



## SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME AND LEARNING OUTCOME OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN ONDO STATE NIGERIA: MODERATING INFLUENCE OF GENDER

BY

Oluwatoyin Dorcas AYIMORO<sup>1</sup>, Alowonle Nurudeen ASUNMO<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria



### Article History

Received: 16/08/2024

Accepted: 24/08/2024

Published: 26/08/2024

Vol – 2 Issue – 8

PP: - 10-13

### Abstract

Nigeria is one of the developing countries that introduced School Feeding Programme (SFP) in order to enhance enrolment, attendance, and academic performance of primary school pupils and keep children in schools. Therefore, SFP came into being in order to reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children because of high level of poverty and malnourished children in Nigeria. This is a safety net to support the achievement of the Universal Basic Education's mission of delivering high-quality education for all pupils. Thus, this study examined perception of primary school pupils toward the effectiveness of school feeding programme on learning outcomes in Ondo State, Nigeria.

The research design for the study was descriptive survey type and ex-post facto. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select 592 public primary school pupils from three selected local government areas in Ondo State. The first stage was random sampling of one local government in each of the senatorial district namely: Akoko North East, Akure South, and Okitipupa. Simple random sampling was used at the second stage. Descriptive and Inferential statistics were employed to answer research hypothesis. Hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Findings from the study showed that there is a significant gender difference in the pupils' perception towards the effectiveness in the implementation of school feeding programme as it influences pupils' attendance [ $t = -6.203, p < .05$ ]. The hypothesis was not rejected.

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that school feeding programme did not only enhance good academic performance or improve, sustain, and increase pupils' school attendance but it is a potent predictor of learning outcomes. Therefore, it was recommended that government should strengthen school feeding programme among pupils in Ondo State.

**Keywords:** School feeding programme, learning outcomes, pupils.

### Introduction

Primary education is the fundamental basis for all degrees of education. At this stage, the significance of literacy and other fundamental elements of schooling is firmly established. It is crucial to emphasise that once this level is solidly established, the subsequent tiers naturally align. Hence, Nigeria's choice to align itself with the United Nations Member States in highlighting basic education as a crucial catalyst for economic expansion and the well-being of its population holds significant significance. Pursuant to Section 18(3)(a) of the Nigerian Constitution of 1999, as amended, the government is required to exert measures in order to ensure the provision of free primary education to all citizens irrespective of sex, tribe, and ethnic diversity. As per section 15 of the Child Rights Act of 2003, the Federal Government of Nigeria has a legal duty to ensure compulsory basic education accessibility to all children, without cost. The enactment of the Compulsory Free

and Universal Basic Education Act of 2004 was a direct result of this legislation. Every child in African society has the inherent right to access a foundational education. Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of pupils are reported to attend school in tattered clothing, barefoot, on an empty stomach, and without essential writing materials, among various other difficulties (UNESCO, 2019). To this end, every new government continually aspire to achieve substantial enhancement in basic education.

The main goal of the SFP through the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) in Nigeria is to reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children and support the achievement of the Universal Basic Education's mission of delivering high-quality education for all pupils (Ministry of Education, 2014; UBEC, 2004). This project seeks to alleviate the burden of food provision for children of school age, which rests on their parents. The purpose of doing so is to guarantee



that these children are able to persist in their school attendance and effectively accomplish their fundamental education. It is crucial to highlight that Nigeria has a significant poverty rate, and this programme aims to tackle the problem of child labour, as evident in the nation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

The NHGSFP (2017) aims to offer a meal daily to every male and female pupil that enrolls in public primary school one to three in Nigeria while targeting around 2.5 million children, which accounts for 10% of the country's population. The trend is that female children are more into child labour than their male counterparts. They are seen peddling food items and other finished products during school hours in order to support the families' economy.

The initial proposal for nourishing pupils in public elementary schools in Ondo State entailed the provision of meals on a daily basis, specifically for a duration of 5 days per week. Nevertheless, it was observed that the feeding programme was first conducted twice a week for around 2 years, but thereafter decreased to once a week. Presently, it seems that the School Feeding Programme has ceased operations at several public primary schools in the State.

