

# **Seasonal Variation of Physicochemical Properties in the Lower River Benue, Nigeria**

## **Abstract**

The study investigates the impact of seasonal changes on water quality in the River Benue. Conducted over eighteen months from January 2020 to June 2021, the research focuses on three locations: Ibi, Lau, and Mayo-Ranewo. Key physicochemical parameters such as temperature, pH, turbidity, conductivity, biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), hardness, dissolved oxygen (DO), fluoride, and nitrate were measured to assess water quality. The findings reveal significant seasonal variations in these parameters, influenced by rainfall patterns, land use, and anthropogenic activities. Temperature ranged from 25.56°C to 30.70°C, within acceptable limits for tropical waters, supporting stable biological processes. Turbidity levels, however, exceeded recommended values, indicating the presence of suspended solids that could impair water quality and harm aquatic life. Total dissolved solids (TDS) and conductivity showed potential contamination risks, likely due to agricultural runoff and urban discharges. Dissolved oxygen (DO) levels were generally adequate, especially during the wet season, enhancing oxygen content through increased photosynthetic activity and water inflows. However, BOD spiked with rainfall, signalling organic pollution and potential eutrophication risks. Seasonal shifts in pH and water hardness reflected changes in runoff and photosynthesis, with values largely within acceptable ranges for aquatic life. Fluoride and nitrate concentrations increased in the wet season, primarily due to agricultural runoff, highlighting the influence of land-based activities on water quality.

## **1 Introduction**

Water is an essential component of life, making up 50-90% of living organisms and covering nearly three-fourths of the Earth's surface, upon which all life depends for survival (Chakraborty, 2021). However, increased rates of urbanization, industrialization, and other forms of modernization have continued to threaten the quality of natural water available to organisms (Chakraborty, 2021). In particular, sustained usage of fertilizer, pesticides, and other agrochemicals, has, to a large extent, rendered natural water, in most cases, highly contaminated with different harmful pollutants (Odewale et al., 2023).

Anthropogenic activities are the primary drivers of global environmental change, directly or indirectly caused by human actions (Volta & Jeppesen, 2021). Numerous studies have identified anthropogenic activities as major sources of water pollution in Nigeria and globally (Song et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2023). Natural water bodies are frequently used as disposal sites for untreated or inadequately treated wastewater from industrial, agricultural, commercial, and domestic sources (Wei et al., 2023). As a result, increased anthropogenic inputs through erosion, leaching, and weathering have rapidly degraded surface water, rendering many water bodies unsuitable for fishing and domestic use (Volta & Jeppesen, 2021).

Understanding the physicochemical properties of water is essential for assessing its quality and identifying potential risks to human health and ecosystem integrity (Chakraborty, 2021). Physicochemical parameters such as pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, conductivity, and nutrient concentrations provide valuable insights into the overall health and ecological status of aquatic environments (Rahman et al., 2021). Changes in these parameters can indicate natural processes such as seasonal variations or anthropogenic influences such as pollution events (Mammeri et al., 2023). Several studies have highlighted the importance of monitoring and assessing water quality in rivers to mitigate pollution and safeguard environmental and public health (Kassegne & Leta, 2020; Mammeri et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2021). This study aims to assess various water quality variables at three different locations (Ibi, Lau and Mayo-Ranewo) to identify the best-fitting parameters for water properties and determine whether these properties remain consistent across different seasons.

## **2 Materials and Methods**

### **2.1 Study Area**

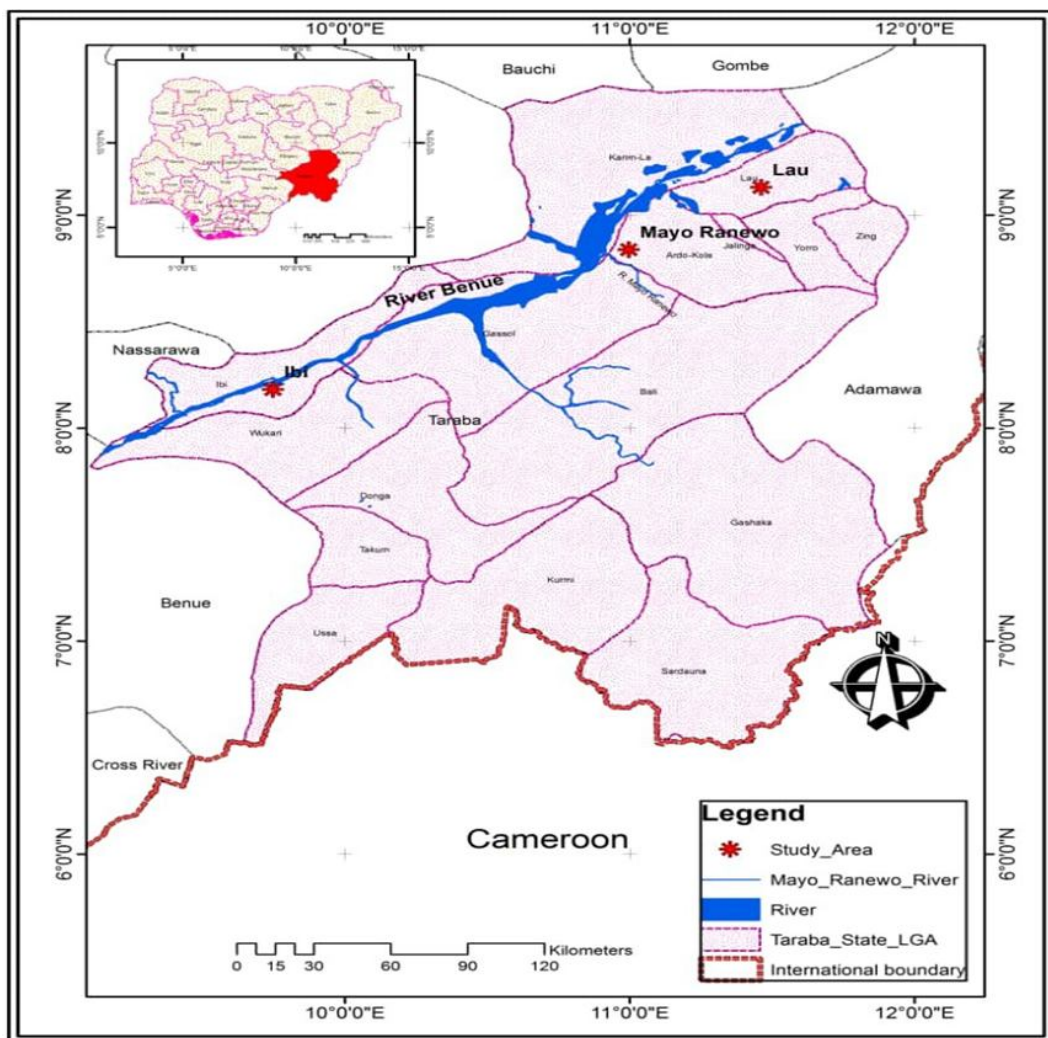
The River Benue, Nigeria's second-largest river, originates from the Adamawa mountains in Cameroon, near the Nigerian border. It flows westward across Nigeria, eventually joining the River Niger at Lokoja in Kogi State (Okayi et al., 2001). This study was conducted in Taraba State, located in northeastern Nigeria, named after the Taraba River, which traverses the state's southern region. The state capital, Jalingo, lies at coordinates 8° 00' N, 10° 30' E. Taraba State spans an area of 54,473 km<sup>2</sup> and had a population of 2,294,800 as of the 2006 census. The landscape is largely undulating, with notable features

like the scenic Mambilla Plateau. Major rivers in Taraba include the Benue, Donga, Taraba, and Ibi rivers.

Ibi is a town and administrative district situated on the southern bank of the River Benue, near where the Taraba and Donga rivers converge with the Benue. Ibi's coordinates are 8° 19' N, 9° 51' E. Lau, another Local Government Area in Taraba, is bordered by Ardo Kola, Jalingo, Yorro, and Zing LGAs. It has a predominantly Hausa-Fulani population, with headquarters in the town of Lau at 9°12' 29.77" N, 11°16' 31.48" E. Mayo-Ranewo, known for its renowned fish market, is located along the banks of the River Benue, about 8 kilometers off the Jalingo-Wukari road (Figure 1).

## **2.2 Experimental Design**

The study was conducted over an eighteen-month period, from January 2020 to June 2021, with monthly sampling from the River Benue covering the wet and dry seasons experienced in the country. During this period, water quality parameters such as temperature, pH, turbidity, conductivity, biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), hardness, Dissolved oxygen (DO), fluoride, and nitrate, were assessed. Sampling was carried out at three designated stations along the river: Station A at Lau, Station B at Mayo-Ranewo, and Station C at Ibi. These stations were chosen based on the level of fishing activity in each area. (Figure.1)



**Figure 1.** Map of Taraba State showing River Benue and the three-sampling locations

### 2.3 Calibration of the Horiba U-50

To obtain correct measurement values, the sensors were calibrated using a standard solution before measurement. Simultaneous auto-calibration of the pH, conductivity, and turbidity sensors in pH 4 standard solution and DO and DEP sensors were also done simultaneously in the air, other times, manual calibration of individual measurement parameters was done, especially if a single parameter reading was needed.

