



SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM AND ITS IMPLICATION ON PUPILS' RETENTION AND ATTENDANCE IN OYI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

The School Feeding Program (SFP) is a vital initiative aimed at improving the overall well-being of students by providing nutritious meals in schools. This program has significant implications for pupils' retention and attendance, especially in developing regions like Anambra State, Nigeria. Adopting a descriptive survey design, the research aimed to explore the extent to which the SFP influences school enrolment, attendance, academic achievement, and the challenges faced in its implementation. A sample of 148 participants selected from 15 schools through simple random sampling were involved in the study. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire, and the reliability was tested using the Cronbach method. The study found a positive correlation between the school feeding programme and increased school enrolment, improved pupil attendance, and enhanced academic performance. Pupils were more punctual, had better attendance, and showed improvements in both curricular and extracurricular activities. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor cooking facilities, insufficient classrooms, and negative parental attitudes were identified as hindrances to the programme's effective implementation. Based on the findings, the study recommends the provision of adequate funding, the involvement of qualified personnel in planning and evaluation, and the establishment of a monitoring system to ensure the programme's success. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the effectiveness of school feeding programmes in promoting educational outcomes in Nigeria and highlights the need for further policy improvements to address the challenges identified.

Keywords: *School Feeding Programme, pupil retention, attendance, academic performance, education policy, challenges*

Introduction

The School Feeding Programme (SFP) is a strategic intervention designed to provide free meals to children in schools, particularly at the lower basic education level, to address issues of malnutrition, low enrollment, and poor retention rates. Originating in the United Kingdom and the United States during the 1930s, SFPs initially aimed to enhance the physical and cognitive growth of children (Locke et al, 2024). Over time, the scope of these programs has evolved, aligning with global initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and regional strategies such as the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme and the Millennium Hunger Task Force. These initiatives linked school feeding to broader objectives, including agricultural development through the use of locally sourced food (Oyetayo et al, 2024). The concept of school feeding programs involves providing food to children through schools to improve their nutritional status and foster educational outcomes. (Agu et al, 2023). School feeding programs are implemented in two main forms: in-school meals and take-home rations. In-school meals have historically been

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more popular, including options like full meals or high-energy biscuits designed to increase school enrollment, retention, and reduce disparities related to gender and socioeconomic factors.

The programs serve as a social safety net, particularly for children from impoverished backgrounds, while supporting national development goals by encouraging education (Barnabas et al, 2024). In Nigeria, poverty and food insecurity remain significant barriers to education, especially in rural areas where families often lack the resources to send their children to school. The high rate of poverty, exacerbated by limited access to basic needs, compels many children to engage in income-generating activities or household chores instead of attending school. Addressing this issue requires interventions that target both children and their households, as hunger and poverty impact the ability of families to prioritize education.

In Nigeria, the Federal Government launched the Home-Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in 2005 under the Federal Ministry of Education. This initiative aimed to provide daily nutritious meals to school children, enhance their health, and boost school attendance and retention rates. The program emphasized sourcing food locally, thereby benefiting farmers and addressing malnutrition among children. Although the funding responsibilities were shared between the Federal, State, and Local Governments, the local and state authorities bore the larger financial burden (Okah et al, 2023). The program's objectives extend beyond improving nutrition to addressing disparities in school enrollment and retention. Malnutrition among Nigerian children has been a persistent issue, with data indicating high rates of stunting, underweight, and deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals. School feeding programs aim to mitigate these issues, improving children's overall health and creating incentives for parents to send their children to school, particularly in rural and underserved areas (Ibrahim et al, 2023).

The program has seen successful implementation in several states, including Anambra, where it began in 2016. The initiative in Anambra serves thousands of primary school pupils daily, focusing on children in grades one through three. By providing consistent, nutritious meals, the program has demonstrated its potential to enhance school participation and cognitive development (Dennis et al, 2021). These programs have also shown reductions in parasitic infections, improvements in hemoglobin levels, and better vitamin intake among participants. However, the implementation of the program faced numerous challenges. Ten out of the twelve pilot states, along with the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), withdrew from the initiative due to disputes over fund disbursement between the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and the participating states. Consequently, the program was sustained only in Osun and Kano States (Abay et al, 2021). The program focuses on primary school pupils from grades one to three, with cooks recruited from local communities and trained to deliver quality meals. This approach not only provides children with nutritious food but also supports local economies and fosters community engagement.