Opinions formed about school feeding effort can greatly influence the efficiency and long-term sustainability of the programme. The viewpoints of educators provide crucial insights into the dynamics, challenges, and potential advantages of the curriculum, which subsequently influence strategies for improving and bolstering the course. Educators have a crucial role in fostering the intellectual, interpersonal, and psychological development of pupils. Their responsibilities include disseminating academic knowledge, fostering a conducive learning environment, and providing guidance and support to pupils. Furthermore, they assume the responsibilities of mentors, counsellors, and advocates to effectively handle the needs of their pupils, while simultaneously preparing them for future accomplishments.

### Statement of the Problem

Governments and education experts support the incorporation of school food programmes alongside primary education in order to achieve universal education. However, a considerable proportion of households in Nigeria lack the ability to adequately provide sustenance for their children and dependents. Some children including girls take the responsibility of being the primary earners in their households by helping their parents with agricultural work and selling the resulting products, despite the fact that they should be attending school. Nevertheless, primary education is an essential right for every child aged 4 to 11. At this stage, pupils receive instruction to acquire the essential literacy skills that will effectively prepare them for the next level of school.

Malnutrition is a substantial barrier to the enrollment and attendance of pupils in many underprivileged households. An undernourished child not only encounters difficulties in enrolling in school at the right age but also suffers challenges

in attending regularly even after enrollment. In 2005, the Nigerian government launched the National Home Grown School Feeding plan (NHGSFP) as a social investment initiative aimed at creating a safety net for primary school pupils irrespective of sex.

However, it has been observed that the occurrence of illiteracy and the rate of early school dropout have consistently increased in the specified research area. Is the NHGSFP programme failing to achieve the desired outcome? This study sought to examine the perception of male and female primary school pupils toward the effectiveness of school feeding programme on learning outcomes in Ondo State, Nigeria.

### Research Hypothesis

1. There is no significant gender difference in the perception of primary school pupils toward the effectiveness of school feeding programme on learning outcomes.

### Literature Review

#### School Feeding Programme and Pupils Attendance in Schools

Oyefade (2015) noted that the adoption of the School Feeding Programme is linked to a rise in attendance and enrollment, especially among girls. Moreover, other studies have established a robust correlation between education and poverty, specifically in connection to inequality. The impoverished experience significant deprivation, and this extends to their children as well. He additionally cited other elements that have a substantial influence on multiple aspects of poverty in relation to school attendance and the quality of education. Specifically, early childhood malnutrition, gender-based deprivation, and financial inequality are often accountable for these effects. Implemented in several countries like Brazil, Philippines, Cambodia, Mali, El Salvador, Indonesia, Ghana, Bangladesh, and Ecuador, school feeding schemes have been shown to enhance enrollment and attendance rates over time, as indicated by data (Akanbi, 2015).

Japhari's (2014) study found that pupils who were ill were unable to attend school consistently. However, when they received meals from the school, they were motivated to attend regularly. During the conversation with parents, several indicated that they motivated their children to attend school consistently since it provided them with sustenance while studying. Additionally, it was noted that girls were prone to being withdrawn from educational institutions in order to assume the responsibility of caring for ill family members or guardians, as well as younger siblings. The results align with the research conducted by UNICEF (2007), which highlighted that female children were burdened with several household responsibilities and had a lower likelihood of consistent school attendance.

#### School feeding programmes and Pupils' Academic Performance in schools

Alabi (2015) study demonstrates that malnutrition in children hampers both their physical growth and cognitive

development, thereby establishing a clear link between nutrition and academic achievement. Food, traditionally seen as a source of energy and building elements for the body, has been found via studies to have a significant impact on brain performance. Children are not only motivated to attend school, but their nutritional status, development, cognitive capacities, and academic achievement are also significantly affected. Research has indicated that the growth and cognitive abilities of individuals are influenced by the nutritional value and overall quality of the food they consume (Jukes, 2016).

The nutritional and health state of a child significantly impact their learning abilities and academic performance. Children who have deficiencies in specific nutrients in their diet do not possess the same capacity for learning as their healthy and well-nourished counterparts. Children who have cognitive and sensory impairments tend to have lower academic performance and are more prone to repeating grades. One of the primary causes for academic underachievement in schools is the inconsistent attendance of malnourished and unwell pupils (Uduku, 2015).