### 2.4 Sample Collection and Analysis

Water samples (approximately 1 000 mL each) were collected in two distinct seasons. Water samples were collected from Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi. Some physicochemical parameters of the water were determined instantly such as temperature, pH, turbidity DO,

electrical conductivity, and total dissolved solids (TDS) in the field using water testing equipment (Horiba,model U-50, Kyoto Japan). Other parameters that could not be determined in the field such as Nitrates, hardness, and Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) were done in the water treatment section of Jalingo Water Supply Agency. The water sample were collected at the selected points. The water sample was collected with plastic table water bottles at the sampling stations. The bottles were rinsed thoroughly with the sample water following the standard guide of the plainest photometer 7100 model. After sampling, an alkaline potassium iodide solution was added to protect water samples from any fungal or other pathogenic attacks(Rahman et al., 2021). Since the sample was not analysed in situ, it was packaged in a cooler stocked with ice before transporting to the Taraba State Water Supply Agency laboratory for analysis. The bottles were kept airtight, labelled properly, brought to the laboratory, and preserved properly in the refrigerator until subsequent analysis. The analysis of Nitrates, hardness, and BOD was conducted using a WagtechPalintest Photometer (Model 7100, United Kingdom).

### **3 Statistical Analysis**

The data collected on physicochemical parameters were analysed using descriptive statistics to determine the mean, variance, and standard deviation, and were visualized with bar charts. Additionally, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess the significance( $P > 0.05$ ) differences among the parameters.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Temperature (°C)**

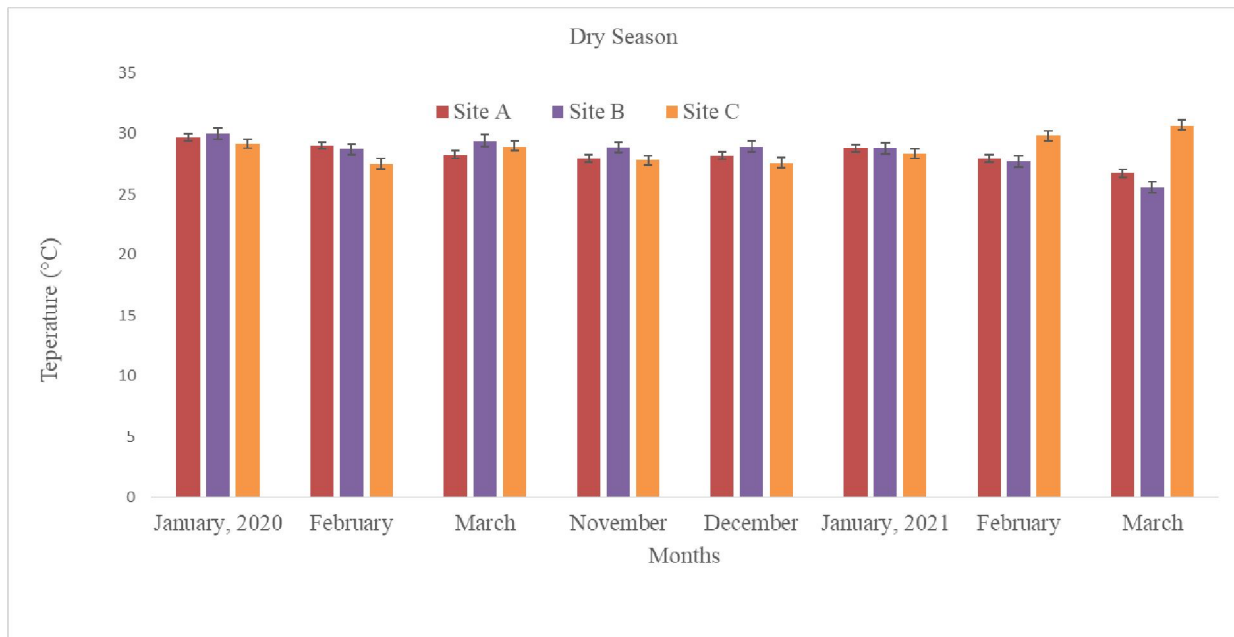
In the dry season, the highest temperature of 30.7° was recorded at Site C in March 2021, while the lowest, 25.56°, was observed at Site B in the same month. The mean temperature during this period ranged from 27.65° to 29.60°, with no significant difference in the overall mean temperature ( $P > 0.05$ ; see Figure 2). In the wet season, the highest temperature of 30.06° was recorded at Site B in April 2020, and the lowest, 25.45°, at Site C in April 2021. The mean temperature for the wet season ranged from 26.02° to 29.14°, with no significant difference (Fig. 3) in the overall mean temperature ( $P > 0.05$ )

### **4.2 Turbidity (mg/L)**

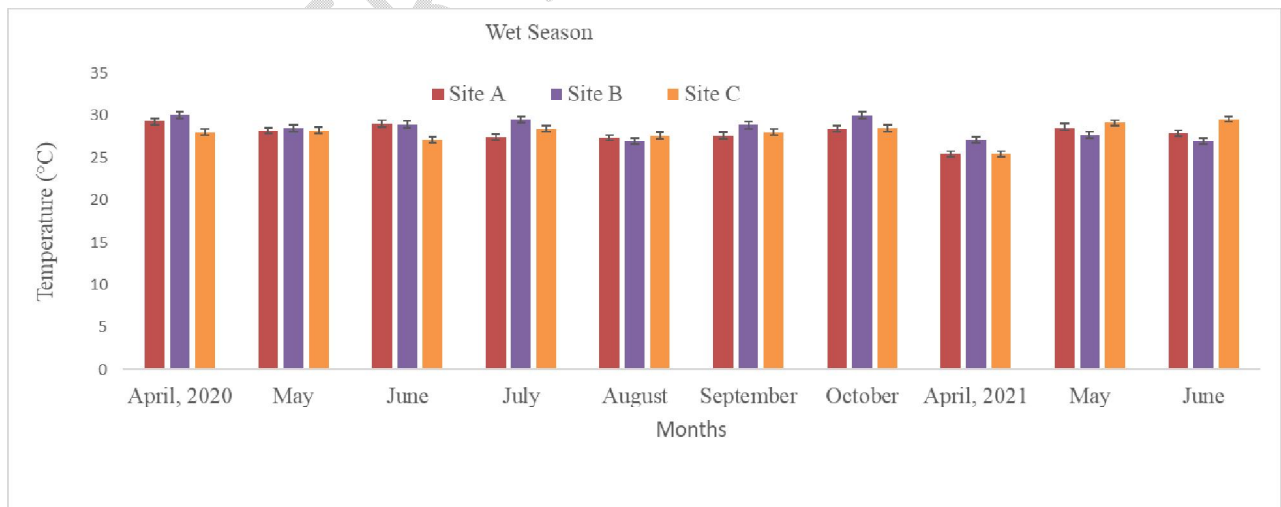
During the dry season, turbidity was highest at Site A in February 2021, with a value of 112.33 NTU, while the lowest value of 35 NTU was recorded at Site C in January 2020. The mean turbidity ranged from 51.77 to 89.11 NTU, with a significant (Fig. 4) overall mean for the dry months ( $P < 0.05$ ). In the wet season, the highest turbidity of 116.33 NTU was observed at Site A in June 2021, and the lowest, 41 NTU, at Site B in the same month. Mean turbidity for the wet season ranged from 63.66 to 102.88 NTU, also showing a significant (Fig. 5) overall mean ( $P < 0.05$ ).

