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Full Length Research

Influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on primary school pupils attendance and academic performance in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study examined influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on primary school pupils' attendance and academic performance in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. Two specific objectives with corresponding research questions and hypotheses were raised and formulated respectively to guide the study. The study adopted survey research design and was carried out in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The population of this study is 1870 teachers from 79 public primary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. The sample size for this study is 330 teachers. A structured questionnaire titled "National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme and Pupils Attendance and Performance in Public Primary Schools Questionnaire" was developed and used for the study. Cronbach Alpha Statistic was used to obtain an overall reliability coefficient of 0.89 for the instrument. The descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the two research questions. Chi-square statistics was used to test the two null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. From analysis of data, the following major findings were made: provision of meals to pupils improve their daily regular attendance, improves enrolment in primary schools, enhances their punctuality, and also improves their co-curricular activities. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made; the State Government should try and replicate the blue print of the Federal Government's National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme to every Local Government in the State so as to ensure sustainability in the provision of meals to pupils and as well as improve their daily regular attendance as well as enhancing their punctuality. Also, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and other education stakeholders should initiate school feeding integrated intervention programmes that improves co-curricular activities through provision of meals to pupils this will influence their ability to understand the practicality of things during learning and also improve their ability to engage with digital technologies.

Keywords: Academic performance, attendance, influence, national home-grown, punctuality, school feeding programme.

INTRODUCTION

Education has for many years served as a vehicle for empowering and transforming people for better societies and the world as a whole. The role of food in the life of a primary school pupil cannot be overemphasized. Providing school meals is therefore vital in nourishing children. In developing countries, almost 60 million children go to school hungry every day and about 40 percent of them are from Africa. Parents are motivated to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home to work or care for siblings (Akanbi, 2013). He further said public interest in school feeding programmes have stemmed from the endorsement of the view that education is essential in the

promotion of the quality of human life for economic and social development.

The introduction of the school feeding is traced to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiative and several conferences held thereafter by African leaders which aimed to tackle issues, such as peace, security, good economic, political and corporate governance and to make the continent an attractive destination for foreign investment (Adekunle and Ogbogu, 2016). Some of these developments include the 'New Partnership for African Development' which according to the blueprint is a pledge by African leaders, based on common vision and a firm and shared conviction, to eradicate poverty and to place their countries on the path of sustainable growth and development and, at the same time, to participate actively in the world economy and politics. Also, the 'Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme' and the 'Millennium Hunger Task Force' amongst others were initiatives which were designed to link school feeding to agricultural development through the purchase and use of locally produced food (Bundy *et al.,* 2009).

School feeding is simply the provision of food to children through schools. According to Oyefade (2014), different countries have one or a combination of the two feeding modalities in place for various objectives. However, they can be grouped into two broad categories: in-school meals and take-home rations where families are given food if their children attend school. Historically, in-school meals have been the most popular modality of school feeding interventions. The school feeding can be in turn grouped into two common categories: programme that provides meals and programme that provides high-energy biscuits or snacks to generate greater impacts on school enrolment, retention rates, and reduce gender or social gaps (Akanbi, 2013). Uduku (2011) contended that there are indications of a significant swing in thinking about school feeding and many elements of this new thinking are being promoted keenly under the rubric of "home grown school feeding". The overall goal of the school feeding programme in Nigeria is to reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children and enhance the achievement of Universal Basic Education. School feeding programmes constitute critical interventions that have been introduced in many developed and developing countries of the world to address the issue of poverty, stimulate school enrolment and enhance pupils' performance.

In order to improve the nutritional status of school children, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the National Home-Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in September, 2005 under the coordination of the Federal Ministry of Education. The programme aimed to provide pupils with adequate meal during the school day (FME, 2007). The scheme, officially known as Home Grown School Feeding Programme. The programme insisted on buying the foodstuffs from the local farmers. It therefore reduced the rate of malnutrition while it also provided the local farmers the opportunity to sell their produce to participating schools. According to the Federal Government's directive, Federal, State and Local Governments were to fund the programme with the State and Local Governments providing the bulk. The decision to enroll a child in school and, thereafter, for the child to attend regularly is influenced by many factors (Oyefade, 2014). These include the perceived value of education, the availability of employment opportunities, the direct and indirect cost of schooling and the availability and quality of school facilities. Food incentives offered to students by compensating parents for direct educational costs. Dairo and Tolulope (2021) maintain that school feeding programme is an initiative of the government that has helped in increasing school enrolment and attendance over the years.

