.SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME AS A CONTRIVANCE FOR PUPILS' ENROLMENT INTO BASIC SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

EGWUATU, Vivian, & DAUDA, Rasheed
Department of Educational Foundations and Management,
Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin
e-mail: *vivianabiodun@yahoo.co.uk,*
Department of Business Education, Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin.
e-mail: rasheedauda@yahoo.com

Abstract
The decline in enrolment of pupils in Nigeria basic schools and its incident problems have been major concerns to the government and educationist. This paper explicit the school feeding programme as a contrivance for pupils enrolment into basic schools in Nigeria. The study obtained its figures and data from secondary sources. It discussed the relevance of the school feeding programme in terms of enrolment, retention and completion of pupils in basic schools. It was therefore recommended that the Federal government should expand the scope of this programme to reach schools mostly in the rural areas and others to key into the programme. It was concluded that this programme should be made a major priority in these schools in order to aid pupils' enrollment and retention in our basic schools.

Introduction

School feeding programme is aimed at providing one meal per day to all basic school pupils in Nigeria; it in turn has the ultimate aim at improving the enrolment, retention and completion rate of school pupils. School feeding programs have been defined by the world-bank(2014) as targeted social safety nets that provide both educational and health benefits to the most vulnerable children thereby increasing enrollment rates, reducing absenteeism and improving food security at its household level.

School Feeding Programme {SFP} also known as the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) is a programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), aims to tackle poverty and improve the health and education of children, therefore it is a commendable idea that must be encouraged by all. In the design of the School Feeding programme, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) is to fund the feeding of pupils in Basic one to three, while the state governments are expected to fund pupils in Basic four to six. The programme at the Federal Level attracted N500 billion allocations in both the 2016 and 2017 budgets and so far the FGN spent N6.2 billion during the academic year that ended in August 2017. Although the

programme has targeted three million pupils, since its inception in 2016, it has made significant strides feeding of 2, 827, 501 school pupils across 14 states of the federation. The states are Abia, Anambra, Bauchi, Benue, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Kaduna, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Plateau, Taraba, and Zamfara states (Alabi, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has been experiencing some decline in enrolment of pupils in Nigeria basic schools which has been a major concerns to the government and educationist, as result, the federal government came up with the Universal Basic Education Act in 2004 providing a legislative backing for the implementation of Home Grown School Feeding and Health Program with the objective of reducing hunger and malnutrition among pupils and to enhance achievement of Universal Basic Education. Some scholars like Awojobi and Tinubu (2020) wrote on the "Impact evaluation of National Home Grown School Feeding Program in Nigeria". Also, Ajani (2009) worked on the "Effect Of School Feeding Program On Primary School Attendance In Rural Areas Of Lagos State, Nigeria" However, from the already existing studies, many of the researches were conducted on school feeding in Nigeria but this present study is set to cover the gap of research insufficiencies with focus on the "School Feeding Program as a Contrivance for Pupils Enrolment into Basic Schools in Nigeria".

Literature Review

Concept of School Feeding in Nigeria

School Feeding Programmes is one of the critical interventions that have been introduced in many developed and developing countries of the world to address the issue of poverty, motivate school enrolment and improve pupils' performance. In developing countries, almost 60million school children attend school in starving situation daily and about 40 percent of them are from Africa, therefore providing school meals is vital in nourishing children. Parents can now be motivated to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home to work or care for siblings (Akanbi, 2013).The introduction of the school feeding is traced to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiative, several conferences were held thereafter by African leaders which aimed to tackle issues, like peace, security, good economic, political and corporate governance and to make the continent an attractive destination for foreign investment. 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 designed to connect school feeding to agricultural development through the purchase and use of locally produced food (Psacharpouls, 2015). Nigeria happened to be one of twelve (12) pilot countries invited to implement the programme.

As a result, 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. Towards the realization of the objectives of the Universal Basic Education programme and the central role of nutrition, the Federal Ministry of Education launched the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in 2005 with overall goal to reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children and to enhance the achievement of Universal Basic Education.

