

THE SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA AS PRACTICED IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTRES IN IMO STATE: IMPACT, CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The study is an overview of the school feeding programme of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as practiced in childhood education centres in Imo State. The research was embarked on to find out the nature, the impact, the challenges facing the effective implementation of the programme and suggest possible solutions to those challenges. To this end, four research questions were raised to guide the study. Literature related to the study was reviewed and a theoretical framework similar to the expectancy theory of motivation was adopted. The descriptive survey research design was adopted also. From a target population of 593, a sample size of 120 respondents was used for the study using the simple random and proportionate sampling techniques. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire of likert type of rating scale. Data collected was analysed using the mean score statistic. Findings of the study revealed that the school feeding programme is actually practiced in Imo State schools, that the programme has far reaching benefits in the health status and academic performances of school children in the state, but the programme among other things is frost with certain challenges like poor monitoring, low quality control of meals served and insufficient meals served to pupils. Based on the findings, the researcher made some recommendations: that government should fund the feeding programme, provide adequate infrastructural facilities and conducive learning environment; food experts should from time to time closely assess the quantity and quality of food served to pupils at the childhood education centres, among others.

Keywords: Childhood education, feeding programme, study, academic performance, Malnutrition, conducive learning environment.

Introduction

School feeding programmes constitute critical interventions that have been introduced in many developed and developing countries of the world whose aim is to address the issue of hunger, stimulate school enrolment, enhance pupils interest in school attendance and boost academic performance. In developing countries, about 60 million children go to school hungry everyday and about 40 percent of them are from Africa alone. The idea of providing school meals is therefore imperative in nourishing children and making them active participants in the classroom. Parents are motivated by this singular act to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home to farm or care for siblings (Akabi, 2013).

The introduction of the school feeding programme could be traced back to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiative from where African leaders aimed at tackling issues of sustainable development and poverty eradication through active participation on world economy and politics. Also the comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme and the Millennium Hunger Task Force are amongst other initiatives designed by African leaders to link school feeding programme to agricultural development through the purchase and use of locally produced food (Bundy, 2009).

As a matter of fact, Nigeria happened to be one of the twelve (12) pilot countries invited to implement the programme. So far, Nigeria Cote d'Ivoire Ghana, Kenya, and Mali, commenced the implementation of the school feeding program. To this effect, the Federal Government came up with the Universal Basic Education Act in 2004 which provided the enabling legislative backing for the execution of the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme, an initiative that was launched in 2005 by the Federal Ministry of Education. 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. However, Osun State was among the twelve (12) states selected to begin a phased-pilot roll out implementation of the programme. Though it was formally launched then, it did not go down well then until Nov. 2010 when the leadership of Governor Aregbesola convened an education summit headed by Professor Wole Soyinka, who at the end of the summit recommended repositioning Osun State education practices and included school feeding programme transformation. The repackaging christened "O meals" was formally launched in the state on 30th April, 2012 with the pupils in Grades 1-3 of the public primary schools in the state being fed with one meal per day (Ministry of Education, 2014).

The rising profile of children's nutritional problems constitutes the greatest threat to public health in the 21st century world of today. The trend of malnutrition is one of the most important global health problems affecting large numbers of people in developing countries and malnutrition is an underlying cause of increase in infant mortality ratio and poor cognition, thus affecting the child's psychosocial and cognitive development. Hence, prevalence in deficiencies of iron and iodine are among the most harmful types of malnutrition. With regard to cognition iron deficiency renders children restless, inattentive and uninterested in learning (Karl, 2015), and when this is the case, learners from childhood begin to experience poor cognitive development and performed poorly in academics. Food has been acknowledged as life and a power in activating peoples life as well as supporting various aspects of child development and that is dependent upon correct amount and quality (Omago, 2014).

School feeding is simply the provision of food to children through the school. It is a program specifically done to learners of childhood age of between 0 to 8 years age bracket who are at the kindergarten and/or lower basic level of the school system. Such institutions where this programme are carried out are referred to as childhood Education centres.

