



IMPACT OF SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME ON ENROLMENT AND ATTENDANCE IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of school feeding programme (SFP) on enrolment and attendance in rural primary schools of Benue State and used a survey design, and a sample of 87 rural primary school teachers was selected randomly. The instrument used was validated by two professionals, one in Sociology of Education and another in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument, 0.75 was determined by using the Cronbach alpha statistic. Data analysis was conducted through SPSS. Research questions were answered using means and standard deviations. The findings of the study revealed that SFP has increased enrolment and attendance in rural primary schools of Benue State. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria should extend the programme from primary one to six by increasing funding. State and local governments should also contribute to the funding of SFP, and also be involved in supervising and monitoring the food vendors, amongst others.

Keywords: School feeding programme, enrolment, attendance, rural primary schools.

Introduction

Enrolment and attendance in rural primary schools of Benue State have been low for many years. Even children who are enrolled do not attend school regularly. The rural school serves the communities surrounding them, whose households are predominantly poor small-scale farmers. The common food crops the farmers produce for consumption and sale include yams, cassava, sweet potatoes, rice, maize, soybeans, guinea corns, groundnuts, beniseeds, millets, and beans, tomatoes and some vegetables (Anzaa, Gbari&Tsav, 2017).

In spite of the many crops produced, many children who attend rural primary schools are not well-fed because their parents have to share what they produce on a small scale between consumption and sale in order to meet hunger and financial demands. Besides, the households who are predominately small-scale farmers, place more value on child labour rather than send their children to school (Basu, 1999). Thus, parents compel their children to support them on the farm, especially during cropping and harvesting seasons.

The population in the rural areas is sparsely distributed, hence schools are located far apart to accommodate many children. As a result, pupils trek long distances before arriving at school. Unfortunately, children who attend rural primary schools suffer double jeopardy. They travel long distances and arrive at school on empty stomach, sometimes weak and tired. On the other hand, parents are unable to enrol more children in school due to poverty which disables them to pay the direct costs of schooling in form of uniforms, textbooks, exercise books, and parent-teacher association fees (Colclough *et al.*, 2000; Huismand & Smits, 2009). Unarguably, poverty inhibits parents from enrolling more children to school, while hunger, ill-health and long-distance increase pupils' absence, as well as irregular attendance. Studies have shown that long absence, irregular attendance and hunger can affect pupils' academic performance. For example, Del Rossa and Marek (1996) stated that children who are hungry in class are likely to have difficulty concentrating and performing complex tasks even if they are well-nourished. According

to Douben (2006), hunger-stricken children do not want to be enrolled or attend school even if they are of school age. He said that this is because hunger-stricken children have to contend with immediate subsistence needs before thinking of schooling. Thus, Bundy *et al.* (as cited in Kazeen *et al.*, 2010) reported that the world food programme (WFP) has estimated that 60 million children go to school hungry every day and that 40 percent of them are in Africa. Also, Kazeen *et al.* (2010) reported that the WFP again estimated that of 300 million poor and chronically hungry children in the world, 130 million do not attend school, that about 150 million children of school age begin school but drop out before completing six years of schooling. However, the WFP, according to Kazeen *et al.* (2010), school meals have the potentials to directly address hunger by improving the quality of the learners' diet, thus increasing both school participation and retention.

Generally, children's enrolment in primary schools in sub-Saharan Africa from 1997 to 2010 has increased remarkably from 58 percent to 76 percent (UN, 2012). However, despite the progress made, the problem still persists. For example, Dei (2007) asserted that many children in school are unable to attend regularly and drop out before completing their primary education. Also, Sabates *et al.* (2011) reported that a significant portion of children who begin school do not complete their primary education or continue to secondary school. Besides, many children have competing family and work commitments that may inhibit them from attending school regularly even if they are enrolled (Sakurai, 2003; UNICEF, 2013). In addition, Sakurai (2013) stated that children in sub-Saharan Africa work at higher rates than children in any other continent. Ainsworth *et al.* (as cited in Kazeen *et al.*, 2010) corroborated that a high rate of child labour can keep children away from attending school even if they are enrolled.

Thus, School Feeding Programme (SFP) is conceptualised to increase enrolment and attendance at school. The school feeding programme is therefore a scheme designed to provide meals to school children. According to Tomlinson (2007), there are two broad categories

of SFP. One category is called in-school meals which provides meals to children while they are in school, and another is take-home rations where families are given food if their children attend school. In Benue State, in-school feeding is adopted. Historically, Tomlinson (2007) traced the emergence of SFP to the 1930s in the United Kingdom and the United States, who introduced the scheme focused on improving the growth of the children. In 1990, according to Tomlinson, the Netherlands became the first country to move the programme to a new level by incorporating school meals into national legislation. He further stated that by the 1930s, the United Kingdom and the United States also instituted SFP as part of their national programmes. Tomlinson again further stated that the SFP was introduced to South Africa in the early 1940s by providing free milk to white and coloured school children, but later in the 1960s and 1970s, this benefit was however withdrawn from all except for the children considered specifically in need.