Attendance is a measure of the number of children who attend school and the amount of time they are present. School attendance means physical presence of a child in school attending scheduled class or during such hours and on such days as determined by the school or, for students enrolled in Alternative Education Programs, at the place and during hours scheduled by school for the attainment of prescribed educational goals. Oyefade observed further that implementation of SFP is associated with increase in enrolment, particularly for girls. Also, several studies have found a strong relationship between education and poverty, particularly inequality. The poor are heavily deprived and so are their children. As observed by author, several factors with significant impact on many dimensions of poverty on school attendance and education quality, particularly early childhood malnutrition, deprivation based on gender and income inequality tend to be responsible. In many countries, such as Brazil, Philippines, Cambodia, Mali, El Salvador, Indonesia, Ghana, Bangladesh, Ecuador among others where school feeding programmes are implemented, data reveals that the programme has increased enrolment and attendance rates over the years (Akanbi, 2013). Oyeniran (2014) revealed that provision of food and quality education increases enrolment. Many studies on nutrition have shown that under nutrition in children stunts their growth and mental development, hence, the relationship between nutrition and academic performance (Alabi, 2003).

Academic performance is the measurement of student achievement across various academic subjects. Academic performance is the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has attained their short or long-term educational goals. Although, food has classically been perceived as a means of providing energy and building materials to the body, research over the years has provided exciting evidence for the influence of dietary factors on mental function (Akanbi, 2013). Not only are children motivated to get into school but also there is a significant impact on their nutritional status and development, cognitive capabilities

and academic performance. Literature has shown that the development and learning potential of the beneficiaries depend on the quality and nutrient components of food (Jukes *et al*., 2008). Nutritional and health status are powerful influences on a child's learning and how a child performs in school. Children who lack certain nutrients in their diet do not have the same potential for learning as healthy and well-nourished children. Children with cognitive and sensory impairments naturally perform less and are more likely to repeat grades. The irregular school attendance of malnourished and unhealthy children is one of the key factors for poor performance (Uduku, 2011).

Yunusa (2012) noted that students in school feeding programmes have the potential for improving their performance because it enables them attend school regularly and studies more effectively. Yunusa found that children scored higher in Arithmetic when they started being fed at school. However, the impact of school feeding programme on the academic performance of pupils has been embraced with mixed feelings. It was observed that although school feeding programmes motivate parents to enroll their children in school, its impact on academic performance is mixed and depends on various factors within the context in which the programme is set. Drawing from this, Uduku (2011) opined that school feeding programmes would best improve the performance of pupils when coupled with adequate learning materials, physical facilities and teacher motivation.

In many countries, such as Brazil, Philippines, Cambodia, Mali, El Salvador, Indonesia, Ghana, Bangladesh, Ecuador etc where school feeding programmes have and are still being implemented, data reveals that the programme has increased enrolment and attendance rates over the years (Akanbi, 2013). In-school, meals are effective at increasing school attendance rates because children receive the meals only on days when they attend school (Dairo and Tolulope, 2021). Dairo and Tolulope further maintains that school feeding programme is one of the social intervention strategies to ensure that pupils have access to education by removing the barriers of hunger. Yunusa *et al*. (2012) indicated that students in school feeding programmes have the ability to boost their performance as it has allowed them to regularly attend school and study more effectively. Akuamoah-Boateng and Sam-Tagoe (2018) also supported that the school feeding programme improves primary school children's enrolment, participation and retention.

Despite the importance of this programme, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) in public primary schools in Nigeria since its inception in 2016 has been facing many implementation problems. Ogunode and Abubakar (2021) submitted that the implementation of the School Feeding Programme falls short of some of the standards stipulated by the World Food Programme due to various challenges in Nigeria. Ogunode and Abubakar further identified inadequate funding, increase in population, corruption, poor monitoring and evaluation, lack of data to plan, delay in releasing money, inflation and insecurity problem as the challenges preventing the implementation of the programme. It is against this background that the present study sought to investigate the implementation of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on attendance and academic performance of public primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

Objective of the study

This study examined influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on primary school pupils' attendance and academic performance in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on attendance of public primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.
2. determine influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on academic performance of public primary school pupils.