Meanwhile the initiation of the School Feeding Programmes (SFPs) in most states is geared towards alleviation of short-term hunger, improve nutrition and cognition of children and save parents of some fund for feeding among other objectives. According to Yunusuf (2012), children in school feeding programme have the potential for improving their performance because it enable them attend school regularly and study more effectively. This program has been operated in two modalities: children are either fed inside the school compound (school meals) or the entire family receives food conditional up achievement of certain level of school attendance by children (Take Home Rations). In the school meals scheme, children are fed for breakfast, lunch or both in school. Such incentive directly targets primary school children, as opposed to Take Home Rations which aims at reaching other needy members of the household as well. Nevertheless, both schemes aim to offer educational opportunity with food-based incentives for children as well as for parents to send their children to school. Unlike some other poverty alleviation programs that focus on short-term gains SFPs target investment in children's education as a strategy to tackle poverty in the long-term and to generate greater impacts on school feeding, retention rates and reduces gender or social gaps. (Akanbi, 2013)

It is pertinent however, to state that because the child's nutritional and health status are powerful influences on the child cognition and academic performances children who lack certain nutrients in the diet do not have the same potential for learning as healthy and well-nourished children. This is why Uduku (2011) rightly states that issues of malnourished and unhealthy children are one of the key factors for poor performance among school children in our educational system. He further opines that

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SFPs would best improve the academic performance of pupils when coupled with adequate learning materials, physical facilities and teacher motivation etc.

In his own, Yanusa (2017), from his research findings observed that students in school feeding programmes have the potential for improving their performance because it enabled them attend school regularly and study effectively. He reiterated that the impact of school feeding programme on the academic performance of pupils has been embraced with great enthusiasm by all and sundry. From the foregoing, low school feeding, poor class attendance and high student pupil drop-outs are the recurring decimals in childhood education among many Nigerian households especially in areas of high food insecurity. This has given momentum to the decline ratio in school enrolment level and low level of educational attainment in most states of the Federation (Onyenobi, 2014). Food has been acknowledged as life and a power in activating people's lives as well as supporting various aspects of child development and it is dependent upon correct quantity and quality. This substance called food has been in short supply in most areas of the world and this handicap has resulted to malnutrition across board. Malnutrition is a serious global issue with devastating implication and the child's physical, emotional and cognitive development. It is in a bid to tackle this global issue of malnutrition that the school feeding programme was embarked on by the Federal Ministry of Education, but it is pertinent to note that this program seems to be a mirage and sounds funny in the ears of many children in Imo State School system as they have never for once experienced or witnessed the program in their own schools since its inception in the State. It is against this backdrop that this present study seeks to survey and assess the school feeding programme looking at its impact on school children, challenges to effective implementation and possible solutions to the challenges.

This programme seems to be a mirage and sounds funny in the ears of some children here in Imo State as they have never for once experienced or witnessed the programme in their own schools since its inception in the state. It is against this backdrop that this present study seeks to have a proper survey of the school feeding programme – its impact so far, its challenges and possible solutions to those challenges in Imo State in particular.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study is to examine the school feeding programme as it applies to Imo State. Specifically the study sought to:

1. ascertain the operational involvement/style of the school feeding programme in the state schools
2. ascertain the impact of the feeding programme in Imo State
3. identify the challenges disrupting the effectiveness of the programme in the state
4. proffer necessary solutions to the challenges hindering effective implementation of the feeding programme

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How is the school feeding programme of the Federal Republic of Nigeria operated in Imo State?
2. What is the impact of the school feeding programme on the health and academic performance of school children in Imo State?
3. What are the challenges to the effective implementation of the school feeding program in childhood education centres in the State?
4. What is the way forward to overcoming the challenges of the school feeding programme in the State?

Research Methods

In this study related literature were reviewed, concept and origin of the feeding programme were traced and necessary theoretical frameworks identified. The expectancy theory of motivation by Victor Vroom (1964) cited in Onyefade (2014) vividly related to the feeding programme was stressed and highlighted there from. Several empirical studies were also reviewed. However, this study adopted the descriptive survey design because it enabled the researcher to elicit information from the respondents on operation of the school feeding programme among public primary school children in Imo State schools. The population of the study comprises of 593 lower basic schools across the three education zones of Imo State. The sample size for the study is 120 teachers drawn through simple random and proportionate sampling techniques. The researcher's instrument for data collection was the four point likert scale structured questionnaire. This instrument was validated by a childhood education expert and two experts in measurement and evaluation of AlvanIkoku Federal College of Education Owerri.

