparo community conservancies. The research included 145 students (including eight instructors) from elementary, junior, and senior secondary schools. The Ministry of Education provided a list of all schools in two conservancies, and random sampling was used to choose eight schools: Balyerwa conservancy selected Sangwali Senior Secondary School, Sangwali Combined School, Samudono Primary School, and Mukurofu Primary School, while Wuparo conservancy chose Simataa, Sauzuo, Mbambazi, and Lianshulu. Six students per grade were randomly picked from each school at a 15% ratio (1teacher:35 students), yielding 145 responders. For several courses per grade (6A, 6B), one class was randomly selected from the three classrooms.

The maximum number of students allowed in each class is 35, so all conservancies sampled 72 primary students, 44 junior students, and 21 seniors. Grades 6 and 7 from each primary school, 11 and 12 from senior secondary, and 8, 9, and 10 from junior secondary were sampled. Additionally, eight instructors from eight schools were randomly selected. The research interviewed 137 learners, giving N=145 (including instructors as the control group and to compare their knowledge with the learners) for both conservancies. The mixed method research included quantitative and qualitative methodologies and many data gathering methods. The surveys included open-ended, closed-ended, and Likert scale questions. The questionnaire had five main sections: personal details (demographic), provisional services, cultural services, supporting and regulating services, and general knowledge. Due to thesis time constraints, surveys were not pre-tested. The researcher had to attend courses while doing the investigation. There was little time for pre-testing.

Data analysis included qualitative and quantitative methods. First, qualitative data was converted to quantitative data using a Likert scale. This required cleaning, organising, and coding in SPSS windows 2010 version 20 by defining numeric categories. The data was then entered into spreadsheets and analysed using SPSS software windows 2010 version 20 to generate descriptive statistics like frequencies, means, percentages, and standard deviations for all objectives including transformed quantitative data into codes. Inferential Pearson chi-square tests were used to find and associate the relationships between factors influencing learners' awareness of wildlife values (ecosystem services) and their awareness, establishing the effective factors influencing learners' response and perceptions of wildlife values. Regression correlation was used to test the significant relationship between primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary school learners and teachers by comparing respondents' awareness levels. Finally, Microsoft Excel 2016 was used to create graphs for all objectives.

Results & Discussions

Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

Table 1: Summarized social-demographic profile of the respondents.

Parameter (N=145)	**Frequency (n)**	**Proportion (%)**
Level of education		
Primary	72	49.7
Junior	44	30.3
Senior	21	14.5
Teaches	8	5.5
Conservancy		
Balyerwa	70	48.3
Wuparo	75	51.7
Gender		
Male	78	53.8
Female	67	46.2
Age : 10 – 15 years old	71	49
: 16 – 21 years old	62	42.8
: 22 + years old	12	8.2

70 (48.3%) of the 145 research participants (137 students, 8 instructors) were from Balyerwa conservancy, while 75 (51.2%) were from Wuparo. Male respondents outnumbered female respondents by 78 (53.8%) to 67 (46.2%). Most responders (n=72) were elementary school students (49.7%) since more primary schools were chosen than other groups. 30.3 percent were junior secondary, 14.5% (n=21) were senior secondary, and 5.5% (n=8) were teachers. The majority (49%) of respondents were aged 10–15, 42.8% (n=62) were 16–21, 4.8% (n=7) were 22–27, and just 5 (3.4%) were above 28 (Table 1).

Learners' wildlife awareness

Table 2: Learners' knowledge of "wildlife" and the relationship between gender, education, and awareness.

