

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME (SFP) ON ENROLMENT OF PUPILS IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study explored public perception of the effectiveness of the School Feeding Programme (SFP) implementation in Ebonyi State Nigeria. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion and Interview. The population for the study were pupils in Primary 1-3. A total of 486 respondents were involved in the study. The researcher adopted a cross sectional survey design and multi-stage sampling technique to select the respondents. The retrieved data were analysed using frequency table, percentage, and chi square (X^2) to test the hypothesis. The results showed that the school feeding programme has been poorly implemented in the state as it has failed to improve pupils enrolment in the public primary schools. Again it was discovered that more children prefer private/mission primary schools to public schools. The major impediments were found to be lack of supervision/monitoring, lack of fund, low morale on the part of teachers etc. The study concluded that monitoring of the programme in the state should be intensified and further research should be carried out to ascertain why parents and pupils prefer private/mission schools to public schools in the state.

Key words: Public primary school, School feeding programme and perception.

Introduction

Ebonyi state falls under one of the educational disadvantaged states in South-East Nigeria. As a result, the state has low enrolment of pupils in public primary schools. One of the strategies embarked upon by the state government in partnership with the federal government through the Universal Basic Education Board (UBEB) and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to improve on the enrolment of pupils in public primary schools in the state is the School Feeding Programme (SFP). According to World Bank (2012), school feeding programme is a targeted social safety nets that provide both educational and health benefits to the most vulnerable children, thereby increasing enrolment and attendance rates, reducing absenteeism, increasing cognitive development and improving food security at the household level. World Food Programme (2015), noted that the objectives for the school meals are mainly three – school feeding as a social net, as a requirement to advance learning and or health status of the school children. Akanbi, (2013), traced the introduction of the school feeding programme to the

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiative and several conferences held thereafter by African leaders which aimed to tackle issues such as peace, security, good economic, political and corporate governance and to make the continent an attractive destination for foreign investment.

Bundy, Burbano, Grosh, Gelli, Jakes and Drake (2009), added that some of these development initiatives include the new partnership for African Development (NEPAD) which was 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 policies.

Nigeria therefore was one of the twelve (12) pilot countries invited to implement the programme. Currently, Nigeria, Cote d'ivoire, Ghana, Kenya and Mali have commenced the implementation of the school feeding programme Taylor and Ogbogu (2016).

As a result, the Federal Government came up with the Universal Basic Education Act 2004, which provided the enabling legislative backing for the execution of the School Feeding Programme otherwise known as the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme. As part of the objectives of the Universal Basic Education Programme and the cardinal role of nutrition, the Federal Ministry of Education launched the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in 2005. The overall goal of the School Feeding Programme in Nigeria is to reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children and enhance increase in enrolment and performance of pupils in Primary Schools. Ebonyi State is one of the states currently implementing the School Feeding Programme. Furthermore, the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) can be seen as a vehicle to stimulate local economies by providing market and source of income for local small holder farmers (Gelli, Masset, Kusi Arthinful, Asante, Drake 2016; Bundy, de Silva, Horton, Jamison and Patton 2018 a). it can also be used as a strategy to ensure that school feeding menus contain a variety of nutritious food that school children are familiar with (Aliyar, Gelli Hamdani. 2015, Bundy, de Silva, Horton. Jamison and patton 2018 b). Again, the school feeding programme is intended to reduce short-term hunger, improve nutrition and cognition of children and transfer income to families (Cole, 2013).

Hence, the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) is a feeding programme that aims to improve the health and educational outcomes of public primary school pupils at the cost of seventy naira (N70) per day (NHGSFP, 2017). It uses farm produce locally grown by small holder farmers to provide children nutritious mid-day meals on every school day (Drake, Wolnough, Burbaw, 2016). The programme therefore links local farmers to the education sector and cooks/food vendors involved in the food service provision (Gelli, Masset, Folson, Kusi, Arthinful, Asante, Drake 2016; World Food Programme, 2019).

Studies have shown that factors such as hunger, illness, frequent truancy, lack of school requirements among others are the causes of poor enrolment and high dropout rates in

schools (Kristiansson, Gelli, Welch, Greenhalgh, Liberato Francis, , Espejo Welch 2012). In area where School feeding programme is functioning well, analysts have indicated consistent positive effects of school feeding in its different modalities on micronutrient status, school enrollment and attendance of the children participating in SFPs compared to non participants (World Bank, 2012, Kristiansson, Gelli, Welch, Greenhalgh, Liberato, Francis and Espejo, 2016).