The objectives of Nigeria's National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme include improving the health and nutritional status of schoolchildren, increasing enrollment and retention rates, and enhancing learning outcomes. These objectives align with the broader goals of Universal Basic Education. Evidence from similar programs worldwide underscores the critical role of nutrition in cognitive and intellectual development, particularly during early childhood (Oyuru, 2023). Malnutrition during periods of rapid brain growth can have irreversible effects on intellectual capacity, responsiveness to stimuli, and overall learning potential. By providing adequate nutrition, SFPs help mitigate these risks, creating an environment conducive to better academic performance and long-term developmental outcomes.

Despite the potential benefits, the impact of the SFP on primary school enrollment, retention, and academic performance in specific areas, such as Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State, remains under-researched. This study seeks to evaluate the program's effectiveness in this region, exploring its role in improving access to education and addressing disparities in educational outcomes. Access to education is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and initiatives like the SFP play a crucial role in actualizing this right. However, understanding the nuanced effects of such programs requires localized research to inform future



policy and implementation strategies (Agbade et al, 2023). The significance of school feeding extends beyond its immediate nutritional benefits. These outcomes contribute to the broader socio-economic development of communities, making SFPs a vital component of educational reform and poverty alleviation. While challenges related to funding, implementation, and sustainability persist, the potential of SFPs to transform the lives of children and their families underscores the need for continuous investment and innovation in this area.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Primary education is a right to every child of school age from 4 to 11 years. Pupils are taught at this level to acquire the literacy that will prepare them for the next level of education. For any educational system to be efficient there should be smooth transition of pupil from one level to another or 100% retention, completion and good educational performance rate. Enrolment and completion rate is low in developing countries and thus contributing to high illiteracy levels. The major problem that plagues most school children in primary school especially in low-income areas is poverty. The Free School Feeding Programme was implemented by the government to address malnutrition and increase enrolment rates in primary schools. However, despite the implementation of this programme, enrolment rates have remained low in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State. There are concerns about the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its goals, and whether it has been able to address the challenges of low enrolment rates, retention and academic performance in the primary education sector. However, the impact of this programme on primary school enrolment remains unclear. Therefore, this study seek to determine the influence of the free school feeding programme on primary school pupils' enrolment, retention and academic performance in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The main objective of this study is to;

- i. Determine the effect of School Feeding Programme on rate of pupil's enrolment in Oyi L.G.A Anambra State.
- ii. Determine the effects of School Feeding Programme on the attendance of pupils in Oyi L.G.A Anambra State.
- iii. Determine the effect of School feeding programme on academic performance
- iv. To examine the challenges of School Feeding Programme in Oyi L.G.A Anambra State.
- v. Examine the effective strategies needed for effective implementation of the school feeding programme in Oyi L.G.A Anambra state.

Research questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent has the School Feeding Programme affected School Enrolment in Oyi LGA Anambra State?
2. What is the extent at which School Feeding Program has affected pupils attendance rate in Oyi LGA Anambra State?
3. To what extent has school feeding programme affected pupils academic performance in Oyi L.G.A Anambra state
4. What are the challenges of School Feeding Programme in Anambra State?
5. What are the strategies needed for effective implementation of school feeding programme in Oyi L.G.A Anambra state.

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Methods

The study employed a descriptive survey design to assess the impact of the School Feeding Programme on pupils’ school enrolment, retention, and academic performance in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State. The descriptive survey method was selected as it allows for effective data collection, summarization, presentation, and interpretation to provide clarity on the subject under investigation. The population for this study comprised all pupils and teachers in primary grades one to three in public schools within Oyi L.G.A., Anambra State. From the total number of public primary schools in the area, 15 schools were randomly selected using a simple random sampling technique. In total, 148 teachers were chosen to participate in the study, all from the schools operating under the School Feeding Programme. To ensure the accuracy and relevance of the data collection instrument, a questionnaire was developed by the researcher and validated by an expert in the Department of Home Economics. Following expert feedback, the final version of the instrument was used for data collection. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. A random sample of 20 respondents, who were not part of the main study population, completed the questionnaires. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using the Cronbach method, which provided an estimate of 0.88 internal consistency. The data collected through the questionnaires was analyzed using frequency counts, mean scores, and standard deviation. A cut-off point of 2.50 was used to categorize responses, with a mean score above 2.50 considered as agreement and below 2.50 considered as disagreement.