In Nigeria, including Benue state, the SFP was introduced in September 2005 to provide children with adequate meals during school hours (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007). The Federal Ministry of Education [FME] (2007), further stated that the SFP was officially launched as Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) with an emphasis on buying the foodstuffs from local farmers. According to the FME, the main aim of the SFP is to reduce hunger, encourage parents to enrol their children in school, increase school attendance and improve children's health. Though the SFP is ongoing, it seems school enrolment and attendance are still low in the rural primary schools of Benue State, and this has not been verified.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the household production framework proposed by economists Claudia and Dan (2000). The household production framework helps to explain the differences between the education of children in urban and rural areas. It is documented in literature that the schooling of rural children lags behind their urban counterparts because rural parents may not see how their children's education will be put to use in

their local labour market (Huisman & Smits, 2009). In rural areas of developing countries where agriculture is the dominant employment sector, parents may not seek education for their children because prevailing employment opportunities do not require it (Claudia & Dan, 2000). Besides, rural parents in developing nations might worry that formal schooling may lead to the out-migration of their children to urban places (Kazccn *et al.*, 2010). In addition, in rural areas of various developing societies, parents may be hesitant to send their children to school where roads and infrastructure are for the most part not good (Huisman & Smits, 2009).

The household production framework also explains disparities in school enrolment and attainment. In poor households, parents may not send their children to school if the direct cost of educating them is too great. In many developing countries including Nigeria, these costs often include school uniforms, text and exercise books, and parent-teacher association fees (Colclough *et al.*, 2000; Huisman & Smits, 2009). Additionally, poor households may perceive schooling as competing with children's time to participate in child labour activities either in the marketplace or in the household, and for that reason, they may not send their children to school but rather send them to work.

Statement of the Problem

Many education stakeholders in Benue State are anxious to know if the introduction of the SFP has any impact on school enrolment and attendance in rural primary schools. They are worried because it is presumed that low school enrolment and attendance at schools can lead to underdevelopment in the State and Nigeria. Studies have shown that low enrolment and attendance at school are attributed to hunger, poverty and ill-health. To increase enrolment and attendance at school, the Federal government of Nigeria has introduced the SFP all over the States, including Benue State. The Scheme provides meals to children who attend school. It is presumed that this may encourage parents to enrol their children to attend school regularly. Nonetheless, it has not been ascertained whether the introduction of the SFP has any impact on

enrolment and attendance at schools. Hence, the researchers are motivated to investigate the impact of SFP on enrolment and attendance in rural primary schools of Benue State.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of SFP on enrolment and attendance in rural primary schools of Benue State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- Investigate the impact of SFP on school enrolment in rural primary schools in Kwande Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State
- Determine the impact of SFP on school attendance in rural primary schools in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What impact does SFP have on school enrolment in rural primary schools in Kwande LGA of Benue State?
- What impact does SFP have on school attendance in rural primary schools in Kwande LGA of Benue State?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. This design was considered appropriate for the study because the respondents were allowed to answer questions through questionnaires (Hale, 2011). The study was conducted in Kwande LGA of Benue State Nigeria and covered all the rural primary schools. The population comprised all 625 teachers in the rural primary schools. A sample of 87 teachers was selected through

random sampling. The researchers developed an instrument titled, School Feeding Programme Questionnaires for Teachers (SFPQT). The instrument is a structured questionnaire which has two parts (A & B). Part A contained the biodata of the respondents, while part B was designed to elicit information from the respondents on the school feeding programme. The instrument adopted a four-point Likert format: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by two professionals, one each in Sociology of Education and Measurement and Evaluation at the Nasarawa State University, Keffi (NSUK). The draft of the instrument was given to the validators along with the purpose of the study and research questions, to assess contents and face-validity. Based on their suggestions and amendments, the new version of the instrument was structured. The reliability of the instrument was determined by conducting a trial test on 20 teachers outside the target population. Adopting Cronbach alpha statistics, the reliability index of 0.75 was obtained. The researchers administered the instrument by themselves and issued 87 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents, who properly completed the questionnaires. After completion of the questionnaires, the researchers retrieved all of them on the spot. Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Mean and standard deviations were used for answering the research questions. Any mean score of an item below 2.50 means SFP has no impact.

Results

The results of the data analysis were presented in the tables as follows:

Research Question One: What impact does SFP have on school enrolment in rural primary schools in Kwande LGA of Benue State?