Nikiema, (2017) noted that take-home rations (THR) increased school attendance for both boys and girls. However, most of the studies conducted on home grown school feeding programme were done outside Nigeria and other parts of the country. moreover, the few studies conduct in Ebonyi state did not cover public perception of the effectiveness of the programme on pupils enrollment. This deficiency has therefore created the gap which the present study intends to fill.

Statement of the Problem

The persistence of low enrolment of pupils in public primary schools primary in Ebonyi state despite the implementation of the school feeding programme is an indication that there other serious factors outside poverty and nutrition that hinder increase in enrolment of pupils in public primary schools. Again in most rural communities in the state parents and guardians prefer private/ mission schools to public schools. This trend results to decrease in pupils enrolment in public primary schools. This development falls short of the intended goals of the School Feeding Programme in the state. This study is therefore intended to ascertain public perception of the effectiveness of the School Feeding Programme in the state.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain the public perception of the effectiveness of the school feeding programme on enrolment of pupils in public primary school in Ebonyi State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent the school feeding programme increased enrolment of pupils in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?
2. Ascertain the factors that tend to reduce

enrolment of pupils in public primary Schools in Ebonyi State?

3. Find out the perception of pupils on the home grown feeding programme in Ebonyi State?
4. Find out how parents and teachers perceive the effectiveness of the school feeding programme in Ebonyi State?

Scope of the Study

This study will be carried out in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. It will cover all the public primary Schools in the thirteen (13) local government areas of the state.. Available records show that there are 1,138 public primary schools in Ebonyi State. The study will make use of the public primary school pupils as respondents for the study while the Focus Group Discussion will make use of teachers and parents.

Research Questions

5. To what extent has the school feeding programme increased enrolment of pupils in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?
6. What are the factors that tend to reduce enrolment of pupils in public primary Schools in Ebonyi State?
7. What is the perception of pupils on the home grown feeding programme in Ebonyi State?
8. How do parents and teachers perceive the effectiveness of the school feeding programme in Ebonyi State?

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the male and female pupils on their perception of the type of food served in school feeding programme in Ebonyi state.

Concept of School Feeding Programme

School feeding programme refers to the provision of food to school children through schools, Oyefade, (2014), noted that different countries have one or a combination of the two feeding modalities in place for different objectives. These include the in – school meals and take home rations where families are given food if their children attend school. Akabi, (2013), pointed out that the school feeding can be grouped into two common categories: Programme that provides meals and programme that provides high – energy biscuits or snacks to generate greater impacts on school enrolment, retention rates, and reduce gender or social gaps. Accordingly,

Udukwu, (2011), opined that there are indications of a significant giving in thinking about school feeding and many elements of this new thinking are being promoted adequately under the rubric of home grown school feeding.

Tomlinson, (2007), traced the emergence of school feeding programme to the 1930s in the United kingdom and the United States of America with a focus on improving the growth of children. Hence, in 1900 Netherlands became the first country to move the programme to a new level of incorporating school meals into a national legislation. And by the 1930s, the United Kingdom and the United States had also incorporated the school feeding programme as part of their national programmes. A further review indicates that school feeding initiatives have been in existence since late 1700's and originated as projects of donors in Europe.

He remarked that the United states of America began the practice of initiating school feeding programme in Austria as an act of international aid aimed at combating the severe malnutrition of children in the 1940s after the second world war. And since then, school feeding programme have become a key part of food assistance, relief emergency and development programme.

School feeding programme is a social safety net for children and as part of the national development goals. It provides an important new opportunity to assist poor families and feed hungry children. It also provides incentives for poor families to send their children to school and keep them there. Therefore, in order to improve the nutritional status of school children the federal government of Nigeria launched the home grown feeding and health programme in September, 2005 under the coordination of the federal ministry of education (FME, 2007).

Empirical Studies

Taylor and Ogbogu, (2016), conducted a study on the effects of school feeding programme on enrolment and performance of public elementary school pupils in Osun state, Nigeria. The study was carried out with a view to determine its effects on school enrolment, retention and academic performance of the pupils. It also sort to determine the challenges encountered in the implementation

of the programme in the state. The study adopted the survey research design and obtained its data from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire administered on 116 respondents in 10 randomly selected public elementary schools in Osun state.