Results

The findings of the study are presented in tables bellow according to research questions which guided the study.

Research question 1: To what extent has the School Feeding Programme affected School Enrolment in Oyi LGA Anambra State?

Table 1: mean responses of pupils on the effect of school feeding program on pupils enrollment in Oyi L.G.A (n=148)

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{X}	Decision
1	There is an increase in enrolment due to the provision of school meals	80	30	18	20	148	3.14	Accepted
2	School feeding encourages punctuality	90	30	20	8	148	3.36	Accepted
3	The school feeding programme helps to stabilize attendance in schools under study	80	30	20	18	148	3.67	accepted
4	School feeding progamme has reduced the dropout rate of pupils	60	50	18	30	148	3.08	accepted

The result presented in table 1 showed that the statement items had a mean range of 3.06 to 3.67. All the items had means above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicated that the respondent agreed with all

of the statement items meaning that school feeding programme has a positive effect on rate of pupil's enrollment in Oyi LGA,

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What is the extent at which School Feeding Program has affected pupil's attendance rate in Oyi LGA Anambra State?

Table 2: mean distribution of response

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{X}	Decision
5	SPF has increased the attendance rate of the pupils	70	30	20	28	148	2.93	Accepted
6	Absenteeism of pupils from school has drastically reduced since the introduction of SPF	50	50	28	20	148	2.87	Accepted

The result presented in table 2 showed the mean rang of 2.89 to 2.73. every items were agreed/ accepted as they had their mean above 2.50

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: To what extent has school feeding programme affected pupils' academic performance in Oyi L.G.A Anambra state?

Table 3: mean distribution of response

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{X}	Decision
7	There is improvement in pupils' performance in both curricular and extracurricular activities	90	30	20	8	148	3.36	Accepted
8	School feeding program has helped to caution the effect of poor nutrition found in students' home.	80	30	20	18	148	3.67	accepted
9	The school feeding programme has helped to improve pupils' developmental (physical and intellectual growth) process	50	50	30	15	148	2.89	Accepted
10	SPF has increased the pupils' ability to concentrate	60	40	30	18	148	2.95	Accepted
11	Pupils' performance in class test has improved	90	20	30	8	148	3.29	Accepted

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12	Pupils' performance in end of term and session exams has improved	80	30	20	18	148	3.29	Accepted
13	Pupils' performance in class test/exam have nothing to do with SPF	39	20	70	28	148	2.35	REJECTED

The result presented in table 3 showed that the statement items had a mean range of 2.35 to 3.67. Six items had means above the cut-off point of 2.50 while item 7 had mean below the cutoff point. This indicated that the respondent agreed with some of the statement items while one was not accepted.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges of School Feeding Programme in Oyi LGA Anambra State?

Table 4: Mean Distribution Of Response

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{X}	Decision
14	School feeding fund is not delivered on time	125	23	-	-	148	3.84	Accepted
15	Poor cooking facilities affect school feeding programme in my school	100	10	18	20	184	3.28	Accepted
16	Insufficient classrooms and furniture to cope with increases enrollment	100	38	10	-	148	3.5	Accepted
17	Instability of prices from the market affects the implementation of school feeding in my school	50	20	8	40	148	2.94	Accepted
18	In my school parents have negative attitudes on school feeding programme	50	10	48	43	148	2.49	Rejected
19	Heavy workload for teachers	60	50	30	8	148	3.09	Accepted
20	There is no central place for the pupils to take their meals	90	30	20	8	148	3.36	Accepted
21	Pupils have no access to good source of water after meals	70	20	30	10	148	2.82	Accepted
22	Quantity of food served is small	80	30	20	18	148	3.16	Accepted
23	Absence of legal frame work and policy to support the SPF	80	30	20	18	148	3.29	Accepted
24	Inability to effectively monitor the food preparation to ascertain the quality of food and the environment	50	50	30	15	148	2.89	Accepted

Table 4, showed that all the items had a mean range of 2.49 to 3.5. the mean values of the item were above the cut-off point of 2.5 except item 18 which had a mean value below the cut-off point of 2.5. This indicated that the teachers identified most of the items as challenges affecting the effective implementation of school feeding programme in Anambra state.