Table 1: Impact of SFP on rural primary schools in Kwande LGA of Benue State

Items	Enrolment	No.	Mean	Std. Dev
1	Parents now enrol more children in rural primary schools as a result of SFP	87	2.38	1.87
2	Children are now willing to be enrolled in rural primary schools because of the SFP	87	3.03	2.34
3	Children prefer to be enrolled in rural primary schools now because of the introduction of SFP	87	3.20	2.50
4	The ongoing SFP motivates parents to enrol their children in rural primary schools	87	3.23	2.52
5	Enrolment of children in rural primary schools has increased due to SFP	87	3.25	2.55
6	Parents are willing to enrol their children in rural primary schools because SFP has reduced hunger	87	3.23	2.52
7	Children enrolled in rural primary schools remain in the class till the closing hours due to SFP	87	3.05	2.00
8	The health of children enrolled in rural primary schools has improved due to SFP	87	3.32	2.23
9	School feeding has led to an increase in enrolment in rural primary schools	87	3.27	2.63
10	Children enrolled in rural primary schools do not drop out because of SFP	87	3.29	2.59
Cluster mean			3.13	2.37

Results in Table 1 indicate that all the 10 items have a mean score and cluster mean (3.13) above the 2.50 cut-off mark. This means that all the teachers who responded to the instrument agreed

that the school feeding programme (SFP) has impacted school enrolment in the rural primary schools of Kwande LGA, Benue State.

Research Question Two: What impact does the school feeding programme (SFP) have on school attendance in rural primary schools in Kwande LGA of Benue State?

Table 2: Teachers' response to the impact of the school feeding programme (SFP) on rural primary schools in Kwande LGA, Benue State

Item	School Attendance	No.	Mean	Std. Dev
11	School feeding programme has increased attendance in rural primary schools	87	3.11	2.42
12	Since the introduction of SFP absences in the rural primary schools have reduced	87	3.32	2.62
13	School feeding programme has made children happy to attend other schools' activities	87	3.36	2.66
14	Since the introduction of the SFP children in the rural primary schools have been attending school regularly	87	3.18	2.47
15	The provision of free meals in rural primary schools motivates children to attend all lessons	87	3.26	2.65
16	School feeding programme has reduced irregular attendance in rural primary schools	87	3.28	2.57
17	Since the introduction of the SFP, children complain less of trekking to attend rural primary schools	87	3.07	2.57
18	School feeding programme has reduced children's complaint of hunger while attending rural primary schools	87	3.14	2.47
19	Since the introduction of the SFP, children attend school punctually	87	2.60	1.95
20	School feeding programme has reduced children's truancy	87	2.95	2.27
Cluster mean			3.12	2.45

Results in Table 2 indicate that all the 10 items have a mean score and cluster mean (3.12) above the 2.50 cut-off mark. This means that all the teachers who responded to the instrument agreed that the school feeding programme (SFP) has impacted school attendance in rural primary schools in Kwande LGA of Benue State.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of the school feeding programme (SFP) on

enrolment and attendance in rural primary schools of Benue State. Two research questions guided the study. The findings of the study showed that both enrolment and attendance in rural primary schools of Kwande LGA, Benue State have increased. These findings resonate with the UN (2012) report which stated that enrolment of children in primary schools in sub-Saharan Africa has increased from 58 to 76 percent from 1999 to 2010. The finding is also in line with the World Food Programme (WFP, as

cited in Kazeen, 2010) report that school meals have the potential to directly address hunger by improving both school attendance and retention. The finding also agreed with Douben (2006) who argued that hunger-stricken children do not want to enrol or attend school because they have to contend with immediate subsistence needs before thinking of schooling.

Nevertheless, the finding of the study is contrary to what Basu (1999) reported that poor households may perceive schooling as competing with children's time to participate in child labour activities either in the marketplace or in the household and for that reason may not enrol their children to school but rather send them to work. The finding of the study suggests that children from poor households in rural areas can combine child labour activities with schooling. The finding is also in contrast to Ainsworth (as cited in Kezzen, 2010) who said that high rates of child labour can keep children away from attending school even if they are enrolled. The finding of the study suggests that despite the high rate of child labour in rural areas, parents still enrol their children in rural primary schools of Kwande LGA, Benue State and encourage them to attend. This may be attributed to the free school meals provided by the SFP across the States in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the school feeding programme (SFP) has an impact on school enrolment and attendance in rural primary schools in Benue State.

Recommendations

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

- The federal government of Nigeria should extend the SFP to cover children from primary one to six. This can be done by increasing fund allocation to the programme.
- The state and local governments should also contribute to the funding of SFP and also involve in supervising and monitoring food vendors who provide food to school children so that the food they provide is always of good quality and enough for each child. Supervisors and monitoring officials should

ensure that food vendors provide food at the appropriate time

- Rural farmers should produce enough food to feed their children at home and sell some to the food vendors so that food vendors do not complain about the lack of foodstuff. The selling of foodstuff will enable poor farmers to exit poverty.
- Rural parents should continue to enrol their children in school and ensure that they attend school regularly since the SFP has intervened in alleviating the problem of hunger while children are at school.
- Teachers should also be involved in supervising the provision of food vendors in their schools and also ensure that children attend school regularly.

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