#### **4.3 Total dissolved solids (TDS)**

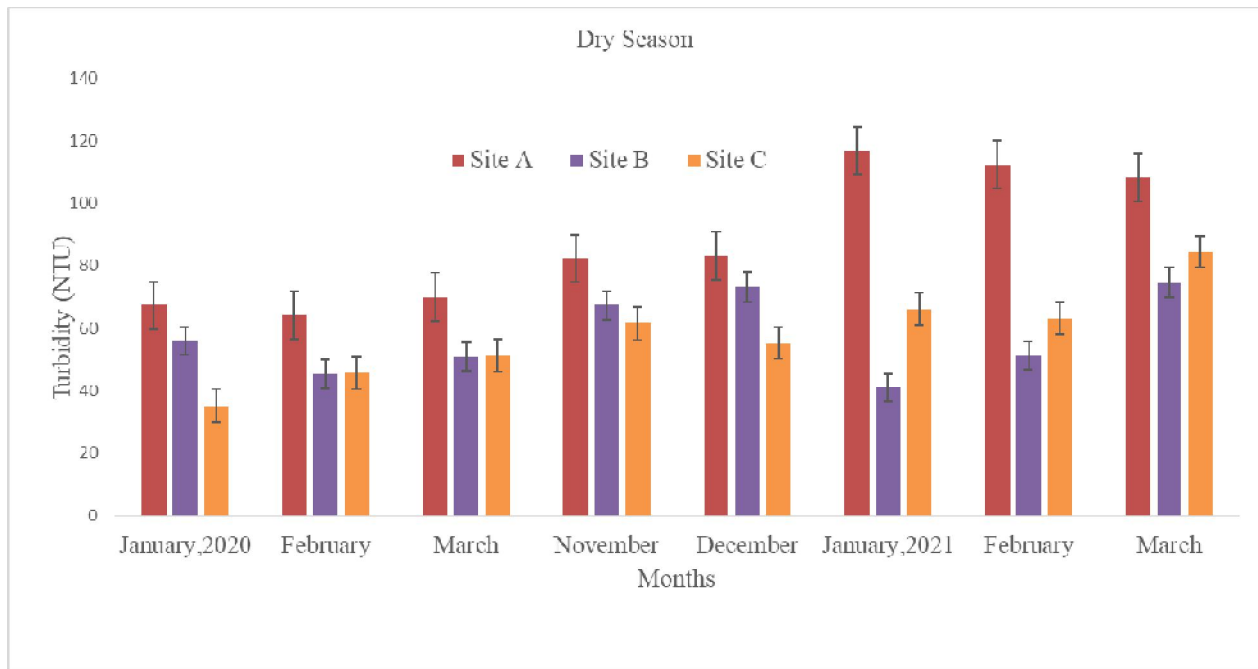
The Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) during the dry season period showed that Site A in the month of January, 2020 had the highest value with 474.36 mg/L and the least value of 297.7 mg/L was recorded in Site C in the month of February, 2020, the mean TDS ranges from 352.21 mg/L to 423.97 mg/L. The overall mean TDS (Fig. 6) for the dry months were significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). During the wet season Total Dissolved Solids, the highest of 715.83 mg/L was recorded in Sites A in the month of August, 2020, and the lowest Total Dissolved Solids of 224.33 mg/L was recorded in Site A in the month of April, 2021, the mean Total Dissolved Solids ranges from 280.7367 mg/L to 606.27 mg/L. The overall mean Total Dissolved Solids (Fig. 7) for the wet months were not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ).



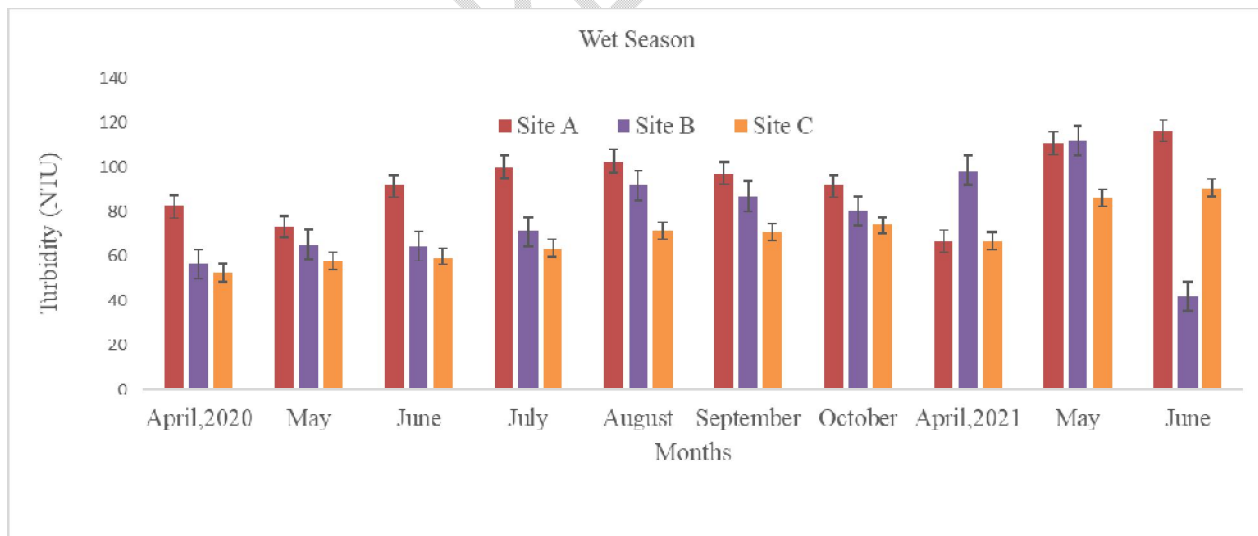
**Figure 2:** Dry season mean Temperature (°C) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



**Figure 3:** Wet season mean Temperature (°C) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi

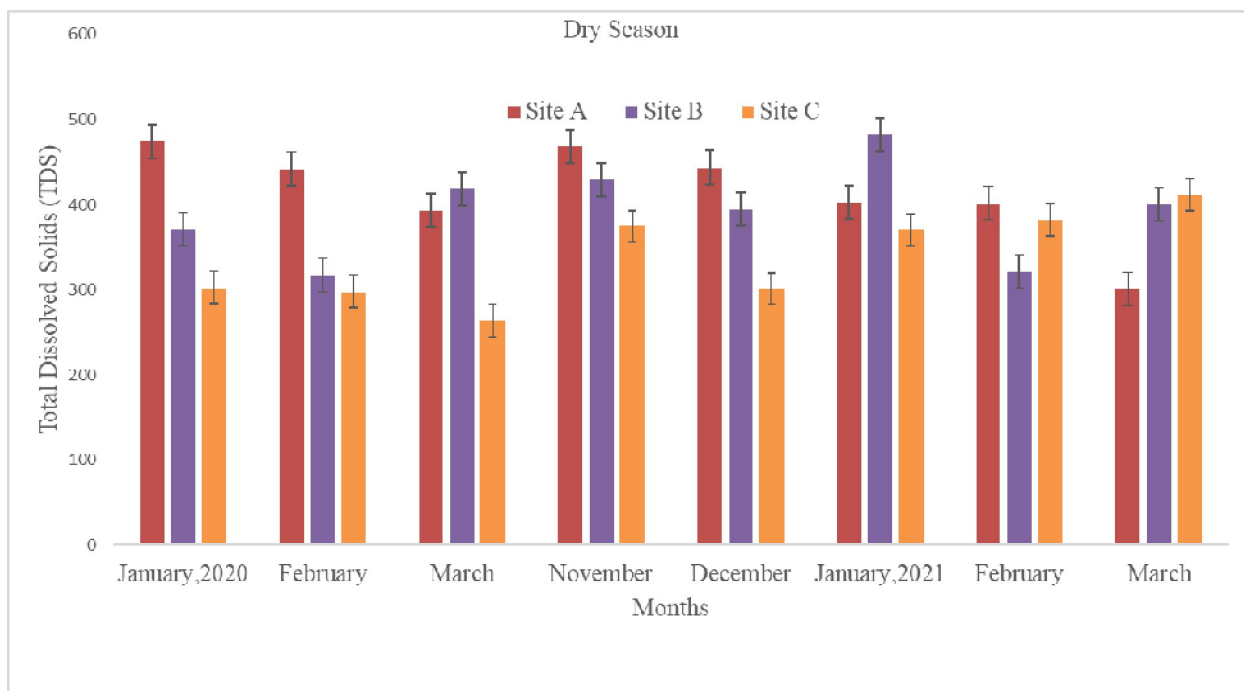


**Figure 4:** Dry season mean Turbidity (NTU) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi

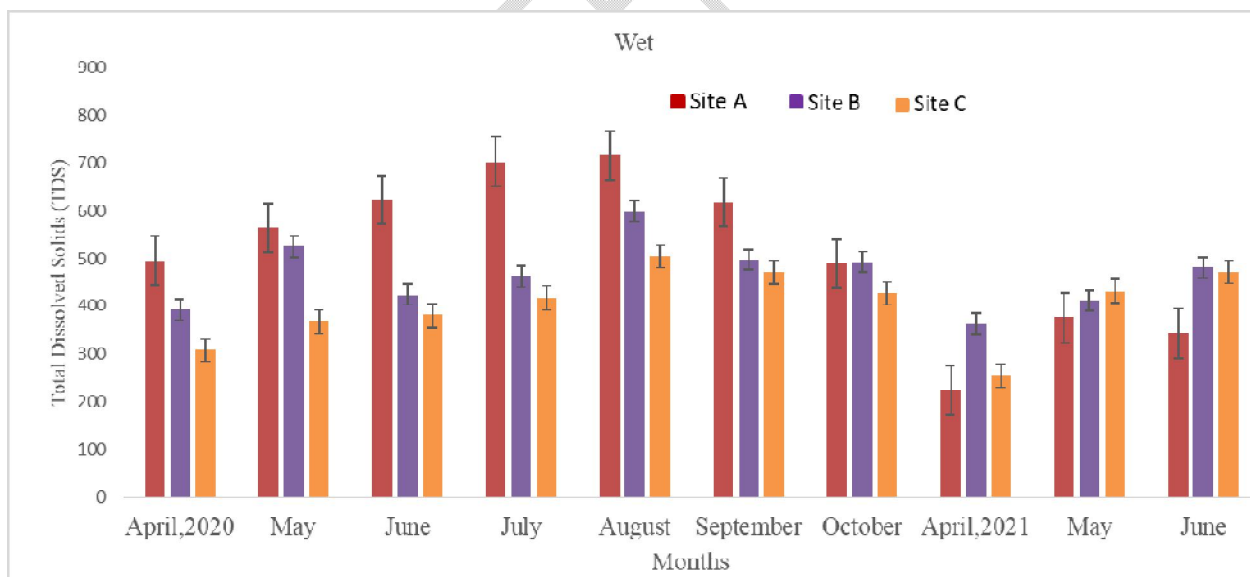


**Figure 5:** Wet season mean Turbidity (NTU) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi





**Figure 6:** Dry season mean Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) mg/L variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



