

## **SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: APPRAISAL OF THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Dennis, Idonije Aidelokhai<sup>1</sup>, Abu Idris<sup>2</sup>, Umar Farouk Musa<sup>3</sup> and Joel, Haruna Maichibi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,4</sup>Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, P.M.B 11, Lapai-Niger state

<sup>3</sup>Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Bauchi State University, Gadau

DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2021.v06i08.001 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2021.v06i08.001>

### **ABSTRACT**

Basic education evolves instructional programs that offer pupils with the opportunities to be responsible and a respectful global citizen to enhance the wellbeing of the society vis-à-vis explore diverse perspectives to enjoying a fulfilling life. Statistics reveals that, 38 million children from sub-Saharan Africa are out of school as a result of poverty and lack of motivation. In order to support the socio-economic of the deprived families and to incentivize the enrolment of their children into primary schools and to enhance their learning capacity cum boosting the economic activities and nutritional balance; the Nigerian Government recently revived the Home Grown School Feeding Program (HGSFP) termed the National Home Grown School Meal Program (NHSMP). In the pursuit to assess the success or otherwise of this scheme, this paper adopted qualitative method and interviewed twenty four (24) informants. The study established that School Feeding Program (SFP) has relatively enhanced enrolment of pupils and their punctuality to school. It has created job opportunities and generates customers to the commercial banks. However, SFP has not enhanced the academic performance of the pupils. Above all, meals provided are consistently inconsistent and grossly inadequate for the pupils as a result of corruption and exploitation by the stakeholders and consequently might affect its continuity and ostracize the incumbent government. In the light of above, this study recommends for the institutionalization of the scheme called National School Feeding Commission and that policy makers, representatives of the parents and stakeholders to work in harmony to ensure policies governing implementation of SFP are followed to the later. Finally, government should institute punitive measure to minimize corruption and manipulation of the scheme.

**Keywords:** School feeding program, public primary schools, academic performance, political implication

### **Introduction**

Hunger is one of the global challenges that cut across continent, race, and religion. The peculiarities of hunger across the globe entices the United Nations (UN) institute intervention programs to play down the socio-economic hardship of the less privileged in the society. Among its schemes is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which specifically focused on eight point agenda - hunger and poverty inclusive (UN 2005). In order to facilitate the implementation of MDGs objectives, the United Nations Hunger Task Force (UNHTF) recommended School Feeding Programs (SFPs) with locally produced foods rather than imported foods. The UNHTF believed SFP as an essential instrument to improving education and boost agriculture production across the globe.

School feeding programs is an intervention scheme introduced in both developed and developing countries of the world to alleviate poverty and encourage school enrolment and enhance academic performance of the pupils. Statistics shows that sixty (60) million children go to school hungry on a daily basis and about forty (40) percent of these children are predominantly from Africa (Adekunle, 2016). Nigeria is one of twelve (12) pilot countries invited to implement the School Feeding Program. Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya and Mali commenced the implementation of the school feeding program, consequently, the Federal Government came up with the Universal Basic Education Act in 2004, which provided legislative support for the implementation of the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Program respectively. In an effort to accomplish the objectives of the Universal Basic Education program and the basic role of nutrition, the Federal Ministry of Education initiated the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Program in 2005 (Adekunle, 2016).

The general objective of the School Feeding Program in Nigeria is to reach out to the most vulnerable groups, reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children, enhancing enrollment and to bridge high gender and social gaps in enrollment and poor retention of girls in school (Bundy, Burbano et al. 2009). Essentially, the Visions of SFP is to achieve a sustainable school feeding program that will establish a safety net for the poor and eradicate malnutrition in school age children while stimulating the national economy. On the other hand, the mission of SFP is to provide free meal a day to pupils in public primary schools in Nigeria by working constructively with stakeholders to ensure a sustainable implementation of the program across the public primary schools in Nigeria

Adekunle (2016) acknowledged that Osun was among the twelve (12) States chosen to implement the program. Albeit, the School Feeding Program was launched, it did not receive attention until when the new government convened an education summit in 2010. The dawn of the new democracy in Nigeria redirect the attention of the government to revive the welfare services to the public primary schools. Upon the assumption into office the government in 2016 shown commitment to key campaign promises. One of these programs is the school feeding program which is a component of the National Social Investment Program tasked with the responsibility to run with the program in collaboration with Partnership for Child Development (PCD) to offer technical assistance.