The School Feeding Programme was well-timed because the economic recession that hit the country heightened its importance for children living in poverty and as part of national educational policies and plans. It also increased school enrolment and retention, improved attendance and reduced absenteeism; and once the children are in school, the programme contributes to their learning, through circumventing hunger and enhancing cognitive abilities which addresses the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal targeted towards quality education. Essentially, the underprivileged children who suffer most from starvation are able to attend school and learn, which ensures human right to adequate food, and further targeted to reduce inequalities (Ahmed, 2014)

The Programme apart from feeding pupils has also boosted local food production and purchase because the meals are prepared with locally grown foodstuffs, as the programme was designed to work with local farmers which in turn boost domestic agriculture production; thus linking school feeding directly with agricultural development. It has helped check malnutrition amongst deprived communities through the serving of one hot meal per child per day and it also created employment, having engaged about 33,895 cooks in the communities where the implementing schools are located in the 14 states. Although, the programme is one of the social intervention strategies to guarantee that pupils in poor communities have access to education by removing the hunger barrier, not all schools especially the ones in the poorer communities benefit from such meals. However, although the programme has achieved some gains for the beneficiary schools but it has also resulted in inequality and injustice within the communities, especially for those school children that attend the non-beneficiary schools. This programme notwithstanding is used by FGN as an entry point to invest in the long-term development of children, families as well as communities. This means that the programme will alleviate poverty and encourage food security since the education and health improvements of children will lead to a greater earning potential later in life, thus breaking the generational cycle of poverty. In long term gains of the country, the programme helps farmers by providing a structured market for local

agricultural production and an opportunity to boost local economies by re-investing resources into the communities the programme is serving (Oyefade, 2015). Therefore, the programme is made to aim a quick win in the fight against poverty and hunger as it has impacted directly on the lives of Nigerian children and families. So, apart from boosting the learning and health/nutrition status in the country, the HGSFP is an integral part of the long-term development of a child and part of the continuum of development support. As such it is a critical step to ensuring that children are able to reach their full potential.

Nigeria decided to adopt the school feeding programme as a major intervention in recent time because she is ravaged with economic problems relating to unemployment, poverty, malnutrition which has hindered the growth and ultimate expansion of the economy, which also have hindered the process of knowledge creation of the pupils within the country. Hence, it becomes an urgent need for government intervention to arrest the ravaging problems of out of school children which have been on the increment yearly. Most of these children who are out of school do nothing but to aid their parents in the process of buying and selling and other income generating ventures to raise some money for their daily basic needs. Hence, the advent of school feeding programme is a hope raiser to the school children and parents since they at least sure of a meal per day. Thus, parents become motivated to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home to work or cater for their siblings (Alabi, 2015).

Achieving this goal of high level of literate society thus becomes easier when one of the basic needs of the children is taken care of, and at the same time lessening the burden of their parents. Food is a major item which can attract students' attention and can help ensure their steady attendance to school (Uduku, 2015). Education remains a fundamental right of everybody as it ensures equity in diversity, it is also good because it creates opportunities and provides people with choices. It is therefore right to say that education is not an end in itself but a means to an end as it helps achieve personal development.

United Nation's framework of Actions identified education as central to human rights and existence which is essential and indispensable for the exercise of all human rights for development. The UN convention on the rights of the child in 1989 also set out the right to education to which all children are entitled, but poverty and hunger is a major barrier and this still keeps about 67 million children of primary school age out of school (Psacharpouls, 2015). In Nigeria, improvement in reducing the number of out of school children of primary school age had been on a slow rate since 2005.

Since a common feature shared among Nigerian homes/families is food insecurity, going to school is no longer a priority for the children or the parents. The result of this is that children become easily distracted and have problems concentrating on the school lessons while on empty stomachs and to the children in this category, education seems unnecessary (Falade&Adewusi, 2012). Statistically in developing countries, more than60 million children which are already enrolled in

school go hungry daily and about 40 percent of them are in Africa while a large chunk of this statistic; amounting to 7.35 million children are in Nigeria (Falade&Adewusi, 2012). Feeding them is therefore vital in nourishing the children and that explains the reason why in 2018, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the School Feeding Programme with the assistance of the United Nations' Children Education Fund (UNICEF) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The goal is to provide one meal per school day to all primary school pupils in Nigeria aimed at improving the health of school children, increase their enrolment, retention and completion rate. Also, there is expected to have an increase in the children enrolment and attendance rate in both genders instead of leaving school for street trading and house-help jobs.