**Figure 7:** Wet season mean Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) mg/L variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi

#### 4.4 Conductivity ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ )

The Conductivity during the dry season period showed that Site A in the month of January, 2021 had the highest value with 671 ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ) and the least value of 306.33 ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ) was recorded in Site B in the month of February, 2021, the mean conductivity ranges from 402.77 ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ) to 611.4 ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ). The overall mean conductivity for the dry months (Fig. 8) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

During the wet season, the highest conductivity of 896.8 ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ) was recorded in Sites A in the month of August, 2020, and the lowest conductivity of 103.33 ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ) was recorded in Site A in the month of May, 2021, the mean conductivity ranges from 354.33 ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ) to 781.06 ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ). The overall mean conductivity for the wet months (Fig. 9) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

#### **4.5 Dissolved oxygen DO (mg/L)**

The Dissolve oxygen (DO) level during the dry season period showed that Site B in the month of January, 2021 had the highest value with 8.22 mg/L and the least value of 6.1 mg/L was recorded in Site A in the month of November, 2020, the mean DO ranges from 6.64 mg/L to 7.41 mg/L. The overall mean DO for the dry months (Fig. 10) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

During the wet season, the highest DO level of 8.56 mg/L was recorded in Sites A in the month of June, 2021, and the lowest DO of 6.06 mg/L was recorded in Site A in the month of May, 2020, the mean DO ranges from 6.25 mg/L to 7.62 mg/L. The overall mean conductivity for the wet months (Fig. 11) were significant ( $P<0.05$ ).

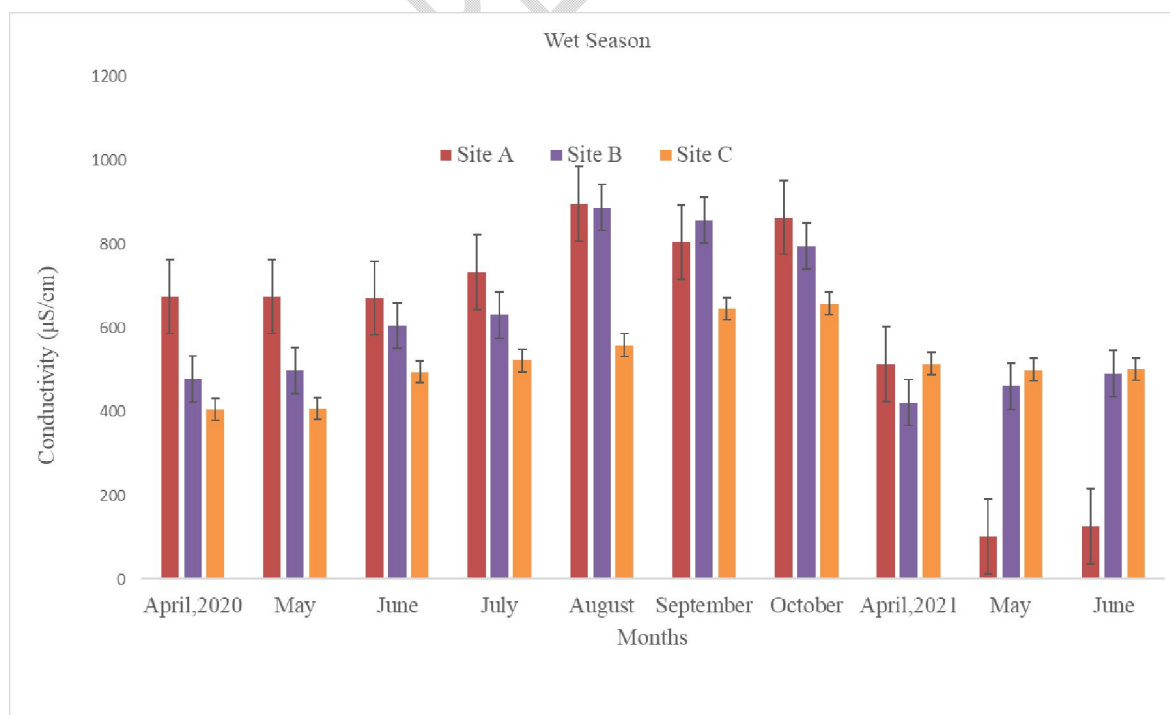
#### **4.6 Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) (mg/L)**

The Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD level during the dry season period showed that Site A in the month of January, 2020 had the highest value with 4.77 mg/L and the least value of 3.10 mg/L was recorded in Site A in the month of November, 2021, the mean BOD ranges from 3.81 mg/L to 4.41 mg/L. The overall mean BOD for the dry months (Fig. 12) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

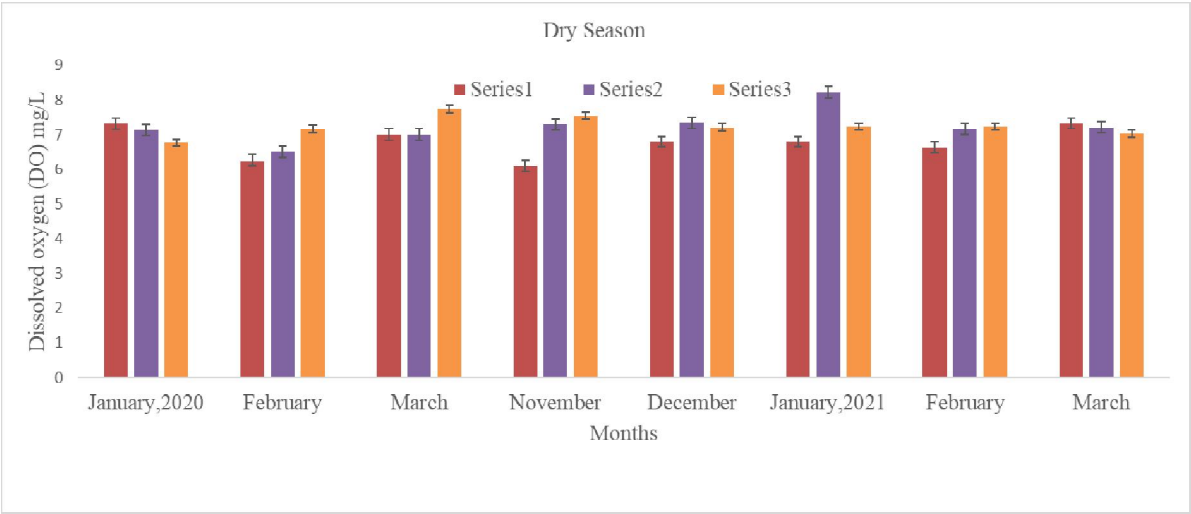
During the wet season, the highest BOD level of 5.1 mg/L was recorded in both Sites A and B in the month of July, and August 2020, and the lowest BOD of 2.82 mg/L was recorded in Site B in the month of May, 2020, the mean BOD ranges from 3.31 mg/L to 4.73 mg/L. The overall mean BOD for the wet months (Fig. 13) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).