According to Yunusa (2014), pupils who participate in School Feeding Programmes have the capacity to enhance their academic performance. This is because the programme allows them to attend school consistently and study more efficiently. According to a study conducted in Jamaica, it was discovered that children in pre-primary education achieved greater scores in Arithmetic when they began receiving meals at school. Nevertheless, the influence of the School Feeding Programme on the scholastic achievement of pupils has been met with a combination of positive and negative reactions. It has been noted that School Feeding Programmes can encourage parents to enrol their children in school, but their effect on academic performance is variable and influenced by several elements specific to the program's setting. According to Uduku (2015), the effectiveness of School Feeding Programmes in enhancing children's performance is maximised when combined with sufficient learning resources, physical facilities, and teacher motivation. The challenges linked to Social Support Programmes (SSPs) such as School nutrition are essential for the attainment of universal education. Despite efforts made by developing nations to enhance primary school conditions through initiatives such as the School Feeding Programme, there is still a notable problem with high dropout rates, resulting in poor levels of primary school completion (Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook, & Hunt, 2010). Japhari (2014) research uncovered that the implementation of school nutrition had led to a notable improvement in academic performance. The availability of school meals was documented to have risen, resulting in improved attentiveness and increased instructional time for pupils.

Moreover, according to the Education for All (2002) report by UNESCO (2007), the primary factors contributing to high dropout rates include poverty, children's responsibilities at home and work, and the inadequate quality of education. UNICEF (2007) found that long distances have a negative impact on children's attendance and academic performance. According to UNICEF, the performance of household tasks,

such as carrying water over great distances, prevented numerous females from attending school. Kelly (1991) noted that the extended travel distance resulted in pupils arriving at school already fatigued, leading to a lack of focus on academic tasks. Girls exhibited a lower capacity compared to boys in confronting physical dangers, such as flooded rivers and treacherous escarpment routes, particularly when navigating their way to school, especially during rainy seasons. This circumstance had an impact on the enrollment, attendance, and academic achievement of the pupils.

## Methodology

The research design for the study was descriptive survey type and *ex-post facto*. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select 592 public primary school pupils from three selected local government areas in Ondo State. The first stage was random sampling of one local government in each of the senatorial district namely: Akoko North East, Akure South, and Okitipupa. Simple random sampling was used in the second Descriptive and Inferential statistics were employed to answer hypothesis. Hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## Result

**Research Hypothesis:** There is no significant gender difference in the perception of primary school pupils toward the effectiveness of school feeding programme on learning outcomes

**Table 1:**

*Independent t-test showing the gender difference in pupils' perception towards the effectiveness of school feeding programme on learning outcomes*

Criterion Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	P	
Learning Outcome	Pupil Attendance	Male	315	53.11	3.59	590	6.203	< .05
		Female	277	54.94	3.54			
	Academic Performance	Male	315	61.52	11.64	590	.357	> .05
		Female	277	61.20	9.82			

The result in Table 1 indicated that there is a significant gender difference in the pupils' perception towards the effectiveness in the implementation of school feeding programme as it influences pupils' attendance [ $t = -6.203, p < .05$ ]. This implies that male pupils with a mean score of 53.11 (SD=3.59) do significantly differ from female pupils with mean score of 54.94 (SD=3.54) in their perception towards the effectiveness in the implementation of the school feeding programme as it influences pupils' attendance. This was such that the females had better perception of the programme has been effective and relevant to improving pupils' attendance in the public primary schools than their male counterparts.

As regards male and female pupils' perception of school feeding programme, as it influences pupils' academic performance, it was shown that there is no significant difference between male and female pupils perception of the effectiveness of school feeding programme as it influences pupils' academic performance [ $t = .357, p > 0.05$ ]. This implied that male pupils' ( $M = 61.52, SD = 11.64$ ) do not differ from their female counterparts ( $M = 61.20, SD = 9.82$ ) on their perception in the effectiveness of school feeding programme as it influences pupils' attendance. Based on the findings on this hypothesis, the hypothesis was not rejected.