Mostly, the school feeding programme has lots of inherent benefits. The school feeding in all its variant forms is a well-recognized programme that reduces hunger while supporting education, health and community development while children learn better. School Health and Nutrition (SHN) interventions have been shown to improve not only children's health and nutrition, but also their learning potential and life choices both in the short- and long-term (Alabi, 2015).

Today, only a few states in Nigeria have adopted the school feeding programme. For example in Osun State, the school feeding programme was given a comprehensive review in 2010 while coming up with an overhauled programme in 2012. Hence, the Osun School feeding and health programme known as O-meals came to exist. The programme was estimated to feed about 254,000 school children in the state and this is generally believed to be the largest school meal outreach by a state in Nigeria. The programme was believed to have employed over 3,000 caterers while indirectly employing seven thousand more people (Alabi, 2015). This is with the aim of reversing the current low academic performance of pupils in public schools; a daily allowance of N250 was earmarked for each pupil while the caterers were provided with official apparels for easy identification and for effective service delivery.

Relevance of School Feeding Programme in Nigeria

School feeding programmes have become a key part of food assistance, relief emergency and development programmes. The following can be identified as few relevance of school feeding programme in Nigeria:

1. School Feeding Programme is a social safety net for children and as part of the National Development Goals.
2. It provides an important new opportunity to assist poor families and feed hungry children.
3. It provides incentive for poor families to send their children to school and keep them there which in turn increase school enrolment and attendance of the pupils.
4. To develop the nutritional status of school children, the Federal Government

of Nigeria launched the Home-Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in September, 2005 under the coordination of the Federal Ministry of Education. The improved nutritional status adds to the general wellbeing of the pupils in terms of health status.

5. The programme aimed to provide pupils with adequate meal during the school day which may improve the cognitive and academic performances of the pupils
6. It therefore reduces the rate of malnutrition, while also serves an economic advantage by giving local farmers an opportunity to sell farm 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.

School Feeding Programme and School Enrolment

Many studies on nutrition have shown that mal-nutrition in children stunts their growth and mental development, hence, the relationship between nutrition and academic performance (Alabi, 2015). 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. Not only are children motivated to enroll into school but also there is a significant impact on their nutritional status and development, cognitive capabilities and academic performance (Ahmed, 2014). 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, 2015).

Yunusa & Adegbusi (2014) noted that students in School Feeding Programmes have the potential for improving their enrolment and also enables them attend school regularly and study more effectively. However, the impact of School Feeding Programme 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 programme is set. Uduku (2015) opined that SFPs would best improve the performance of pupils when coupled with adequate learning materials, physical facilities and teacher 0motivation. Challenges associated with school feeding programmes Social Support Programmes (SSPs) like School feeding are crucial and should be addressed if universal education is to be achieved. Although developing countries are working towards improvement of primary school conditions through interventions like SFP, dropout rates are significant and lead to low levels of primary school completion (Yunusa & Adegbusi 2014).

Effect of School Feeding Programme on Pupils

As observed by Oyefade, (2015), the decision to enroll a child in school and, for the child to attend regularly is influenced by many factors. 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 such as school meals compensate parents for direct educational costs. He 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 Oyefade (2015), 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 etc where school feeding programmes are implemented, data reveals that the programme has increased enrolment and attendance rates over the years (Akanbi, 2015).

Oyeniran (2014) observed that schooling in developing countries is based on social class status. Educational opportunity is driven by unequal and asymmetric political decision making structures whereby people from poorer backgrounds tend to bear the brunt of national and local policies. He contended that availability of schools does not automatically result in higher enrolment numbers and submitted that some families cannot send their children to school because the combined cost of fees, textbooks and uniforms is prohibitive generally to low income earners.

However, studies have further revealed that provision of food must not be the only focal-point for improving access to education or education opportunity equality. Poor education environment can contribute to drop out rate, while quality education increases enrolment which can lead to classroom overcrowding. Psacharopouls (2015) indicated that the quantified benefits of investing in education are highest at primary levels. This view provides a strong case for expanding investment in primary rather than higher levels of education. 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. Education has for many years served as a vehicle for empowering and transforming people for better societies and the world as a whole.