SA_ Question: Are you aware of the term wildlife?	**P = 0.259**

		Yes	No	Proportion within gender		Total	Proportion between gender	
				Yes	No		Yes	No
Gender	Male	62	12	83.8%	16.2%	74	55.9%	46.2%
	Female	49	14	77.8%	22.2%	63	44.1%	53.8%
Total		**111** (81%)	**26** (19%)			**N=137**	100%	100%

The majority of survey participants (81%) were aware of the word "wildlife" without being provided a definition, whereas 19% were not (Table 2). The findings showed that 81% of students at conservancy schools were acquainted with the term "wildlife." This may be because all schools are situated in community conservancies. This increases learners' likelihood of understanding the subject. Müderrisoğlu & Altanlar (2011) found that students in rural areas have higher environmental awareness than those in urban areas, indicating that residence can significantly impact learners' environmental awareness.

This study also found that wildlife-related activities like environmental clubs in some schools helped raise students' awareness of environmental issues through subjects like Natural Science, Life Science, and Biology. Environmental clubs are a great tool to teach students about nature and its values. According to Woodworth et al. (2011) and Moseley (2000), environmental education increases student environmental responsibility.

Of the 111 affirmative answers, 62 (55.9%) were male and 49 (44.1%) were female (Table 2). Women were less informed than men. This suggests guys had ways to participate with wildlife concerns. According to MacDonald & Hara (1994), males are more sensitive to environmental conflicts than females. Some research suggest that women are more optimistic and concerned about the environment than men (Taskin, 2009). Awareness was not associated with gender (Pearson chi-square value: P = 0.259), age (P = 0.374), or education (P = 0.129) among learners. All four male and four female professors in the research knew about animals (Table 2). In support with Yilmaz, Boone, & Andersen (2004), they discovered no significant gender difference. Tuncer et al. (2005) found that gender and school type attendance significantly affected environmental views of young people in Turkey, with females scoring higher than boys.

Association between wildlife awareness and education

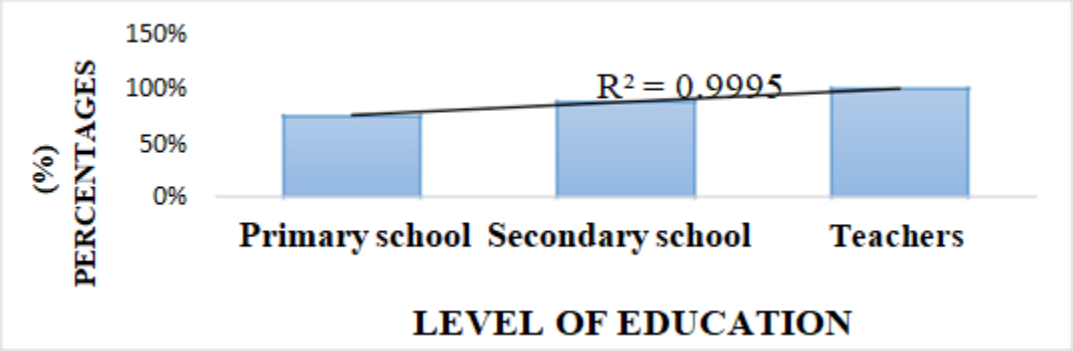

Figure 2: Association between students' and instructors' "wildlife" awareness and education.

Junior and secondary school students' wildlife knowledge was similar, therefore they were handled as one group. Wildlife was known by 75% of primary school students and 88% of secondary school students (Figure 2). In contrast, all study instructors were aware (100%). There was a substantial positive association between awareness and education (correlation: R2 = 0.9995), thus awareness rose with education (Figure 2).

Awareness of wildlife value

Table 2: Level of awareness of respondents on wildlife as a valuable assert

Level of education	N	**Mean**	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Primary S	72	1.58	.092	1.40	1.77
Junior S	44	1.41	.075	1.26	1.56
Senior S	21	1.67	.126	1.40	1.93
Teachers	8	1.00	.000	1.00	1.00
Average mean	145	**1.51**	.055	1.40	1.62

Generally, learners and teachers were aware that wildlife has values (Average Mean = 1.51) (Table 3). The Likert scale of five levels (Highly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree, and Highly Disagree) was used to quantify awareness levels (mean values between education levels) (Table 3).