There are several studies on the benefits of School Feeding Program to pupils but not much has been done to underscore the impact of the program on school academic performance and political implications particularly in Niger state. Therefore, this establishes a gap for further study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by theory of hierarchical needs, developed by Maslow Abraham (1943). The theory assumes that all motives are derived from a hierarchical system of needs, from the 'rudimentary' physiological needs to security and love to aesthetic needs for self-actualization (The Longman Encyclopedia, 1989). People who lack food are incapable to express high need (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 2005). According to this theory, there are particular minimum requirements that are important for human needs to facilitate standards of living. These are acknowledged as physiological needs and they include food, shelter and health. Relating this theory to this study, the argument is that, when children are served with their basic need which is meals, they attend and stay in school and improve the attention span by solving short-term hunger. Therefore, the provision of meals through SFPs enhances school enrolment and attendance, alleviates short-term hunger and improves nutritional status. In line with the assumptions of this theory, the researcher therefore attempted to apply it to assess the impact of the SFP in Niger state public primary schools

### **Methodology**

The study adopted qualitative method and purposively interviewed twenty four (24) informants comprises of six (6) public primary school pupils, four (4) teachers, six(6) head teachers, two(2) labour leaders, four (4) community leaders and two (2) stakeholders in the education department. Pseudonyms were used throughout with actual names of informants preserved. Hence, they were represented in the study as "informants" based on the burden of pledge made

to strictly maintain high degree of confidentiality and also respect their anonymity. Interview method is flexible, because questions were both open and closed ended. This approach helps the researcher to collect complementary information about the informants and to as well probe for more answers.

### **Conceptual Discourse**

The World Food Program (2004) defined school feeding as the provision of meals or snacks in schools with the intent of minimizing pupil's hunger while schools are in session. Simply put, school feeding is solely in-school food or meals. The School Feeding Program was introduced sometimes in 1930's, when feeding schemes were launched in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) aimed to improving the growth of pupils by providing them with milk (Ritcher et al., 2000). The Brazilian government adopted similar scheme after the Second World War in 1945 (Swartz, 2009). Brazil implemented a decentralized mechanism to ease operation and ensure that target beneficiaries gain from the scheme. This comprises of representatives from the government, teachers, parents and civil society organizations (WFP, 2009). In the same vein, South Africa also introduced free supply of milk as school feeding program in the early 1940's for schools of white and colored, the program provided fortified biscuits, nutrient supplementation or full meals (Tomlinson, 2007). The SFP was also introduced in Malawi and it was called the Food for Education (FFE), and it provides school meals and/or snacks to trim down short-term hunger and achieve commonly expected academic outcomes to improve school enrollment, attendance and learning capacity.

It is pertinent to point out that Malawi SFP focused on poor families especially girls, orphans and vulnerable children (Swartz, 2009). According to WFP (2004) in Zimbabwe, the SFPs was conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Child welfare, Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, the WFP and other humanitarian organizations such as World Vision, Care International and Catholic Relief Services. The program aims junior primary school grades as well as out of school children who are orphans and vulnerable in which pupils were provided with corn meal porridge during break time (WFP, 2004).

The SFP was officially rolled out in 2005 with three-prong objectives. These objectives are reducing hunger and malnutrition, increasing enrolment, attendance and retention in school and boosting the production of local foods

### **School Feeding Program and school attendance**

Literature abound established that School Feeding Program has improved school attendance in developed nations. Although, SFP may be considered expensive, yet, benefits could be achieved more cheaply. Food attracts children to school and reduces hunger while they learn. The programs have considerably impacted on school participation (Thompson, Amoroso & FAO of United Nations, 2014). In Bangladesh for instance, there was an increase of 14% in enrolment and 6% increase in attendance (Gilligan, 2009). This justify that SFP in pre-schools motivate attendance and performance. Murungi (2012) acknowledged that 65% percent of children are not attending pre-school education. Even though factors like lack of uniform, sickness, family affairs, lack of food at home, lack of tuition, poor performance may be contributing to low enrolment and attendance. However, lack of SFP in many schools may are major causal factor.

According to Hartjen & Pryadarsini, (2012), feeding program has in recent times received renewed attention as a policy instrument for achieving the Millennium Developments Goals (MDGs) of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and hunger reduction in developing countries. Nevertheless, there are divergent opinions among the governments and donors agencies on the impact of SFP to the target beneficiaries. For instance, studies carried out by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the World Bank in collaboration with World Food Program, established that SFP has wide-ranging impact on school attendance, school performance, and cognitive development.