## Discussion of Finding

This study indicates a notable gender disparity in how pupils perceive the success of the school food plan, which in turn affects their attendance [ $t = -6.203, p < .05$ ]. Furthermore, the study indicates that there is no notable disparity between male and female pupils' impression of the school feeding programme's impact on their academic performance [ $t = .357, p > 0.05$ ]. According to the results of this hypothesis, the hypothesis was not disproven. According to Alderman et al (2012), the first year of the school feeding initiative led to a 28 percent rise in enrollment for girls and a 22 percent increase for boys in schools supported by the World Food initiative. Following the initial year, the enrollment patterns exhibited variability based on the specific sort of school feeding programme implemented. In cases where take-home rations for females were paired with on-site food for all pupils, the absolute enrollment of girls increased by 30 percent and this rise was maintained even after the first year. In schools that only offered on-site food, the absolute number of pupils enrolled returned to the levels observed in the year before the start of the school meal programme after the first year. Providing take-home rations seems to decrease the number of female pupils who stopped attending school, especially in the upper years of elementary school.

## Conclusion

The implementation of the school feeding programme effectively eradicated hunger among pupils, therefore serving as a crucial social intervention tool to ensure that pupils have access to education and also provide economic prospects within the communities. The government implemented this programme, which has contributed to an increase in the enrollment, attendance, retention, and academic achievement of pupils in public primary schools in Ondo State.

## Recommendations

Therefore, it was recommended that government should strengthen school feeding programme among pupils in Ondo State. Policies should be implemented to make SFP mandatory in pre-schools, as it has been proven to enhance children's enrollment, attendance, and academic performance.

## References

1. Adelman, S., Adelman, H.D., Giligan, O., & Lehrer, K. (2008). *The impact of alternative food for education programmes on learning achievement and cognitive development. Northern Uganda*,

- Mimeo, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington DC.
2. Ahmed, A. U. (2014). *Impact of feeding children in school: Evidence from Bangladesh*. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPR).
3. Ajani. O.I.Y. (2009) The effect of School Feeding Programme on Primary School Attendance in Rural Areas of Lagos State, Nigeria. *African Journal for the Psychological Study of Social Issues*, 12(1-2), 20 – 30.
4. Akande, G.O. & Alayande, E. (2011). Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programmes in Nigeria: An Innovative Approach to Boosting Enrolment in Primary Schools – A Study of Osun State (2002 – 2010). *The African Symposium. An Airline Journal of the African Educational Research Network*, 11 (2); 20 – 28.
5. Akanbi G.O. (2013). Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in Nigeria: An Innovative Approach to Boosting Enrolment in Public Primary Schools – A Study of Osun State, 2002–2010. *African Symposium*, 11(2), 8-12.
6. Japhari, K. R. (2014). *An Assessment of the Effects of School Feeding Programmes on School Enrolment, Attendance and Academic Performance in Primary Schools in Singida District, Tanzania*. Unpublished dissertation in the Administration, Planning, and Policy Studies (Med Apps) of the Open University of Tanzania.
7. Jukes M.C.H., Drake L.J., & Bundy D.A.P. (2008). *School Health Nutrition and Education for All: Leveling the Playing Field*. Cambridge: CAB Publishers.
8. Jumare D.M (2022). Effect of School Feeding Programme on School Enrolment and Retention in Public Primary School Pupils in Selected Local Governments in Kaduna State. *Gombe Journal of Administration and Management*, 3(1), 196-198.
9. Mungai, T. (2015). *Role of School Feeding Programme on education development in Kiambu county*. Unpublished Master thesis, University of Nairobi.
10. National Bureau of Statistics (2019). "2019 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria" report
11. NHGSFP (2017). *Feeding One Million School Children: The Journey so far, National Home Grown School Feeding Programme*, FMOE, Abuja.
12. UNICEF (2019). *The State of the World's Children 2019: Reimagine the Future – Innovation for Every Child*, UNICEF, New York,
13. Yunusa. I; Gumel, A. M.; Adegbusi, K & Adegbusi, S. (2014). School Feeding Programme in Nigeria: A Vehicle for Nourishment of Pupils. *The African Journal*, 12(2), 53-67