In general, the survey found that students and instructors knew wildlife had values. The Go Green Club (at Sangwali Primary School) and the Big Five Club (at Simataa Senior Secondary School) were established at all the schools in the study. The former teaches students about flora and encourages tree planting, while the latter takes them on wildlife safaris (game watching) in neighbouring protected areas like Mudumu National Park. Environmental groups teach wildlife background and ideals. The availability of environmental and animal chapters like "Types of Ecosystems" in Natural Science, Life Science, and Biology further increased awareness. Love of nature (animal and plant interest) was also recognised as a factor in learning.

According to Pashby & Weis (2002), school activities and environmental groups increased children's environmental awareness. Selby (2001) said that environmental conservation projects influence knowledge and attitudes to reconnect people and nature. However, other students believed wildlife had little value because of their unfavourable views of wild animals, particularly human-wildlife conflicts. Ignorance and gender were also key hurdles to learners' awareness.

General Ecosystem Services awareness

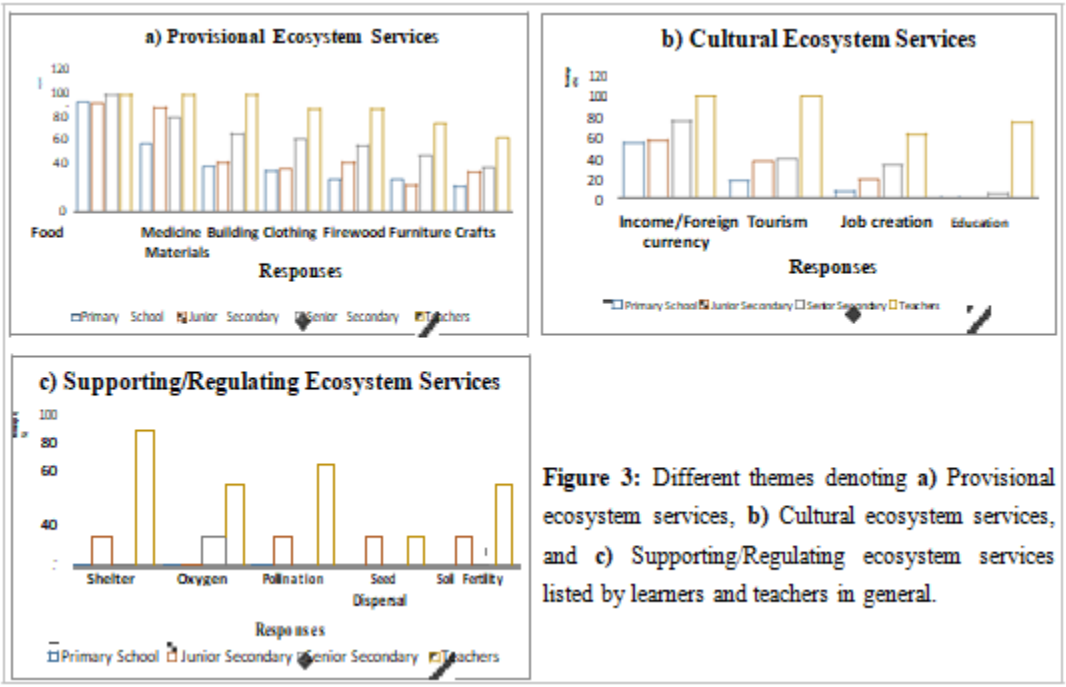

Figure 3: Different themes denoting **a)** Provisional ecosystem services, **b)** Cultural ecosystem services, and **c)** Supporting/Regulating ecosystem services listed by learners and teachers in general.

This detailed understanding of provisional (tangible), cultural (religion, leisure, or education), and ecological service support or regulation. The main provisional (food, medicine, building materials, clothing, firewood, furniture, and crafts), cultural (income or foreign currency, tourism, job creation, and education), and supporting or regulating (shelter, oxygen, pollination, seed dispersal, and soil fertility) ecosystem services in the conserved area were

easily specified and given an overview using different themes. This helped avoid repetition of related individual benefits. Since participants might specify several benefits, the aggregate of all topic proportions exceeds 100% (Figure 3).