In addition, Alderman and Bundy (2012) identified significant impact of school meal on morning and afternoon attendance. Correspondingly, Jacoby & Cueto (1996) affirmed that a school breakfast significantly increase attendance rates of fourth and fifth-grade students by 0.58 percentage points in the treatment (benefitting) schools whereas the attendance score decreased in control (non-benefitting) schools by 2.92 percentages. Similar research conducted 30 days after the launching of the breakfast program reveals that subsidized lunches induced children to attend school (Hinrichs (2010). Other studies have also showed that SFP has a statistically significant positive impact on class attendance of participating pupils (Ahmed, 2004; Sarah, Adelman, Gilligan & Lehrer, 2008).

Furthermore, literatures discussed extensively reveal that illness is the major problem that hinders school attendance. In the same vein, Asmamaw (2014) states that severe sicknesses relates to poverty and insufficient nutrition negatively affects children's attendance and cause drop-outs. School age children with severe hunger have significantly higher chronic illness rates than those with moderate hunger. Corroborating the foregoing, Weinreb, Wehler, Perloff & Scott (2002) contend that severe poverty has negative effects on children's health. As a result of that when poor children are sick; they stay back at home for extensive period of time without visiting

a medical practitioner. It is important to note that the effect of SFP on attendance and performance may differ in age groups. For instance, Alderman, Lehrer & Gilligan (2012) find no considerable impact of SFP on average morning attendance of children aged [6–13].

### **School Feeding Program and Academic Performance**

School feeding program as a social safety net recognized in developing countries as a prelude to accomplishing the Millennium Development Goals. This agenda is commonly targeted on populations that are food insecure and reside in areas with large families and low socioeconomic condition, poor attendance and enrollment of pupils. There are numerous studies on the impact SFP; however, evidence on the impact of these programs is not always conclusive. Studies on nutrition have shown that under nutrition in children inhibit their growth and mental development, therefore, the relationship between nutrition and academic performance (Alabi, 2003). Although food naturally provide energy and build the body, research over the years has provided exciting evidence for the influence of dietary factors on mental function. It does not only motivate children to get into school but also there is a significant impact on their nutritional status and development, cognitive capabilities and academic performance. Literature reveals that the development and learning potential of the target beneficiaries is anchored on the quality and nutrient components of food (Jukes et al, 2008).

The SFP has a statistically significant positive impact on learning, as measured by achievement test scores. For instance, a study attests that the SFP increases test scores by 15.7 percent points (Ahmed, 2004). Similarly, the study carried out by Chepkwony, Kariuki & Kosgei (2013) also suggested that the schools with SFP had the highest academic performance compared to those without SFP. Afridi, Barooah & Somanathan (2013), reveals in their study that provision of school meals improved the class room concentration and effort of students in grade 7. The findings also suggest that school quality influences the extent to which school meals improve effort levels. Students in schools that had higher average scores in curriculum related tests gained significantly more from the extension of the meal program. Few studies address some of the potentially adverse impacts of SFPs on academic performances. Intuitively, the positive impacts on academic performances would require that the learning environment remains constant or improves when enrollment increases. One can, however, anticipate several changes in the learning environment following the introduction of SFPs. First, if teachers allocate some of their time to administering the programs, the actual teaching time could decrease. Second, classrooms could become overcrowded since enrollment is likely to increase. In this case the teacher may become less efficient. Schools may find themselves lacking other inputs (e.g. books, notebooks) which could effectively reduce academic performances. Moreover, the additional incentives of

the program will bring in students whose parents previously assessed the benefits of schooling as lower than the costs; at the margin, these students can be expected to be less able to gain from schooling (Kazianga et al., 2009)

Dietary and health status are influential on a child's learning and how a child performs in school. Children who lack definite 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 a class. The irregular school attendance of malnourished and unhealthy children is one of the key factors for poor performance (Uduku, 2011).

According to Yunusa (2012) School Feeding Programs have the possibilities for improving their performance of school children because it enabled them attend school regularly and studied more effectively. The author found that in a study conducted in Jamaica, children in Grade 2 scored higher in Arithmetic when they started enjoying the feeding program at school. On the other hand, the impact of School Feeding Program on the academic performance of pupils has been embraced with mixed feelings. It was observed that although SFPs 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 program is being established. Drawing from this, Uduku (2011) opined that SFPs would best improve the performance of pupils when coupled with adequate learning materials, physical facilities and teacher motivation

### **Findings School Feeding Programs in Niger State**

The findings were drawn from the interview conducted on the twenty four (24) informants comprises of six (6) public primary school pupils, four (4) teachers, six(6) head teachers, two(2) labour leaders, four (4) community leaders/parents and two (2) stakeholders in the education department.