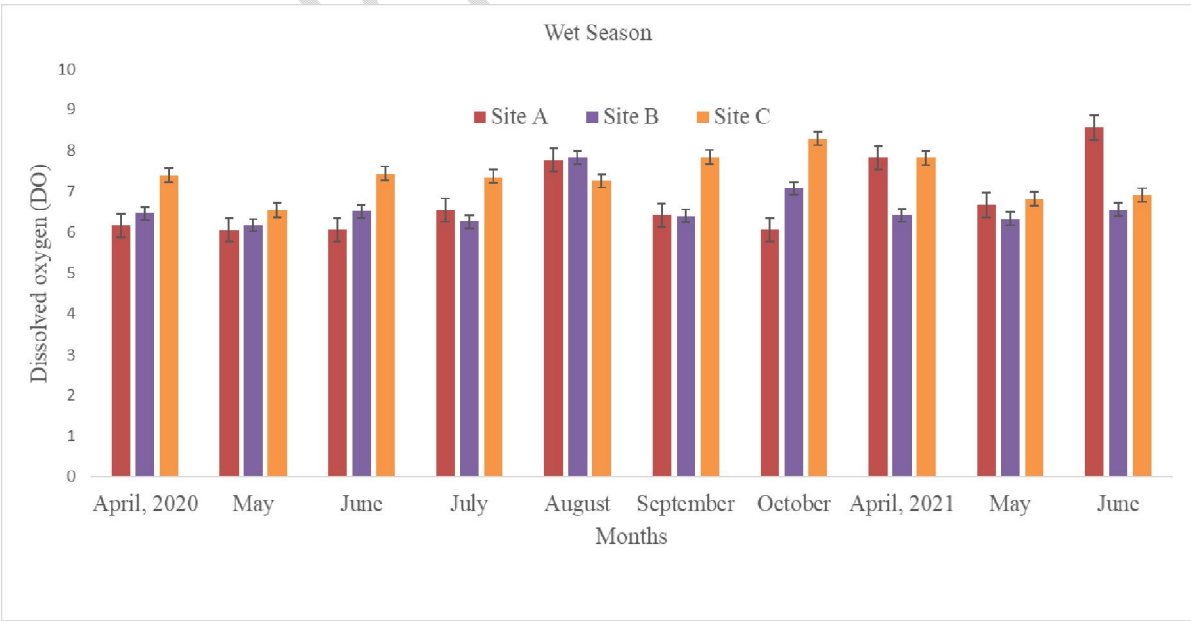
**Figure 8:** Dry season mean Conductivity ( $\mu\text{S/cm}$ ) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



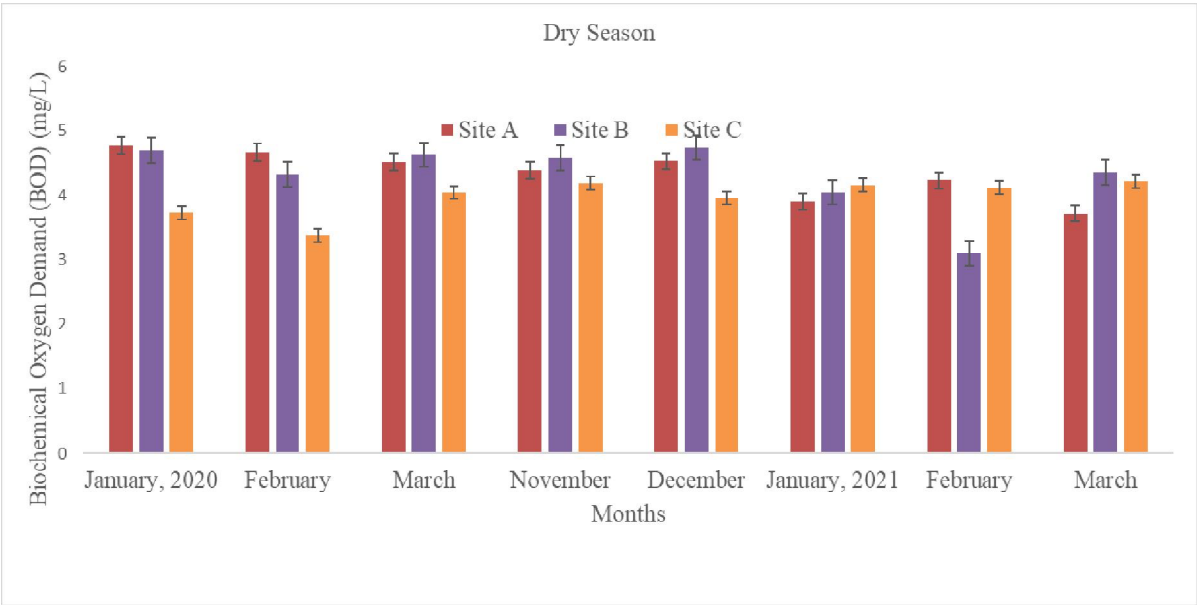
**Figure 9:** Wet season mean Conductivity ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



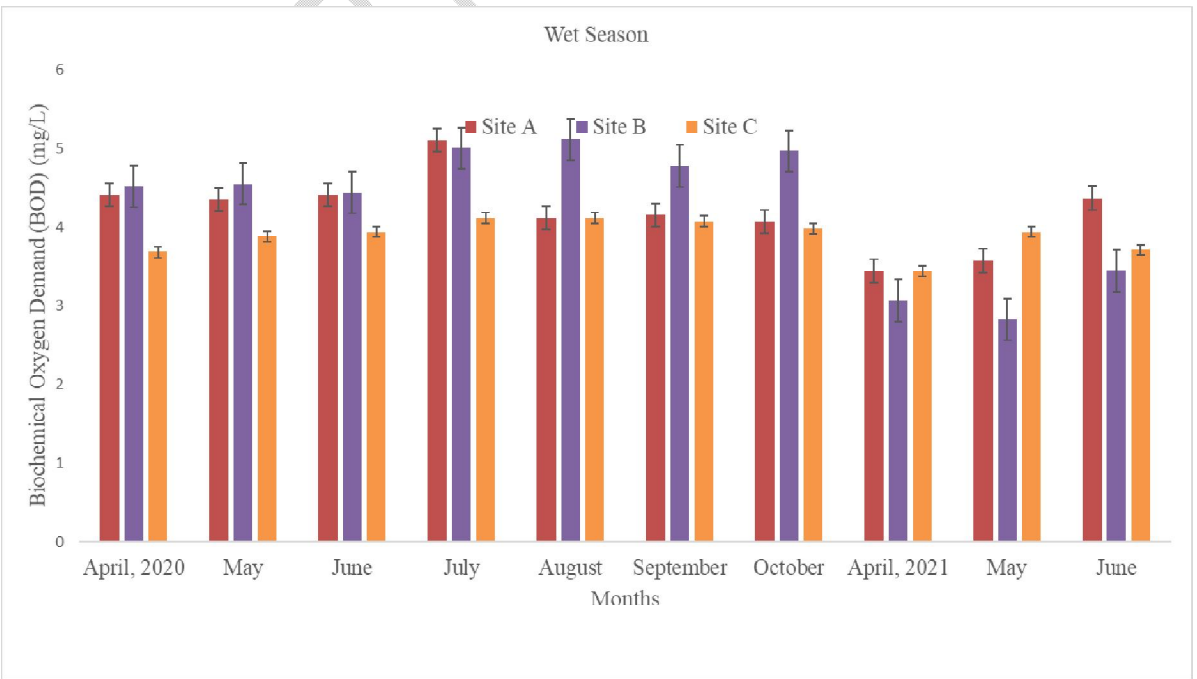
**Figure10:** Dry season mean Dissolved oxygen (DO) mg/L variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



**Figure11:** Wet season mean Dissolved oxygen (DO) mg/L variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021).Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



**Figure 12:** Dry season mean Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) mg/L variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



**Figure 13:** Wet season mean Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) mg/L variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi

#### **4.7pH**

The pH level during the dry season period showed that Site C in the month of January, 2021 had the highest value with 8.01 and the least value of 6.67 was recorded in Site B in the month of February, 2021, the mean pH ranges from 6.98 to 7.54. The overall mean pH for the dry months (Fig. 14) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

During the wet season, the highest pH level of 8.07 was recorded in Sites A in the month of May, 2020, and the lowest pH of 6.16 was recorded in Site C in the month of May, 2021, the mean pH ranges from 6.16 to 7.71. The overall mean pH for the wet months (Fig. 15) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