Provisional Ecosystem Service awareness

Primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary students knew that animals provided food and medicine (over 80% at all levels of schooling) (Figure 3; a). Other themes (clothing, building materials, firewood, furniture, and crafts) had values below 75% for all respondents except teachers, so awareness or knowledge increased with education. Senior secondary school learners were more knowledgeable than primary school learners, but junior secondary learners were similar in most cases. Teacher awareness was strong in all situations (Figure 3; a). Among learners exclusively, 95% identified food as the primary provisional service from wildlife (n=130). The majority (n= 98, 72%) said plants and animals can be used to treat sick people, 40 said furniture (29%) including chairs and doors, 39 said plants can be used for crafts (29%), 61 (45%) said plants were used as building materials for houses, especially in local villages, 64 (47%) were confident that animal skin and other plant parts could be processed into clothes, and 51 (37%) participants mentioned use of plants as firewood.

Awareness of Cultural Ecosystem Services

Wildlife provides cultural services, however most elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary students and instructors listed income and foreign currency as the key cultural service (over 50%). In tourism, job creation, and education, senior secondary school students were more aware than primary and junior secondary school students, and the figures ranged below 50% in all themes except teachers (Figure 3; b)).

The majority of learners (n=80, 58%) said money (income/foreign currency) was the primary cultural service. Only 19 (14%) respondents could say wildlife creates employment (both self-employed and employed), 36 spoke of tourism (26%), and only 2 could say wildlife is educational.

Awareness of supporting/regulating ecosystem services

Education raised knowledge of shelter and oxygen (Figure 3, c). Most respondents (below 30% in all subjects) were unaware of wildlife's supporting and regulating environmental services, except instructors (over 50%). Learners from secondary schools had a notion and were somewhat educated about animals as ecosystem supports and regulators, unlike elementary school students (Figure 3; c).

The survey found that only 15% of learners knew animals offers refuge in nature (n=21). It added that 12% of participants (n=16) valued plants as a source of oxygen (through photosynthesis), 11% (n=15) valued insects as pollinators, 7% valued wildlife as soil nutrients, and only 6% (n=8) valued animal and plant species as seed dispersers.

Overall Ecosystem Services awareness

This summed learners' ecosystem service knowledge and showed which categories were most and least understood by learners and instructors.

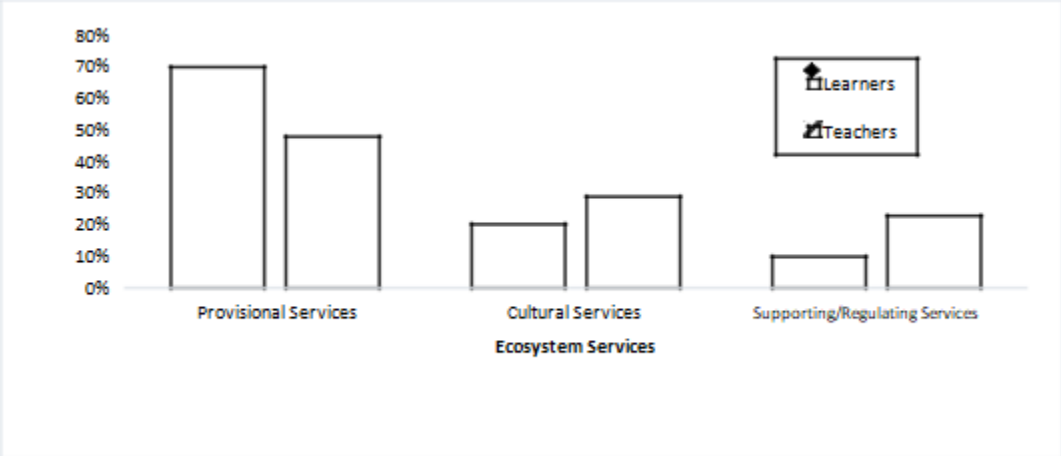

Figure 4: Ecosystem Services knowledge among students and instructors.

