

**PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON
MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN SRI LANKA: A
CASE STUDY FROM THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI
LANKA AND THE UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA.**

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ABSTRACT

Man is the most dangerous and self-centred animal in the world formulating different types of environmental concepts and strategies for his survival. Change of man's mind set and development of his positive attitude on environment is very important to protect the world from the man. This study mainly explored the existing knowledge, awareness, attitude and behaviour, reasons and solutions of the undergraduates of two national universities with different teaching-learning methods (The Open University of Sri Lanka and the University of Peradeniya) regarding the major environmental issues. Questionnaire survey was adopted with 33 structured items and 04 open ended items to explore the perception of existing knowledge, interest, attitude, behaviour and socio-economic background of the target population. Students' perception on causes of major environmental issues in Sri Lanka, their harmful effects, proposed conservation strategies were also evaluated. Study sample was consisted 800 undergraduates of Engineering, Science, Management, Law and Arts/ Social Sciences of the above said two universities equally. An independent-sample t-test on research data was recognized that, no significant difference ($P=0.729$) among two major undergraduate groups on environmental knowledge. But, One Way ANOVA statistical test was found that significant differences ($P=0.0$) between undergraduates from different disciplines, undergraduates' family income ($P=0.048$), educational background of the family ($p=0.0$) with existing knowledge. It was found that, school education had played a main role in building environmental concepts of study group. Attitude and behaviour of both student groups were investigated regarding the environment showed fairly favourable status. Majority of undergraduates suggested that TV and radio were the most effective in public awareness for conservation of environment. The study revealed that, considerable number of the students participate in different form of environmental activities. Undergraduates of the OUSL were more interested in "tree planting"/ "gardening" (22.7%) while "hiking (Mountain climbing)" was selected as the first priority for Peradeniya undergraduates (25.7%). Both groups were recognized that the "global warming" as the major global environmental issue and air pollution as the local issue. This study highlights the importance of building environmental knowledge among undergraduates, mainly on global and local environmental issues, to improve the sustainable environment management in Sri Lanka.

Key words: Questionnaire survey, Perception, Environmental knowledge, Undergraduates, Sri Lanka.