#### **4.8Water Hardness (mg/L)**

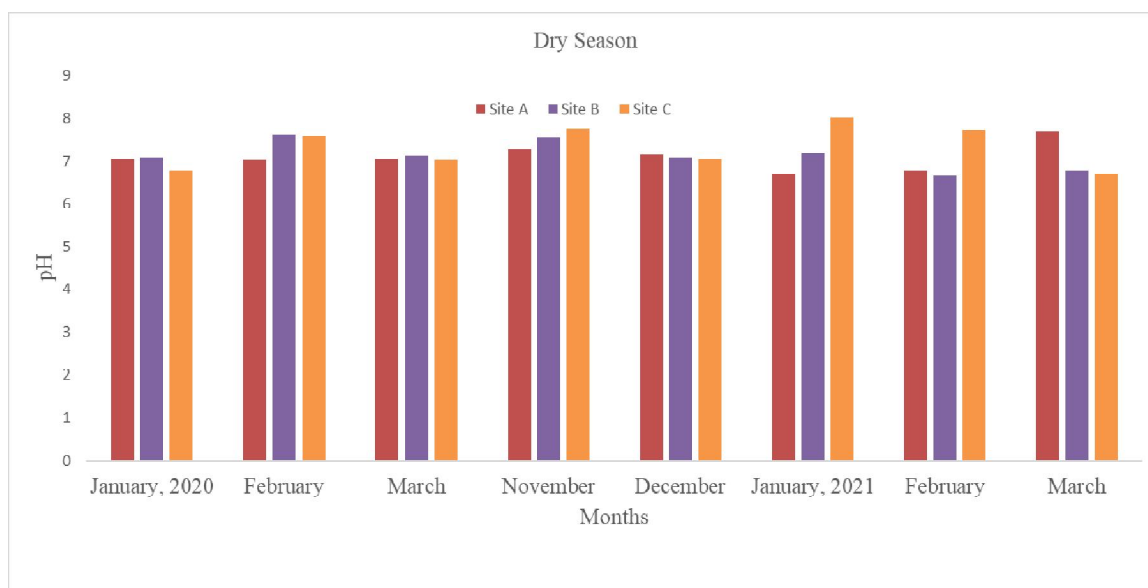
The Hardness level during the dry season period showed that Site A in the month of March, 2021 had the highest value with 170.33 mg/L and the least value of 48.1 mg/L was recorded in Site C in the month of February, 2020, the mean Hardness ranges from 63.25 mg/L to 133.77 mg/L. The overall mean Hardness for the dry months (Fig. 16) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

During the wet season, the highest Hardness level of 165.63 mg/L was recorded in Sites B in the month of May, 2020, and the lowest Hardness of 36.66 mg/L was recorded in Site A in the month of June, 2021, the mean Hardness ranges from 70.034 mg/L to 135.26 mg/L. The overall mean pH for the wet months (Fig. 17) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

#### **4.9Fluoride (mg/L)**

The Fluoride level during the dry season period showed that Site A in the month of January, 2021 had the highest value with 0.86 mg/L and the least value of 0.01 mg/L was recorded in both Site A and C in the month of December, 2020, the mean Fluoride ranges from 0.02 mg/L to 0.86 mg/L. The overall mean Hardness for the dry months (Fig. 18) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

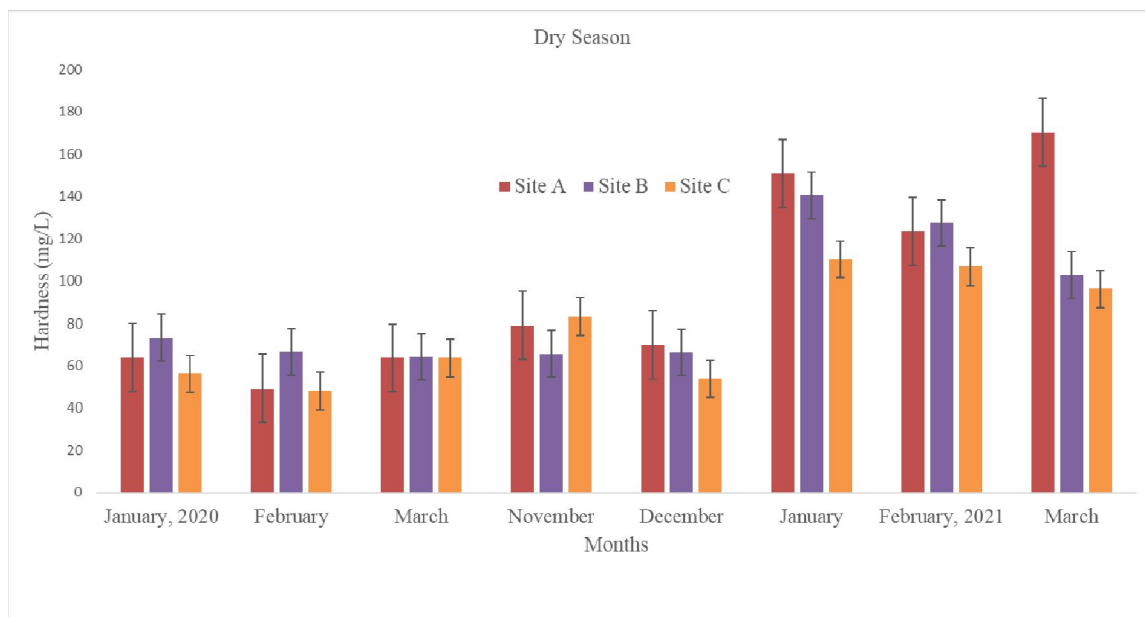
During the wet season, the highest Fluoride level of 1.12 mg/L was recorded in Sites A in the month of June, 2021, and the lowest Fluoride of 0.01 mg/L was recorded in Site C in the month of July, 2020, the mean Fluoride ranges from 0.00-.53 mg/L. The overall mean Fluoride for the wet months (Fig. 19) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).



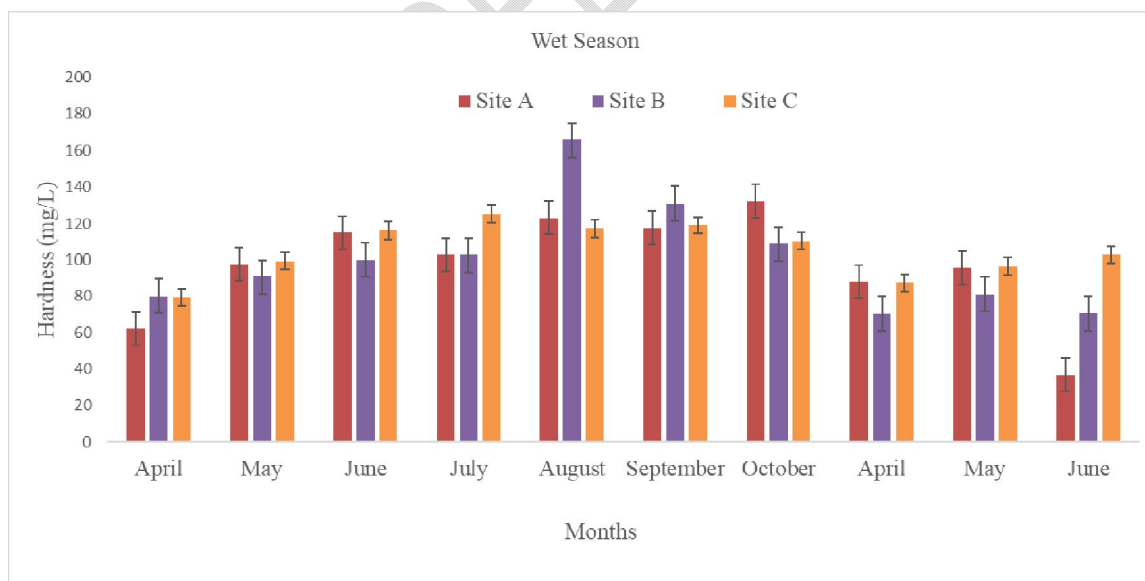
**Figure 14:** Dry season mean pH variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