The primary data were complemented by – in-depth interviews of 23 purposively selected officers involved in the implementation and monitoring of the school feeding programme. The retrieved data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results showed that the school feeding programme in Osun State ensured that pupils in public elementary schools were fed daily. And that this resulted in an increase in pupils enrolment, retention, as well as regularity and punctuality in school attendance. It was also discovered that it enhanced the pupils' performance in curricular and extra-curricular activities. The major challenges found in the study were insufficient funding, insufficient classrooms and furniture to cope with increase in enrolment, among others. It is therefore necessary to carry out a similar study to ascertain public perception of the effectiveness of the School Feeding Programme in Ebonyi state.

Theoretical Framework

Gregory, Theory of Perception. This study will adopt Gregory's theory of perception. One of the most widely held constructivist theories of perception is Gregory's theory who used the flow of ontogenetic time (Gregory, 1990). Gregory established mechanisms for the explanation of impressions and reasons why our perception is so complex and universal.

One of the greatest advantages of this approach is that when speaking of the process of perception, it takes into account our personal history and that we understand that to operate with sensory data does not necessarily mean to perceive, but to perceive always means to integrate feelings into a wider context of our beliefs and opinions. It also involves active participation of higher cognitive function responsible for constructing. The brain therefore has to guess what an individual sees based on previous experiences (McLeod, 2018). This theory is thus suitable for this study because based on the past experience of pupil that received food in the course of HGSEP, they will have to integrate their feedings and say their opinion.

Design

This study will adopt a cross – sectional survey design. A survey research is that social research which seeks to get an overview of all the subjects, a total perception of the situation of things at a given point in time using interviews, questionnaire and other related methods (Obikeze, 1990, Ezech, led), (2005). This design is proper since it will seek to elicit information from a sample/target population regarding their opinion on the effectiveness of the school feeding programme on enrolment of pupils in public primary schools in Ebonyi State.

Area of the Study

This study will be carried out in Ebonyi State, South East, Nigeria. The state has three educational zones namely: Abakaliki , Onueke , and Afikpo Education Zones.

Population of the Study

The population comprised 1,006 public primary schools in the state practicing HGFSP. The population of the pupils is 317,087 (Ebonyi State Universal Basic Education Board 2018).

Sampling and Sampling Techniques.

The sample size of the study is 486 pupils, in fifty – four (54) pupils primary schools, which is 5% of public primary schools, in Ebonyi State. A multi-stage sampling technique will be used. This procedure will involve, firstly dividing the state into education zones. Abakaliki, Onueke, and Afikpo zones. secondly, purposive sampling will be used to select seven local government areas where the study will be carried out, Abakaliki – 2, Onueke, 2, and Afikpo – 3 that are currently providing school meals (in-school), thirdly, selection of schools in different LGAs and lastly nine (9) pupils (3 each in primary 1, 2, and 3 respectively) will be randomly selected.

Instrument for Data Collection.

The main instrument used for data collection in this study are the questionnaire schedule, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interview. According to walker (1985), and Obikeze, (1990), the focus group discussion uncovers areas of agreement and disagreement on any given topic among members of the community as participants try to justify their views. Again, group dynamics permit the generation of ideas which may not have occurred to

any one individual.

Validity of the Instrument

The validity of the instrument will be established by subjecting the draft instrument to face and content validity by three experts from the Universal Education Board, local Education Authority and Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo.

Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument will be administered to twenty five (25) respondents from non participating public primary schools. Their responses will be collated

and data obtained will be used to computer the reliability coefficient of the instrument using Cronbach Alpha.

Method of Data Collection.

The researcher with the aid of research assistance distributed copies of the questionnaire to the respondents

Method of Data Analysis

The data generated were analyzed using descriptive statistics-frequency tables and percentages.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Table1. Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Dimographic Characteristics{n- 486}. This and the Focus Group Discussion {FGD} were used in Data Analysis. See Appendix 1 for more details.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	273	56.2
Female	213	43.8
Total	486	100.0
Class		
Primary 1	122	25.1
Primary 2	179	36.8
Primary 3	185	38.1
Total	486	100.0
LGA		
Abakaliki	70	14.4
Ohaukwu	69	14.2
Ezza South	69	14.2
Ikwo	70	14.4
Ohaozara	69	14.2
Afikpo North	70	14.4
Ivo	69	14.2
Total	486	100.0
Education zone		
Ebonyi North	139	28.6
Ebonyi Central	139	28.6
Ebonyi south	208	42.0
Total	486	100.0

Table 4.1 shows the distribution of respondents by sex, class, LGA, and education zones. It indicates that 373 (56.2%) were males while 213 (43.8%) were females.

Furthermore, 122 (25.1%) were in primary 1, 179 (36.8%) in primary 2, and 185 (38.1%) in primary 3 respectively.