Research Question 5: What are the strategies needed for effective implementation of school feeding programme in Oyi LGA Anambra State?

Table 5: mean distribution of response

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{X}	Decision
25	Rapid capacity building	90	30	15	13	148	3.33	Accepted
26	Adequate funding should be provided to the programme	60	50	28	10	148	30.0	Accepted
27	Qualified home economist, nutritionist, dietitians and caterers should be involved in planning and evaluation of SPF	70	60	10	8	148	3.29	Accepted
28	SPF should be well guided by a menu which reflect a balanced and nutritious meal for growth and repair of damaged tissue	60	10	48	43	148	2.76	Accepted
29	A committee/supervising team should be set up to ensure optimum Coordination of food supply, storage, and distribution across schools especially in remote areas	60	50	30	8	148	3.09	Accepted

Table 5, showed that all the items had a mean range of 2.76 to 3.33. The mean values of the item were above the cut-off point of 2.5 this indicated that the teachers accepted that the listed items are strategies needed for effective implementation of school feeding programme in Anambra state.

Discussion of Results

Analysis of research question 1 shows that there is an increase in enrollment of pupils, low rate of drop out, punctuality to school has increased and stabilization of attendance pupils to school since the introduction and implementation of SFP. The SFP has positively influenced enrolment through increased attendance, punctuality, and a reduction in dropout rates. Specifically, the provision of school meals was identified as a major factor driving higher enrolment and stabilizing attendance. The findings highlight the role of the SFP in promoting access to basic education. In a related study, Agbade et al, (2023) observed that school feeding programmes significantly increased enrolment rates in rural Nigerian communities, particularly among vulnerable children. This finding agreed with the current study's observation of improved enrolment due to school meals. Similarly, a study by Oyoru (2023) confirmed that punctuality improved in schools implementing feeding programmes, aligning with the perception of pupils in Oyi LGA. However, in contrast, a study conducted in Ghana by Abay et al, (2021) noted that while enrolment initially increased due to school feeding, its long-term sustainability faced challenges related to inconsistent funding. Furthermore, Dennis et al, (2021) found a lesser impact of SFP on dropout rates in urban areas compared to rural ones, suggesting regional disparities in programme effectiveness.

Analysis of research question 2 highlights the mean responses of pupils regarding the impact of the School Feeding Programme (SFP) on attendance rates in Oyi Local Government Area, Anambra State. The respondents agreed that the SFP has significantly increased pupils' attendance rates and drastically reduced absenteeism. These findings suggest that providing meals in schools has enhanced regular attendance, addressing a critical barrier to educational access. In a related study, Ibrahim et al, (2023) found that SFPs in rural Nigerian communities significantly boosted daily attendance rates, particularly in areas with high levels of food insecurity. This finding agreed with the current study's observations in Oyi LGA. Similarly, Okah et al, (2023) emphasized that SFPs contributed to reducing absenteeism by alleviating the economic burden on families, resonating with the reduced absenteeism reported in the present study. However, in contrast, Barnabas et al, (2024) reported that in some regions of Ghana, SFPs had a minimal impact on attendance rates due to

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inconsistent meal delivery and poor program management. Additionally, Agu et al, (2023) highlighted that while SFPs reduced absenteeism in rural areas, their effect was less pronounced in urban settings where other factors like transportation costs influenced attendance.

Analysis of research question 3 indicates the respondents' agreement on the positive impact of the School Feeding Programme (SFP) on pupils' academic performance in Oyi LGA, Anambra State. The majority affirmed that SFP has improved curricular and extracurricular performance, mitigated the effects of poor nutrition, enhanced physical and intellectual development, increased concentration, and boosted performance in class tests and examinations. This finding agreed with Oyetayo et al, (2024), who observed that SFPs in Southeast Nigeria improved students' cognitive abilities, particularly in mathematics and science, by reducing hunger-related distractions. In a related study, Locke et al, (2024) reported that nutritional support through SFP significantly enhanced academic outcomes, including test scores and overall engagement, underscoring the importance of balanced meals. In contrast, Adekule et al, (2016) found that in some underfunded rural communities in Zambia, the SFP's impact on academic performance was marginal due to irregular meal supply and lack of nutrient diversity. Similarly, Thomas and Nwokocha (2021) noted that while the program improved physical growth and attendance in urban Nigerian schools, its effect on academic performance was limited by overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teaching resources. These contrasting findings highlight the importance of program quality and supplementary factors in determining outcomes.