**Figure 15:** Wet season mean pH variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi

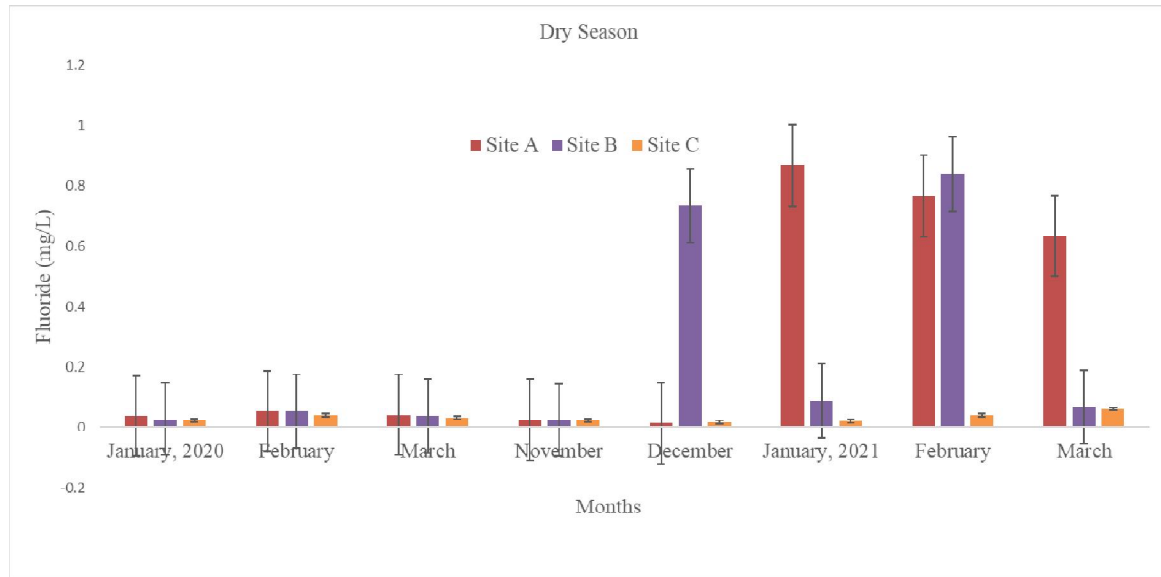


**Figure 16:** Dry season mean Hardness (mg/L) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi

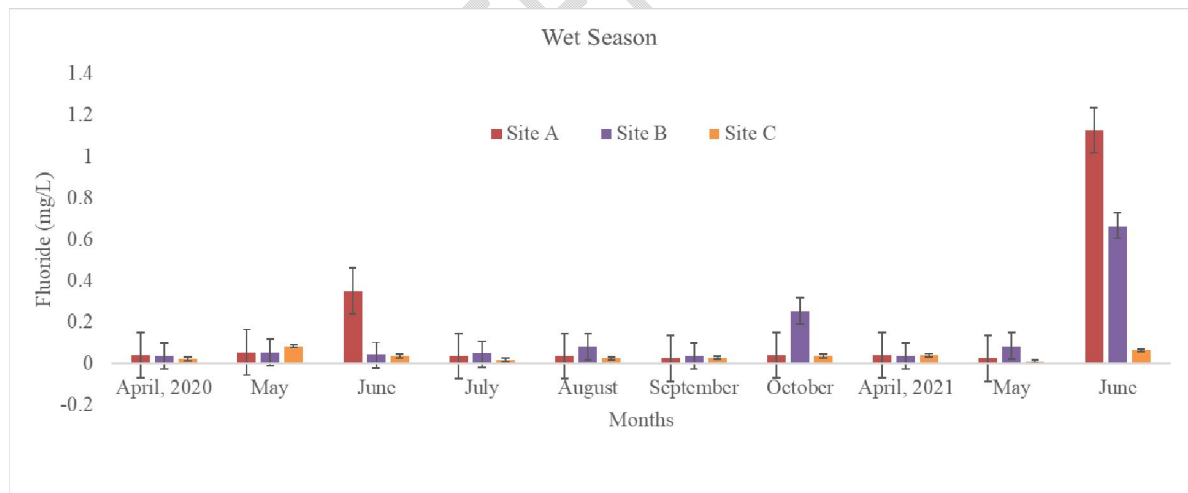


**Figure 17:** Wet season mean Hardness (mg/L) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi





**Figure 18:** Dry season mean Fluoride (mg/L) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



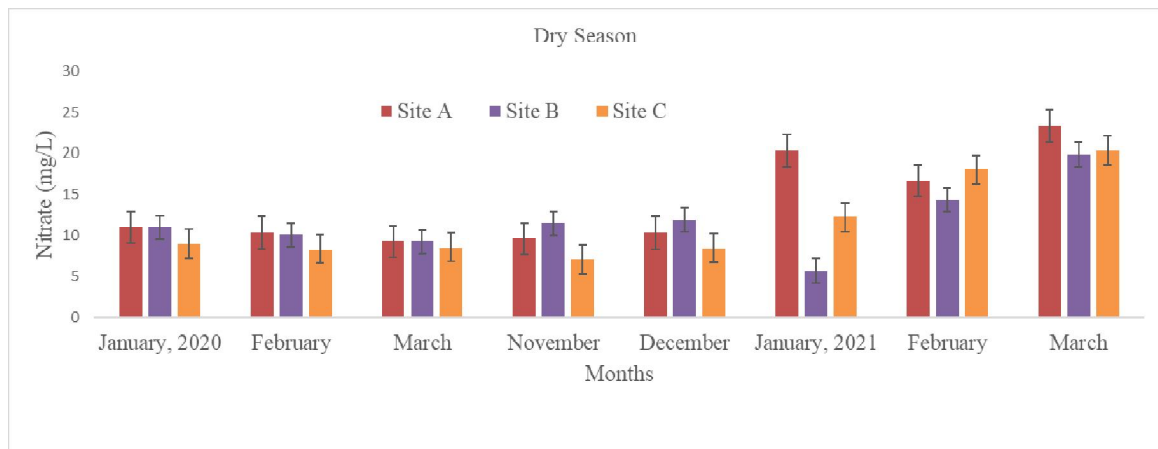
**Figure 19:** Wet season mean Fluoride (mg/L) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi

### 3.10 Nitrate (mg/L)

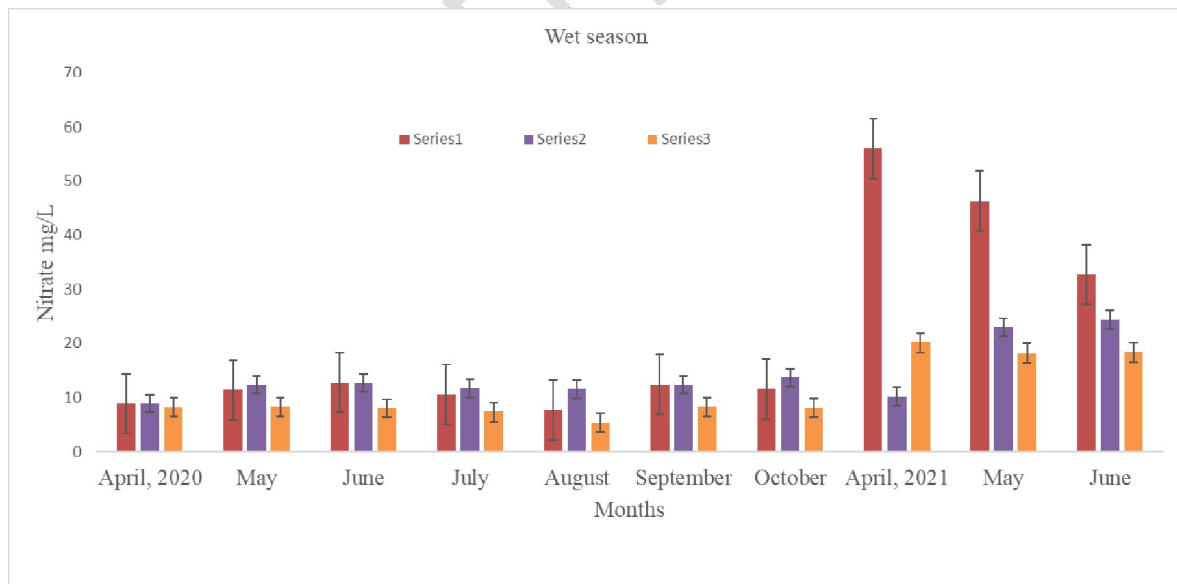
The Nitrate level during the dry season period showed that Site A in the month of March, 2021 had the highest value with 23.33 mg/L and the least value of 5.7 mg/L was recorded in

Site B in the month of January, 2021, the mean Nitrate ranges from 8.98 mg/L to 21.17 mg/L. The overall mean Nitrate for the dry months (Fig. 20) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

During the wet season, the highest Nitrate level of 56 mg/L was recorded in Sites A in the month of April, 2021, and the lowest Nitrate of 5.4 mg/L was recorded in and C in the month of August, 2020, the mean Nitrate ranges from 8.23 mg/L to 29.18 mg/L. The overall mean Nitrate for the wet months (Fig. 21) were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).



**Figure 20:** Dry season mean Nitrate (mg/L) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi



**Figure 21:** Wet season mean Nitrate (mg/L) variation of River Benue at Lau, Mayo-ranewo, and Ibi (2020-2021). Site A Lau, Site B Mayo-ranewo, and Site C Ibi

#### 4 Discussion

Temperature is a crucial factor in aquatic environments, influencing the physical and chemical properties of water, as well as the biological activities of aquatic vegetation and organisms. In this study, the physico-chemical parameters of River Benue exhibited variations that may be associated with patterns of water use and rainfall, as noted by Ayoade *et al.* (2006) and Anago *et al.* (2013). The water temperature fluctuated between 25.56°C and 30.70°C, which falls within the acceptable range for tropical water bodies. This range aligns with findings from Abubakar *et al.* (2015), who reported similar temperature profiles in their assessments. Additionally, Fafioye (2021) observed temperatures ranging from 27°C to 35°C in preliminary studies on the water characteristics and microbial populations in Kojalo fish pond, further supporting the consistency of temperature findings in various aquatic systems. Temperature variations are significant as they can influence the solubility of gases, such as oxygen, and affect the metabolic rates of aquatic organisms (Kazmi *et al.*, 2022). Armstrong *et al.* (2021) emphasizes that warm water fish thrive best at temperatures between 25°C and 32°C, highlighting the importance of maintaining optimal temperature ranges for the growth and health of aquatic species.