Research questions

This following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What is the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on attendance of public primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State?
2. What is the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on academic performance of public primary school pupils?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H_{O1}: National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme does not have significant influence on attendance of public primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

H_{O2}: National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme does not significantly have influence on academic performance of public primary school pupils in Benue State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Survey design was used for the study. The study was carried out in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The population of this study is 1870 teachers from 79 public primary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. The sample size for this study is 330 teachers. Multistage sampling technique was used for the study because each stage required a different sampling technique. In purposive sampling, specific elements which satisfy some predetermined criteria were considered; hence, public primary schools were purposively sampled. Thirty (30) primary schools were selected using simple random sampling technique. Simple random sampling was also used to sample eleven (11) teachers from each sampled school respectively, totaling 330 teachers. A structured questionnaire titled "National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme and Pupils Attendance and Performance in Public Primary Schools Questionnaire" (NHGSFPPAPPPSQ) developed by the researchers was used for the study. The questionnaire is a 10-item questionnaire with items that elicited information relating to the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was further subdivided into two (2) clusters based on the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme indices that were used in the study. The first cluster contains 5 items, the second cluster contains 5 items respectively, adding up a total of 10 items.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha Statistic was used to obtain an overall reliability coefficient of 0.89 for the instrument. Hence the instrument was found reliable for this study. The instrument was administered on the respondents through direct delivery approach as it enabled the researchers to have a satisfactory return of the questionnaire copies administered. The descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A cut-off points of 2.50 and above representing positive response was agreed to. Whereas, any mean less than 2.50 was regarded as negative response, and was disagreed to. Chi-square test of independence was used to test the two null hypotheses at 0.05 Alpha level of significance.

RESULTS

Research question 1: What is the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on attendance of primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State? To answer this research question, responses on the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on attendance of primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State were collected and analyzed as shown in Table 1.

Analysis of data as presented in Table 1 shows the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on attendance of primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State with corresponding Standard Deviation values. Data presented in Table 1 revealed that National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme influences pupil's attendance in public primary schools, as the respondents agreed on item 1, 2 and 3 with mean scores ranging from 3.09 to 3.41 which are above the benchmark of 2.50. Respondents also disagreed with item 4 and 5 (which states that "provision of meals impedes pupil's retention in primary schools and provision of meals to pupil facilitate their dropout rate"). This implies that provision of meals enhances pupil's retention in primary schools and provision of meals to pupil reduces their dropout rate. The table also revealed close Standard Deviation values ranging from 0.45 to 0.88 which showed that the respondents were homogeneous in their responses. The cluster mean of all the items was revealed to be 2.53 and SD = 0.64. With this cluster mean, it can be deduced from this finding that; provision of meals to pupils improves their daily regular attendance, provision of meals to pupils improves enrolment explosion in primary schools and provision of meals to pupils enhances their punctuality. From this finding, it is evident that National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme significantly influence attendance of primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

Hypothesis 1: National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme does not significantly influence attendance of primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. Table 2 shows the Chi-square calculated value ($\chi 2$) of 361.281, degree of freedom df =12 and a sig (p-value=0.00) which is less than the alpha value (α=0.05). Since $p<0.05$, the result is significant, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This implied that, National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme significantly influence attendance of primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

Research question 2: What is the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on academic performance of primary school pupils? To answer this research question, responses on the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on academic performance of primary school pupils were collected and analyzed as shown in Table 3.

Analysis of data as presented in Table 3 shows the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on academic performance of primary school pupils with corresponding standard deviation values. Data presented in Table 3 revealed that National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme influences pupils' academic performance, as the respondents agreed on item 6, 7, 8

Table 1. Mean and standard deviations of respondents on the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on attendance of primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

S/N	Item	N	SA	A	D	SD	x̄	SD	Decision
1.	Provision of meals to pupils improves enrolment explosion in primary schools	330	30	290	2	8	3.30	0.74	A
2.	Provision of meals to pupils enhances their punctuality	330	96	165	60	9	3.09	0.62	A
3	Provision of meals to pupils improve their daily regular attendance	330	20	295	5	10	3.41	0.88	A
4	Provision of meals impedes pupils retention in primary schools	330	0	3	68	259	1.39	0.45	SD
5	Provision of meals to pupil facilitate their dropout rate	330	0	0	33	297	1.44	0.50	SD
	Cluster mean and SD						**2.53**	**0.64**	**Agree**

Table 2. Chi-Square test of significance of the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on attendance of primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State

N	Df	χ2	Sig	Alpha level	Remark
330	12	361.281	0.000	0.05	Significant

Df = Degree of freedom; χ2 = Chi-Square Calculated Value; Sig = p-value.

Table 3. Mean and standard deviations of respondents on the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on academic performance of primary school pupils.