Based on local government areas, Abakaliki had 70 (14.4%), Ohaukwu 69 (14.2%), Ezza-South 69 (14.2%), Ikwo 70 (14.4%), Ohaozara 69 (14.2%), Afikpo North 70 (14.4%), and Ivo 69 (14.2%).

In terms of education zones, Ebonyi North had 139 (28.6%) respondents, Ebonyi Central 139 (28.6%), and Ebonyi South 208 (42.8), Ebonyi South Zone had more number of respondents because it has five local government areas while Ebonyi North and Central has four local government areas each.

Hence from the table it can be observed that all the classes focused by the School Feeding Programme were involved in the study. Furthermore, the sex of the respondents, their local government area and educational zones were put into consideration.

Substantive Issues of the Study

The substantive issues of the study were presented, analysed and discussed in line with the frequency tables following. These frequency tables were generated from the questionnaire items 1-11.

Table 2 Opinion of Respondents by Sex on being Fed Regularly in the School on School Days in Ebonyi State.

Variable	Accepted	Not accepted	Total
Sex			
Male	46 (16.8%)	225 (83.2%)	273 (100%)
Female	37 (17.4%)	176(82.6%)	213 (100%)

Source: Fieldwork 2022.

The above table reveals the perception of male and female respondents on the regularity of feeding in the school on school days in line with the school feeding programme. It indicates that majority of the respondents both male and female admitted that they were not fed regularly (daily) in the school.

Hence, only 46 males, representing 16.8% and 37 females representing 17.4% admitted being fed daily while 227 males (83.2%) and 176 females (82.6%) denied being fed regularly in the school. Furthermore from their responses it was indicated that sometimes they were fed once or twice a week or not at all.

This goes to agree with the opinion of discussants from Focus Group Discussion (FGDI) that in some local government areas, the food vendors appear once in a while and disappears till another term. One of the participants observed that in her school, the food vendor never supplied food more than 10 times in a term. Similarly, other participants noted that the food vendors only surface at the middle of the term once or twice and suddenly disappears

Table 3.

Perception of Respondents by Class on being fed Regularly in the School.

Variable	Accepted	Not accepted	Total
Primary 1	53 (10.9%)	433 (89.1%)	486 (100%)
Primary 2	25 (5.1%)	461 (94.9%)	486 (100%)
Primary 3	0 (0%)	486 (100%)	486 (100%)

Source: Fieldwork: 2022

The above table indicates that majority of the respondents across the classes were of the view that they were not regularly fed in the school. Hence, in primary 1, only 53 (10.9%) respondents admitted being fed regularly, in primary 2 only 25 (5.1%) respondents and in primary 3, no respondent admitted being fed regularly in the school. On the other hand 433 (89.1%) respondents in primary 1, 461 (94.9%) respondents in primary 2 and 486 (100%) respondents in primary 3 all denied being regularly fed in the school. This shows that the respondents did not differ on their perception on the regularity of feeding in the school. Their perception was further strengthened by comments by discussants in the FGD regarding the regularity/frequency of the school feeding programme (SFP) in Ebonyi State.

Table 4. perception of respondents on type of food served to pupils.

Variable	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
Male	263 (96.3%)	105 (38.5%)	161 (57.0%)	201 (73.6%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Female	209 (98.1%)	211 (99.12%)	207 (97.2%)	199 (94.4%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Key:

A – Yam patridge, B – Rice, C – Okpa D – Moi Moi, E – Eggs, F – fruits, G – meat
 H – Fish, I – Garri, J – Beans, K – Chin-chin, L – Biscuits, M – noodles

Source: Fieldwork: 2022

The above table shows the perception of male and female respondents on the type of food served to pupils in Ebonyi State. It reveals that they are served with yam porridge-males 263 (96.3%) female 209 (98.1%), Rice – males 105 (38.5%), females 211 (99.1%), okpa-males, 161 (60%) females, 207 (97.2%); moi-moi-males 201 (73.6%), female, 199 (93.4%). The table further revealed that such food like eggs, fruits, meat, fish, garri, beans, chin-chin, biscuits, and noodles were not served to pupils in Ebonyi State. This is evident since none of the respondents admitted ever being fed on those meals/food.

Table 5. Perception of Respondents on the Effects of SFP on Enrolment and Retention of Pupils in Primary Schools in Ebonyi State.