Majority of the pupils interviewed revealed that meal provided is grossly inadequate and inconsistent and has not in any way contributed to their performance. By implication, their result/position remains the same. Yet, they regularly attend and participate in the school programs because of the meal provided to them.

Corroborating the above, majority of the teachers acknowledged that the School Feeding Program attracts children to school and also reduces hunger. However, the current food allocation to their schools is inadequate; therefore the pupils were unable to stay longer in school. However, only few teachers affirmed that the program has considerably impacted on

school participation and performance of the pupils. They consider academic performance to be an individual commitment (teachers and the pupils).

*'There has been a stable increase in enrolment and school attendance is regular. Even if pupils are sick, they like to come back to school to collect their meals and later sneak out...'* (Teacher)

Another teacher inferred that:

*Over the years, we have to summon meeting to pleading with the parents to enroll their wards but in recent times the school admitted more pupils than her capacity leading to overcrowding of class rooms and overburdening the teachers. To overcome this, we have redirected the parents to other schools (Teachers).*

In the light of above, the researcher could infer that the School Feeding Program has rekindle people's hope confidence in the public school system. This is because in the preceding years very low pupils' enrolment was recorded as a result of poor incentive and poor implementation under the previous administration.

In addition the pupil's attendance varies across the academic year pending on the demand of the pupils.

*For instance, on the market days, or during festivities or harvest period. Children often turn out to be absent from school because this is when their labor is more required in the market or farm or occasions as the case may be. During such period, parents desire to keep their wards on these tasks than allowing them to go to school since the economic contribution of children becomes more important than the perceived future educational gains. However, in recent years, there have been battles between the children and their parents as a result of the introduction of SFP. Children prefer to go school than farm or market (Head Teacher, Teacher).*

*...since the SFP was re-launched I noticed significant increase in the number of children enrolled in our school. From the point of encouraging parents to enroll their children, I think SFP is an important tool and should be supported and sustained. Albeit, they*



*have their shortcomings, yet, I believed that further progress in the program's operation can boost enrollment and possibly the performance of the pupils...." (Head Teacher)*

The above submissions revealed that the enrolment of the pupils have increased steadily. The interviewees confirmed that truancy have drastically reduced since the pupils' are sure of being provided with free meals in the school. In addition, enrolment, attendance and retention have improved significantly.

Contrarily, some teachers affirmed that SFP does not in any way motivate enrolment, attendance and academic performance. They argued that SFP is politically inclined and that government only provides meal only when the election was approaching. They however, contended that, SFP has created job opportunity to food vendors and also generated customers to the commercial banks.

A complementary view by the representatives of Nigeria Labor Congress in Niger state branch (NLC) in an interview reveals that:

*School Feeding Program is generally a waste of resource. ...ninety-six billion Naira spent on the program monthly across the country ought to have been channeled to other ventures that are more beneficial to the citizens. ....SPF is a systematic way of squandering public fund, ...it is a fraud because if 2.1 billion Naira was budgeted to feed the school pupils for 21 days, all schools are expected to have equal meals instead of having meals in nylons leather like beggars" (NLC Chairman).*

The representative of Nigeria Union of Teacher (NUT) appreciates the effort of the government for reviving the School Feeding Program. As a teacher, he argues that the program has significantly improved school activities, enrolment and attendance respectively. However, on academic performance, he challenged the teachers, government and parents to collectively support children education, revival of evening preps among other to improve their performance.

According to the parents:

*SFP is a big relief to me; I have fifteen (15) children and a subsistent farmer. Most of my children have been dropout, because I cannot finance their breakfast meal for barely two (2) academic terms. However, I have*

*recently re-enrolled them because of the new SFP. This opportunity to enroll my children to school is high. It is my prayer that SFP will be sustained. (Parent)*

### **Discussion**

The study found SFP to have significantly improves the enrolment of the pupils and their punctuality in their respective schools in Niger state. However, the feeding scheme has not in any way improved the academic performance of the pupils. Mainstream of the informants reveals that inability to supervise the food preparation to ascertain its quality, quantity absence of a central place (Dining Hall) in the schools where the pupils' could eat their meals constituted challenges to SFP in Niger state. In addition, food vendors, the head teachers connived with the monitoring committee to divert food stuff allocated to various schools.