The reliability of the instrument was also established to be 0.79 using the Cronbach alpha reliability method. Data was collected via the questionnaire handed over to the responding teachers with the help of two research assistants. The responded questionnaires were collected back instantly to avoid any loss of the instrument. Data collected from the field survey were tabulated and analyzed using the mean statistic.

Results

Research Question One: How is the school feeding programme of the Federal Republic of Nigeria operated in Imo State?

Table I: Mean scores on the nature of the school feeding programme in Imo State

S/ N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
1	There is provision of food for the pupils through school feeding	42 168	65 195	11 22	2 2	120 387	3.2	0.89	Accepted
2	Meals served are assorted such as yam, rice, beans, egusi and garrietc	39 156	38 144	29 58	14 14	120 372	3.1	0.86	Accepted
3	School feeding are safety nets that provides health benefits to vulnerable children	27 108	75 225	13 26	5 5	120 364	3.0	0.95	Accepted
4	It has a positive impact on nutritional status, gender equality and education status	51 204	35 105	22 44	12 12	120 365	3.0	1.13	Accepted
Grand mean							3.1	0.82	

Analysis of the above, items 1-4 with mean score 3.2, 3.1, 3.0 and 3.0 and standard deviation of 0.89, 0.86, 0.95, 1.13 showed that the following are the nature of school feeding programme in Imo State: provision of food for the pupils, assorted meals served, safety nets that provides health benefits to vulnerable children, it has positive impact on nutritional status, gender equality and educational status.

Research Question Two: What is the impact of the school feeding programme on the health and academic performance of lower basic education children in Imo State?

Table II: Mean scores on responses to the impact of the school feeding programme on school children

S/ N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
5	There is increased interest of pupils to school attendance	63 252	26 78	12 24	19 19	120 373	3.1	0.83	Accepted
6	Much interest results to increase in school attendance	23 92	68 204	21 42	8 8	120 368	2.9	1.05	Accepted
7	The rate of school dropout is highly reduced	40 184	41 123	28 56	5 5	120 368	3.1	0.96	Accepted
8	There is high concentration on school activities amongst pupils	44 176	58 174	12 24	6 6	120 380	3.2	0.78	Accepted
9	Punctuality and regularity to school is enhanced	49 196	56 168	12 24	3 3	120 391	3.3	0.60	Accepted
10	School feeding improves their cognitive development	52 208	43 129	22 44	3 3	120 384	3.2	0.83	Accepted
11	There is an increase in pupils retention and performance	17 68	76 228	22 44	5 5	120 345	2.9	1.07	Accepted
Grand mean							3.1	0.82	

Table 2 above shows the mean scores on the impact of the school feeding programme on the health and academic standard of lower basic education pupils in the study area. All the items in the table, items 5-11 with mean scores 3.1, 2.9, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3., 3.2 and 2.9 respectively were above the criterion mean of 2.5 and were therefore accepted in their varying capacities. However their grand or cumulative average mean score of 3.1 intensifies acceptance.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges to the effective implementation of the school feeding programme among lower Basic Education pupils in the State?

Table III: Mean scores on responses to the challenges facing the effective operation of the school feeding programme

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
12	Lack of effective monitoring of the scheme	39 156	58 116	17 34	6 6	120 312	2.6	0.95	Accepted
13	Low quality control of meals served in the school	43 172	36 108	35 70	6 6	120 356	3.0	0.94	Accepted
14	Poor learning infrastructure hinders the effectiveness of school feeding programme	31 124	50 150	35 70	4 4	120 348	2.9	0.93	Accepted
15	Insufficient meal topped the list of complaint from the pupils	50 200	51 153	16 32	3 3	120 388	3.2	0.91	Accepted
Grand mean							2.9	1.06	

Analysis of the above table items 12-15, with mean scores of 2.6, 3.0, 2.9 and 3.2 showed that the following are the challenges facing effective implementation of the school feeding programme. Lack of effective monitoring of the scheme, low quality control of meals served, poor learning infrastructure and insufficient meals which topped the list of complaints from the pupils.

Research Question Four: What is the way forward to overcoming the challenges of the school feeding programme in the State?