S/N	ITEMS	Accepted	Not accepted
3	Come to school every day because of the school meal served	115 (23.7)	371 (76.3)
4	Remain in school till dismissal because of the meal	235 (48.4)	251 (51.6)
5	Participate and remember better lessons taught because of the meal	275 (56.6)	211 (43.4)
6	Tell other children to attend my school	75 (15.4)	411 (84.6)
7	More children attend public primary schools than private school in my area	65 (13.4)	421 (86.6)
8	Do not come to school late because of the meal	61 (12.6)	425 (87.4)
9	My parents express joy over the school meal	125 (25.7)	361 (74.3)
10	People come to supervise the school meal from UBEB/LEA	17 (3.5)	469 (96.5)
11	The quantity and quality of the school should be improved	411 (84.6)	75 (15.14)

Source: Fieldwork 2022.

Table 5 presents the perception of respondents on the effects of the SFP on enrolment and retention of pupils in primary schools in Ebonyi State. The table reveals that only 23.7% admitted that they attend school daily because of the meal they are served while 76.3% were indifferent. On the issue of pupils remaining in school till dismissal because of the meal, 48.4% agreed while 51.6% said no. Considering the ability of pupils to participate and remember better lessons taught, 56.6% said yes while 43.4% said no. This implies that the programme has not positively impacted on the pupils in terms of increasing enrolment of pupils in public primary schools.

Hypothesis 1 There is no significant difference between the Male and female pupils on their perception of the type of food served in the school feeding programme in Ebonyi State.

Table 6; Chi square(χ^2) analysis of perception of respondents on type of food served to pupils.

Variable	Yam partridge	Rice	Okpa	Moi moi	Total
Male	63 (23.3%)	65 (33.8%)	70 (25.0%)	75 (27.4%)	273
Female	61 (28.6%)	62 (29.10%)	50 (23.4%)	40 (18.7%)	213

Formula; $\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ with 3degree of freedom, at 0.05 signi ficant levl = 0.23

Since the calculated value= 0.23, is less than the critical value= 7.82, the hypothesis is therefore accepted as no difference in their perceptions.

On whether greater number of pupils attend public primary school, than private schools the table reveals that only 13.4% admitted while 86.6% said that it was not true. Based on punctuality, only 12.6% admitted that they are always punctual because of the school meal while 86.6% of the pupils noted that the meal has no influence on their punctuality to school.

On the issue of parents' appreciation of the school meal, 25.7% noted that their parents express joy over the meal, while 74.3% confessed that their parents do not openly express joy over the meal. This further indicates that both pupils and parents have not seriously felt the positive impact of the school feeding programme. This further confirms the assertion of some participants in the FGD, who noted that the school feeding programme has been poorly implemented in primary schools in Ebonyi State. According to them, the vendors are inconsistent and not regular.

On the issue of monitoring and supervision of the programme, 3.5% of the respondents admitted that the school meal is monitored and supervised while 96.5% denied the fact. This shows that the Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and the Local Education Authority (LEA) do not monitor or supervise the food vendors. And this makes the vendors to act and behave anyhow. Furthermore, on the quality and quantity of the school meal, 84.6% admitted that there is need for improvement, while only 15.4% observed that there is no need. This also agreed with the opinion of

some participants in the FGD that there is serious need to supervise and monitor the food given to pupils since the food is prepared from outside. This is to ascertain the quality of the food and the environment.

They further noted that lack of effective monitoring and evaluation system and poor quantity and quality of food served constitute serious impediments to the success of the School Feeding Programme in Ebonyi State.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that School Feeding Programme is a vital joint World Bank and Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education intervention which has a lot of intended educational benefits. It is therefore intended to improve the enrolment and retention of primary school pupils in public primary schools in Ebonyi State but on the contrary, the enrolment of pupils in public primary schools in the state has been in a steady decline, while parents and pupils patronize private and mission schools. Hence, despite the fact that over the years the World Food Programme has shown keen interest in School Feeding Programmes across countries of the world and had suggested standards to guide the design and implementation of sustainable school meals. This study found that the implementation of the School Feeding Programme falls short of some of the standards set out by the World Food Programme due to a number of challenges. The study therefore concluded that the state government through the Universal Basic Education Board (UBEC) and the Local Education Authorities in Collaboration with the State Ministry

of Education should make concerted efforts to address the gaps identified in the programme implementation in order to sustain the desired increase in pupils enrolment and retention in public primary school in Ebonyi State. Hence to achieve this, the study suggested that intensive monitoring and supervision of the programme should be

undertaken by the relevant bodies. Again, there should be sufficient funding to improve the quality and quantity of food served. There is also serious need for further research to be carried out on why parents prefer private/mission primary schools to public schools in Ebonyi State.

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