It is worth to note that the emergence of SFP was a consequence of a political decision such as campaign promise as captured in political party manifestoes or was simply a product of thought after winning political power. However, this study found out that Niger state government was initially reluctant in fulfilling the campaign promises and concentrated in others activities that have insignificant bearing to the citizens. Hence, deviating from national goals has gravely contributed to the failure of SFP in Niger state. Going by these challenges of SFP and the preceding policies that were consistently inconsistent in Niger state, this study is skeptical on the continuity of SFP and what might be the political implications if it is discontinued in Niger state?

### **Conclusion**

This paper examines the effects of SFP on academic performance. The paper revealed that SFP has been adopted in about 60% public primary schools in Niger state and has to a large extent improves the enrolment of pupils and their punctuality to schools. However, the study is skeptical about the sustainability of school feeding scheme in Niger state as a result of corruption among the stakeholders, food vendors and school heads. The paper therefore recommend for harmonious working relationship between the stakeholders, teachers, labour leaders and parents to checkmate the illicit transactions as well as to improve the quantity and quality of meals provided to the pupils. The paper further observed that discontinuity of SFP in Niger state will be a setback to education and the political reputation of the incumbent government vis-à-vis a challenge to the opposition. The study therefore suggested that government should demonstrate political-will to legislate an institutional initiative called National School Feeding Commission to sustain the feeding scheme. There should be policy framework for the commission, stable funding and budgeting for implementation, monitoring and accountability of the program. This

study has methodological and scope shortcomings as it generate data through interview, content analysis-literature which might be insufficient to make generalization. Therefore, future study on SFP should adopt mixed method for sufficient information and should be extended to other states.

## References

- Adekunle, D., Taylor & Christiana, O. (2016)The Effects of School Feeding Programme on Enrolment and Performance of Public Elementary School Pupils in Osun State, Nigeria, *World Journal of Education* 6(3) <http://wje.sciedupress.com> *World Journal of Education*
- Ahmed, A. U. (2004). *Impact of Feeding Children in School: Evidence from Bangladesh*.
- Adelman, S.W., Gilligan, D.O., & Lehrer, K. (2008). *How Effective are Food for Education Programs? A critical assessment of the evidence from developing countries*. International Food Policy Research Institute
- Ahmed, A. U. (2004). *Impact of Feeding Children in School: Evidence from Bangladesh*
- Alderman, H., & Bundy, D. (2012). *School Feeding Programs and Development: Are We Framing the Question Correctly?* <http://wbpro.oxfordjournals.org/> at Addis Ababa University Libraries, Accessed on December 24, 2016
- Asmamaw G. (2014). *Assessment of the difference of school feeding program on school participation among primary school children in Bishoftu town, east Shoa zone, Oromia regional state* (Master's Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)
- Bundy, D., C. Burbano, et al. (2009). *Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector*. Washington DC, World Bank.
- FRN, (2017) *Feeding One Million School Children in Nigeria*
- Gilligan, D. (2009). *International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)*. Washington DC.
- Hartjen, C & Priyadarsini, S. (2012). *The global victimization of children: problems and solutions*. New York: Springer Science Business media, LLC
- Hinrichs, P. (2010). *The Effects of the National School Lunch Program on Education and Health* *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 29(3) pp. 479-505

- Jacoby, E. & S. Cueto, S. (1996). Benefits of a school breakfast program among Andean children in Huaraz, Peru. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 17(1): 54–64
- Maslow, A. (1970). *Hierarchy of Needs*. Official Abraham Maslow H. Maslow publication
- Murungi, C. G. (2012). Early Childhood for the Preschool Age Going Children: The issues of Low Enrolment in Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice*. Vol 3, No 6.
- Tomlinson, M. (2007). *School Feeding in East and Southern Africa: Improving Food Sovereignty or Photo Opportunity?* Equity Discuss Paper, NO. 46
- Uduku. (2011). School Building Design for Feeding Programme and Community Outreach: Insights from Ghana and South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31, 59–66. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.06.005>
- Weinreb, L., Wehler, C., Perloff, J., & Scott, R. (2002). Hunger: Its Impact on Children's Health and Mental Health, Pediatrics, American Academics of pediatrics.
- WFP (2008). *Children in Local Development [CHILD] –Food for Education Program*, Second Edition, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Yunusa, I., Gumel, A.M., Adegbusi, K., & Adegbusi, S. (2012). School Feeding Programme in Nigeria: A Vehicle for Nourishment of Pupils. *The African Journal*, 12(2), 53-67.