Without instructors, 70% of respondents were aware of wildlife's interim ecological functions. Supporting or regulating ecological services was least known by learners (10%), compared to cultural (20%) and provisional (20%) ecosystem services. Teachers were aware of all ecological services equally and diversely. This implies that learners knew less about supporting/regulating ecological services compared to provisional and cultural ones. The research scientifically showed that preserved area learners understood provisional, cultural, sustaining, and regulating ecosystem services. Cultural (non-tangible benefits that regulate, control, or support ecosystems with its biotic and abiotic factors and process) and provisional ecosystem services were more familiar to them than supporting ecosystem services. Learners respect wildlife for its immediate (concrete) advantages, not indirect ones.

In support of this study, Xun et al. (2017) found that farmers were concerned with ecosystem service functions that directly benefit them but did not understand ecological security maintenance or cultural landscape functions. This research also found that ecosystem service awareness improved with education. Wildlife knowledge in schools rose with grades and wildlife-related courses, while elementary schools had less wildlife-related subjects than secondary schools and higher education.

Thapa (1999) and Tehrani et al. (2010) found similar differences in students' environmental attitudes and actions depending on their educational level. They found that students with better environmental education were more conscious of environmental services. Thus, environmental literacy was connected to students' knowledge, sensitivity, and comprehension of evolving environmental issues. However, other writers suggested that local members' ecologically responsible animal value choices are based on formal, informal, and non-formal youth training (Eagles & Demare, 1999).

On secondary school students' perceptions of environmental services, Tesfai et al. (2016) found that both educated and poor people valued forest ecosystem services more than uneducated people due to conservation education in their areas of residence, indicating that education affected wildlife awareness.

School awareness effects

Raising awareness includes educating students about wildlife via campaigns, excursions, or speech in schools. Raising school knowledge of wildlife values improved student comprehension, the research found. By learning about wildlife and its relationships with the ecology and local people, they conserve wildlife. The study found that even though raising awareness helped learners learn about wildlife conservation, they were unable to educate other local members in their communities, which prevented them from sharing skills and increasing poaching in conserved areas. Eagles & Demare (1999) found that official and informal environmental conservation programmes in conserved and non-conserved regions reduce nature-human separation. According to Navjot et al. (2010), conservation efforts only succeed when local people are given alternative food, basic education, and environmental outreach to lessen animal dependence.

Since this study found that raising awareness in schools increases learners' awareness, Bitanyi et al. (2012) and Tesfai et al. (2016) recommended improved education programmes and alternative livelihood opportunities to decrease dependence on wildlife resources, meaning that wildlife conservation education can boost local awareness and strongly supported the need.

Conclusions

In the research, learners knew that wildlife provides ecosystem services, but secondary school students knew more than primary school students, and boys knew more than girls. It also showed no significant connection between gender, age, or education level and learners' wildlife awareness and values. Education improved knowledge of wildlife values and concepts. The research also found that learners were aware that wildlife delivers physical and cultural ecosystem services but not supporting and regulating ecosystem services because they prioritise direct advantages of wild animals and plants. It finds that secondary school students were more informed than elementary school students in these services, although instructors were aware of these services. Respondents valued wildlife for food, medicine, revenue, foreign currency, and refuge.

Access to wildlife-related subjects, education, environmental clubs in some schools, and school location (in conserved areas) were the main factors that raised students' awareness of wildlife values. Some schoolchildren were aware, but impediments stopped them from respecting animals. These included disinterest in environmental groups and cultural beliefs that animals cause human-wildlife conflicts. Although this research was a byproduct of another, it showed that such data may provide new insights.

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