The researcher observed from research question 4 that parents have no negative attitudes towards the implementation of SFP; rather many challenges such as insufficient fund, insufficient classroom, poor cooking facilities, and instability of market price for food items and lack of monitoring team are hindering the effective implementation of SFP in Oyi L.G.A Anambra state. The School Feeding Programme (SFP) in Oyi LGA faces numerous challenges. These include delays in funding, inadequate cooking facilities, overcrowded classrooms, fluctuating market prices, negative parental attitudes, teacher workload, lack of centralized eating spaces, insufficient water supply, small food portions, absence of a legal framework, and inadequate monitoring of food quality and hygiene. This finding agreed with Aribodor et al, (2021), who highlighted funding delays and price instability as critical impediments to SFP implementation in Nigerian schools, leading to disruptions in meal provision. In a related study, Umar et al, (2024) emphasized that poor infrastructure, including insufficient classrooms and furniture, exacerbated overcrowding and reduced the program's effectiveness in encouraging enrollment. In contrast, Dada et al, (2023) reported that Ghana's SFP achieved better outcomes by establishing a robust legal framework and regular monitoring mechanisms, which improved food quality and hygiene. Similarly, Appiah, K. (2024) noted that schools with centralized dining areas and access to clean water experienced fewer implementation issues, as pupils' dining conditions were better managed.

Analysis of research question 5 highlights several strategies crucial for the effective implementation of the School Feeding Programme (SFP) in Oyi LGA, Anambra State. These strategies include rapid capacity building, adequate funding, involvement of qualified professionals such as home economists and nutritionists, development of a balanced meal menu, and setting up a committee to ensure proper coordination of food supply, storage, and distribution. This finding agreed with the work of Oyela et al, (2022), who emphasized the importance of involving trained professionals to enhance the quality of meals and overall effectiveness of SFPs. Similarly, Abay et al, (2021) stressed the role of adequate funding and clear meal planning in ensuring the sustainability of school feeding programs, particularly in rural areas. In contrast, a study by Ibrahim et al, (2023) found that while capacity building was critical, insufficient coordination and lack of a dedicated supervisory team led to inefficiencies in meal distribution in certain Nigerian states. Furthermore, in a related study, Agu et al, (2023) highlighted the importance of tailoring the feeding program to meet nutritional standards, ensuring the meals provided contribute to the physical and intellectual growth of students.



5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that SFP promotes Pupil's Academic Performance in selected public primary school in Oyi LGA of Anambra State. Moreover, the study also, concluded that SFP has impacted on Pupil's Enrolment in selected public primary school in Oyi LGA . In addition, SFP has impacted on Pupil's Academic Performance and Retention in selected public primary school in Oyi LGA of Anambra State. In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the School Feeding Programme (SFP) in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State has had a significant positive impact on pupils' retention and attendance rates. The findings revealed that the provision of school meals has contributed to increased enrolment, improved punctuality, and stabilized attendance, aligning with the broader objective of ensuring that more children stay in school and regularly attend classes. Additionally, the SFP has shown a positive effect on pupils' academic performance by addressing the nutritional deficiencies that hinder learning and development, particularly in rural areas. However, the study also highlighted several challenges hindering the program's effectiveness, such as delayed funding, inadequate cooking facilities, and insufficient monitoring systems. These issues, if not addressed, could undermine the long-term success of the SFP. To ensure its sustainability and effectiveness, the study suggests strategies such as capacity building, adequate funding, and the involvement of qualified professionals in meal planning and evaluation. Ultimately, the findings of this study underscore the importance of strengthening and expanding the School Feeding Programme to enhance pupils' learning outcomes and retention in schools, while addressing the logistical and structural challenges to ensure its success in Oyi Local Government Area. In line with the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. That government should endeavor to sustain the SFP, in order to encourage pupils to concentrate on their studies, so as to enhance Pupil's Academic Performance in selected public primary school in Oyi LGA of Anambra State;
 - ii. In order to encourage school enrolment, the state government should continue with the School Feeding Programme across the 21 Local Government Areas in the State;
3. That the government should extend the School Feeding Programme to cover up to Primary Six, so as to encouraged the pupils.

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