S/N	Item	N	SA	A	D	SD	x̄	SD	Decision
6.	Provision of meals to pupils improve their ability to engage with digital technologies	330	76	245	4	5	2.94	0.60	A
7.	Provision of meals to pupils improves their co-curricular activities	330	23	304	3	0	3.45	0.99	A
8	Provision of meals to pupils influences their ability to understand the practicality of things during learning	330	30	288	9	3	3.31	0.84	A
9	Provision of meals to pupils impedes their ability to retain abstract concepts	330	6	10	35	279	1.32	0.43	SD
10.	Provision of meals to pupils influences their listening skills	330	95	187	38	10	2.77	0.51	A
	Cluster mean and SD						**2.76**	**0.67**	**Agree**

and 10 with mean scores ranging from 2.77 to 3.45 which are above the benchmark of 2.50. The respondents however disagreed on item 9 (provision of meals to pupils impedes their ability to retain abstract concepts). This implies that provision of meals to pupils enhances their ability to retain abstract concepts. The table also revealed close standard deviation values ranging from 0.43 to 0.99 which showed that the respondents were homogeneous in their responses. The cluster mean of all the items was revealed to be 2.76 and SD = 0.67. With this cluster mean, it can be deduced from this finding that; provision of meals to pupils improves their co-curricular activities, provision of meals to pupils influences their ability to understand the practicality of things during learning and provision of meals to pupils improve their ability to engage with digital technologies. These findings revealed that National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme influences pupils' academic performance in public primary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

Hypothesis 2: National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme does not significantly influence on academic performance of primary school pupils in Benue State. Table 4 shows the Chi-square calculated value (χ2) of 379.143, degree of freedom df =12 and a sig (p-value=0.00) which is less than the alpha value (α=0.05). Since p<0.05, the result is significant, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This implied that, National Home-

Table 4. Square test of significance of the influence of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on academic performance of primary school pupils in Benue State.

N	Df	χ2	Sig	Alpha Level	Remark
330	12	379.143	0.000	0.05	Significant

Df = Degree of freedom; χ2 = Chi-square calculated value; Sig = p-value.

Grown School Feeding Programme influences pupils' academic performance in public primary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

From the data analysis, the following major findings were made:

1. Provision of meals to pupils improve their daily regular attendance, provision of meals to pupils improves enrolment in primary schools and provision of meals to pupils enhances their punctuality.
2. Provision of meals to pupils improves their co-curricular activities, influences their ability to understand the practicality of things during learning and improve their ability to engage with digital technologies.

DISCUSSION

The first finding of the study revealed that National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme significantly influence attendance of public primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. It was revealed from this finding that; provision of meals to pupils improves their daily regular attendance, improves enrolment explosion in primary schools and enhances their punctuality. Similarly, the test of a related hypothesis revealed that National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme significantly influence attendance of public primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. This finding corroborates with that of Akanbi (2013) who revealed that school feeding programme provides meals that provides high-energy in pupils and this generates greater impacts on school enrolment, retention rates, and reduce gender or social gaps. The findings corroborate with that of Dairo and Tolulope (2021) who revealed that school feeding programme is an initiative of the government that has helped in increasing school enrolment and attendance over the years. The findings further corroborate with that of Uduku (2011) who contended that the overall goal of the school feeding programme in Nigeria have reduced hunger and malnutrition among school children and enhanced the achievement of Universal Basic Education.

The second finding of the study revealed that National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme significantly influence academic performance of public primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. It was revealed from this finding that; provision of meals to pupils improves their co-curricular activities, influences their ability to understand the practicality of things during learning and improve their ability to engage with digital technologies. Similarly, the test of a related hypothesis revealed that National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme significantly influence academic performance of public primary school pupils in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. This finding corroborates with that of Akuamoah-Boateng and Sam-Tagoe (2018) who revealed that the school feeding programme improves primary school children's enrolment, participation and retention. The findings further corroborate with that of Dairo and Tolulope (2021) who revealed that school feeding programme is an initiative of the government that has helped in enhancing pupils' performance. The findings further corroborate with that of Uduku (2011) who contended that the overall goal of the school feeding programme in Nigeria is to reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children and enhance the achievement of Universal Basic Education. Finally, the findings corroborate with that of Yunusa *et al*. (2012) who revealed that pupils in school feeding programmes have the ability to boost their performance as it has allowed them to regularly attend school and study more effectively.

Conclusion

This study concluded that the role of school feeding programme as one of the social intervention strategies adopted by the Federal Government to ensure that pupils have access to education by removing the barriers of hunger has significantly improve attendance and academic performance of primary school pupils. It is therefore envisaged from this study that, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme have the ability to boost pupils' attendance; as children receive meals only on days when they attend school, this has allowed them to regularly attend school and study more effectively as this has significantly improved their academic performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The State Government should try and replicate the

blue print of the Federal Government's National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme to every Local Government in the State so as to ensure sustainability in the provision of meals to pupils and improve their daily regular attendance so as to enhance their punctuality.

2. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and other education stakeholders should initiate school feeding integrated intervention programmes that improves co-curricular activities through provision of meals to pupils as this influences their ability to understand the practicality of things during learning and also, improve their ability to engage with digital technologies.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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