Conclusion

In the last few years, SFPs have enjoyed massive support and attention from international organizations and many development partners; this can be attributed to the multi-faceted role of this social intervention (education, health, agriculture) in achieving development objectives in many countries and a perceived demand for the programme. In its multi-faceted role, SFPs can be linked to several of the MDGs

namely; eradication of extreme poverty, hunger, achieving universal basic education, promoting gender equality and women empowerment, developing a global partnership for development, hence, the use of SFPs in the developing countries is a significant intervention to be considered (Uduku, 2015).

Recommendations

The following recommendations were thus made:

1. That the government should expand the scope of this programme to reach schools mostly in the rural areas where most poor families live. This programme should be made a major priority in these schools in order to aid pupils' enrollment and academic performance and to reduce the financial burden of the parents in feeding the pupils.
2. That the government should liaise with every organ of the government working responsible for the management of the school feeding programme to ensure proper management of the scheme, including developing favourable legal policy frameworks that will ensure the continuous sustenance of the programme most especially of the poor areas of Nigeria.
3. Against this backdrop, the programme should be given prime priority and the beneficiaries scaled up at the federal and state levels to inclusion. Achieving this requires a national policy. Therefore, in addition to the laid-down guidelines towards implementation, the Federal Government or the National Assembly should back up the programme with a legislative Act and include all the thirty six (36) states. State governments should intensify efforts to support the initiative by providing for it in their budgets and designing implementation plans that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound!
4. Again, the programme should encompass both public and private primary institutions across the country. Qualified food scientists, nutritionists, dieticians and caterers should be involved in running the programme while the cooking and serving should be executed under the supervision of the School Based Management Committee (SBMC). Serving should be conducted in a uniform standard measure to ensure standard-sized meals. In addition, feeding should be well guided by a menu which reflects the nutritional need for energy and micronutrients. Collectively, Nigerians can use this programme to secure the nation's future as it ensures that even the most disadvantaged children have the opportunity to maximise their potentials. The organised private sector, through their corporate social responsibility programmes, civil societies, charities and individuals should also complement the efforts of the government in this programme.

Funding

(TETFund/DESS/COE/ILORIN/ARJ)

"TETFund Projects 2020-2022"

References

Ajani, O.Y (2009). The effect of school feeding programme on primary school attendance in rural areas of lagods state, Nigeria. African journal for the psychological study of social issues. Vol. 12, N012.

Alabi A.T. (2015). Evaluation of the Impact of Universal Basic Education Process on Primary School Enrolment in Kwara State. Ilorin. University of Ilorin Press.

Ahmed, A. U (2014). Thinking School Feeding, Social Safety Net, Child Development and the Education Sector. The world Bank. Washington DC.

Akanbi G. O (2005). Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in Nigeria. African Symposium. South Africa.

Awojobi, O.N and Tinubu, R.A. (2020). Impact evaluation of National home-grown school feeding programme in Nigeria. Lagos. National Youth Council of Nigeria.

Falade, S. O &Adewusi S. A. (2012). School Feeding Programme in Nigeria. SCIRP Publication. Wuhan.

Federal Ministry of Education, (2016). National Guidelines for school meals planning and Implementation, Federal Government of Nigeria Press. Abuja.

Oyefade, S.A (2015). Administration of Home Grown School Feeding & Health Programme in Osun State, Obafemi Awolowo University Press. Ile Ife.

Oyeniran, O. B. (2014). Rich Country poor people: Nigeria Poverty in the Midst of Plenty. Technopol Publisher Manchester.

Psacharpouls, G. (2015). Education and Development. World Bank Research Observer . United Kingdom.

Universal Basic Education Act (2004). National Home-Grown School Feeding and Health Programmes. *The journey so far. Retreived from http:www.schoolsandhealth.org/shared/dsocuments/Nigeria/national/school/feeding/proramme.the journeysofar.pdf.*

Uduku, (2015). School Building Design for Feeding Programme and Community Outreach: Insight from Ghana and South Africa. International Research. Washington DC.

World Bank (2014). World Development Indicators 2000-2003 (statistics). 'Nigeria'. Available from World Bank Edstats database.

Yunusa, I. G &Adegbusi, S (2014). School Feeding Programme in Nigeria: A vehicle for Nourishment of Pupils. African Journal: South Africa.