Table IV: Mean Score on responses to the way forward towards overcoming the challenges of the school feeding programme

S/ N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
16	Efforts should be made to extend the programme across board so that all school children should benefit thereby ensuring equity and justice	39 156	38 144	29 58	14 14	120 372	3.1	0.94	Accepted
17	Effective monitoring of the scheme should be intensified	50 200	51 153	16 32	3 3	120 388	3.2	0.79	Accepted
18	Emphasis should be made on high quality control of the meals served to the children	51 204	35 105	22 44	12 12	120 365	3.0	0.94	Accepted
19	There is need to provide good learning environment and infrastructure for all schools to align with the feeding programme	23 92	68 204	21 42	8 8	120 346	2.9	1.05	Accepted
20	Meals provided for schools should be sufficient enough for pupils to feel satisfied with the programme	63 252	26 78	12 24	19 19	120 373	3.1	0.87	Accepted
21	Teachers who teach these children should be given their own share of the ration because they are part and parcel of the programme	49 196	56 168	12 24	3 3	120 391	3.3	0.74	Accepted
	Grand mean						3.1	1.13	

An analysis of the items in table 4 shows that the items 16-21 had the following mean score responses of 3.1, 3.2, 3.0, 2.9, 3.1 and 3.3 respectively. All these mean scores are above the criterion mean point of 25 and were therefore accepted as solutions to the challenges facing the programme. A cumulative average mean score of 3.1 is an intensifier to the acceptance.

Discussion

With regards to the administration and computations made from the copies of the questionnaire distributed to respondents, necessary findings were made and discussed based on the research questions.

The result of the study made from research question one indicated that the provision of school feeding is actually a realistic programme in primary schools in Imo State and that such meals served e.g. Garri, yam, rice, beans, egusi and snacks provide safety nets to the nature of the school feeding programme as well as health benefits to vulnerable children.

The result from table 2 of the analysis revealed that with the school feeding programme in process, there is often an increase in the interest of the pupils to school attendance and consequently

to school enrolment. The rate of school dropout is drastically reduced. The school feeding programme encourages punctuality and regularity to school and correspondingly enhances high concentration on school activities by the pupils. The result also revealed that the programme helps to improve the cognitive development of basic education children and as well increases the pupils retention and performance. The result also indicated that the programme has a positive impact on the nutritional status, gender equality and education status of pupils. The above findings supported the opinion of Uduku (2011) who states that SFPs will best improve the academic performance of pupils when coupled with adequate learning materials, physical facilities and teacher motivation.

The study further revealed that lack of effective monitoring of the scheme, low quality control of meals served, poor infrastructural facilities and unconducive learning environment as well as insufficiency of meals served to pupils are some of the challenges facing the effectiveness of the programme. This goes to align with the position of Olumayiwa, et al (2012) cited in Biha et al (2014) when they found out that lack of effective monitoring, poor infrastructural facilities and insufficient meals are the challenges to the school feeding programme especially in Imo state.

The result from table 4 indicated that as a way of addressing the challenges efforts should be made to monitor the feeding programme closely so as to achieve effective result expected of the scheme. Meals provided for the scheme should be of high quality otherwise the aim of the programme is defeated. The meals should also be provided in greater quantity so as to be sufficient to all the pupils. This finding goes to be in line with the opinion of Omago (2014) who asserts that food which supports various aspects of child development depends upon its correct amount and quality.

Conclusion

Based on the above findings from the study, the researcher concludes as follows: increased school enrolment, punctuality and regularity, concentration in pupils activities in school, decrease in the rate of school dropout, improvement in cognitive development as well as increase in retention and performance are some of the benefits of the school feeding programme especially in Imo State. Provision of such foods like garri, rice, beans, akamu and snacks serve as the safety net to the health status of vulnerable children in our schools. Furthermore, it was found out that lack of effective monitoring of the programme, low quality control of the meals served to pupils, poor infrastructure and unconducive learning environment as well as insufficient meals provided are some of the challenges hampering the school feeding programme in the State.

Recommendations

1. Class teachers should be fully involved in the programme so as to monitor the type and quality of food served to their pupils
2. Teachers, head teachers and Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) should collaborate in making sure that the programme runs smoothly.
3. Food scientists or experts should be involved from time to time to assess the quantity and quality of food served to pupils
4. There should be provision of adequate facilities and conducive learning environment for learners so as to make the programme a worthwhile venture
5. Government should fund the school feeding programme through consolidated funding as this would make way for efficient implementation of the scheme
6. Efforts should be made not to politicize the programme rather government should try to extend her hand of involvement and fellowship to other childhood centres in the state.

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