Turbidity in river water refers to the cloudiness or haziness caused by suspended particles such as silt, clay, organic matter, algae, and microorganisms. In the present study, turbidity levels ranged from 51.77 NTU to 89.11 NTU during the dry season, which does not conform to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA, 2020) recommendation that turbidity in surface waters should generally not exceed 10 NTU to protect aquatic life. Elevated turbidity levels during the wet season indicate a higher presence of suspended solids, which can adversely affect aquatic organisms and overall water quality (Matos *et al.*, 2024). Similar patterns have been observed in other rivers, where turbidity tends to spike during high rainfall months. For instance, Dodds *et al.* (2002) documented comparable increases in turbidity levels during wet conditions. Nwankwoala and Ememu (2017) reported turbidity values ranging from 60 NTU to 100 NTU in their assessment of surface water quality in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, focusing on turbidity and other physicochemical

parameters. Additionally, Utang and Apkan (2012) found turbidity levels ranging from 126.2 NTU to 130.9 NTU, indicating very turbid conditions at their sampling stations during the study.

The mean total dissolved solids (TDS) value in this study aligns with findings from Akinyemi et al. (2019), who reported TDS levels of 270 mg/L and 480 mg/L in water at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria. Similarly, Adedeji et al. (2019) recorded a mean TDS of  $352.83 \pm 1.81$  mg/L in Lake Ribadu. Higher TDS levels have also been observed in other water bodies, such as Ero Reservoir (Oso & Fagbua, 2008), Awba Reservoir (Anago et al., 2013), and Dadin-Kowa (Abubakar et al., 2015).

Elevated TDS levels can affect water taste and quality, often indicating the presence of various pollutants and dissolved substances. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA, 2020) notes that high TDS concentrations may impact water palatability and suggest contamination sources like agricultural runoff, industrial discharges, or urban wastewater. This is critical for assessing the suitability of water for drinking and aquatic life. Additionally, Kadir et al. (2019) found that elevated TDS can alter the ionic composition of water, impacting aquatic organisms' physiological processes.

The mean conductivity in this study was slightly higher than that reported by Adedeji et al. (2019), who found a mean conductivity of  $432 \pm 8.64$   $\mu\text{mhos/cm}$ . Adeleke (1982) classifies conductivity as low (below 50  $\mu\text{mhos/cm}$ ), medium (50–600  $\mu\text{mhos/cm}$ ), and high (above 600  $\mu\text{mhos/cm}$ ). Conductivity levels observed here suggest a medium to high classification, with implications for water quality and aquatic life. This increase in conductivity may result from higher ion concentrations due to anthropogenic influences, such as agricultural runoff, industrial discharges, and urbanization (WHO, 2017). Kadir et al. (2019) similarly observed that higher conductivity often correlates with increased dissolved salts and nutrients, impacting aquatic ecosystem health. Further, Olajire and Imeokparia (2007) found that seasonal changes and land use practices can cause conductivity variations. The dissolved

oxygen (DO) levels in the current study ranged from 6.06 mg/L to 8.56 mg/L in River Benue, showing significantly higher concentrations during the wet season compared to the dry season. These values are consistent with the findings of Kefas (2016), who reported DO levels ranging from 3.51 mg/L to 13.2 mg/L in Lake Geriyo, highlighting the variability of DO across different aquatic environments. The mean DO levels observed in this study fall within the permissible value of 5 mg/L recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). This is further supported by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), which also sets a minimum DO concentration of 5.0 mg/L for freshwater to sustain aquatic life. Research by Olajire and Imeokparia (2007), Akan *et al.* (2010), Akinbile and Sangodoyin (2011), and Adeyemi and Gobo (2012) corroborates these findings, reporting consistently elevated DO levels above 5 mg/L in various water bodies, indicating good water quality for aquatic organisms. The higher DO levels during the wet season can be attributed to increased photosynthetic activity from aquatic plants and the influx of freshwater, which enhances oxygen solubility. This observation aligns with the work of Mustapha (2008), who noted that wet conditions promote higher dissolved oxygen levels due to improved aeration and reduced water temperatures. Moreover, similar studies by Kadir *et al.* (2019) have shown that runoff during the wet season can lead to increased nutrient loading, which in turn supports the growth of aquatic plants and microorganisms, contributing to higher DO levels. Conversely, low DO concentrations, particularly below the critical threshold, can be detrimental to fish and other aquatic organisms, as noted by Akan *et al.* (2010), who reported adverse effects on fish health in environments with low oxygen levels.

The mean biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) was higher in the wet season, consistent with Hart and Zabbey (2005), who observed elevated BOD during the rainy season due to increased organic matter and oxygen demand from organisms. The BOD range in this study was broader than that reported by Edward *et al.* (2018) for the Upper Benue River (3.39–3.56 mg/L), likely due to local land use, rainfall patterns, and human impacts. BOD levels in this study remained below the WHO's maximum standard of 6.00 mg/L (WHO, 2006), which is essential, as high BOD can signal poor water quality and potential eutrophication, harming

aquatic ecosystems. Adefemi and Awokunmi (2010) similarly found that rainfall increases BOD due to runoff, while Kadir et al. (2019) noted that agricultural practices and urban runoff contribute to higher BOD in rivers during the wet season.

The study's mean pH value slightly exceeded Boyd's (1979) recommended range of 6.5–7.5 for tropical waters but was within WHO's permissible range of 6.5–8.5 (WHO, 1993). This finding aligns with studies by Nwankwoala and Ememu (2012), Ibe and Egereonu (2016), and Olaoye and Olaniyan (2018), who reported pH values of 6.47 to 7.19. Bisht et al. (2020) also found similar results, noting that pH levels in this range support fish and aquatic health. pH levels affect nutrient and contaminant chemistry in water, impacting aquatic life (WHO, 2017). The higher mean pH in the wet season may result from agricultural runoff with lime and increased photosynthesis by aquatic plants, as Mustapha (2008) observed.

Water hardness peaked at 170.33 mg/L in the dry season and was lowest at 36.66 mg/L in the wet season, consistent with Patrick et al. (2015), who reported similar levels in River Galma, Kaduna State. Higher hardness is typical in arid and semi-arid climates, as noted by Ewa et al. (2011), while Okoro et al. (2019) recorded even higher levels in Okun River. Geological factors and human activities, such as agricultural runoff and industrial discharges, likely influence hardness variability, as discussed by Iweala et al. (2020). Elevated calcium and magnesium, which contribute to hardness, can stress aquatic organisms by affecting osmoregulation (Baker & Hargreaves, 1997). WHO recommends 50–150 mg/L of hardness for most freshwater fish (WHO, 2017), as Adefemi et al. (2010) found that exceeding this range can harm fish health.

Fluoride levels in this study ranged from 0.01 to 1.12 mg/L, below those reported by Abdulmoseen et al. (2020) in North-Eastern Nigeria. Fluoride peaked in the wet season, likely due to pesticide and fertilizer runoff, as Dahiya (2009) suggested. Kumar et al. (2018) also found that agricultural runoff increases fluoride in surface water, especially during heavy rains. Raghunath et al. (2009) highlighted that urban runoff similarly raises fluoride levels. WHO recommends keeping river fluoride below 1.0 mg/L to protect aquatic life (WHO,

2017), as high levels can harm fish health by disrupting osmoregulation (Baker & Hargreaves, 1997). Nitrate concentrations ranged from 5.4 to 56 mg/L, with higher levels in the wet season, likely due to nitrogen-based fertilizers in agricultural runoff, as noted by Matos et al. (2024). Rabalais et al. (2002) observed that rainfall events increase nutrient loading through runoff and leaching, particularly in farming areas.

## **5 Conclusions**

The physicochemical parameters of the River Benue reveal significant seasonal variations, influenced by rainfall patterns, land use, and anthropogenic activities. Temperature, an essential factor for aquatic health, remained within acceptable limits for tropical waters, supporting stable biological processes. However, elevated turbidity, especially in the wet season, exceeds recommended levels, indicating the presence of suspended solids that could impair water quality and harm aquatic life. Increased total dissolved solids (TDS) and conductivity, likely resulting from agricultural runoff and urban discharges, highlight potential contamination risks and point to the impact of local land use on water chemistry.

Dissolved oxygen (DO) levels, which are crucial for sustaining aquatic organisms, were generally adequate, especially during the wet season, when photosynthetic activity and water inflows enhance oxygen content. Nonetheless, the biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) spiked with rainfall, underscoring the need for careful monitoring, as high BOD may signal organic pollution and potential eutrophication risks. Similarly, seasonal shifts in pH and water hardness reflect changes in runoff and photosynthesis, with values largely within acceptable ranges for aquatic life. Fluoride and nitrate concentrations also increased in the wet season, primarily due to agricultural runoff, highlighting the influence of land-based activities on water quality. These findings underscore the necessity of effective water management strategies to maintain ecological balance and protect aquatic ecosystems, especially during periods of heavy rainfall and runoff.

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