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INFLUENCE OF FREE SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME ON PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS' ENROLLEMENT IN ASA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KWARA STATE

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Abstract

Abstract

The Free School Feeding Programme (FSFP) has been a significant intervention in the Nigerian education sector, aimed at improving the enrolment and retention rates of children in primary schools. However, the effectiveness of the programme has been subject to various debates and controversies, with some stakeholders questioning its impact on educational outcomes. This study examines the influence of free school feeding programmes on primary school enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey was used to conduct this study. 20 schools were sampled using simple random sampling technique. The data were analysed using percentage and chart. The study found that free school feeding programmes have a positive influence on primary school pupil's enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State with significant increase in 2020/2021 session (13.30%), 2021/2022 (31.06%) and 2022/2023 (42.46%). Furthermore, the study found no significant difference in the influence of free school feeding programmes for primary school pupils' enrolment based on gender with female (54.3%) and male (45.7%). These findings have important implications for policymakers and educators in developing countries, who can use free school feeding programmes as a tool to improve enrolment rates and promote access to education among primary school children. It was therefore recommended that the programme should be improved to promote more enrolments and successes.

List for Keywords: School Feeding, Enrolment, Programme,

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INTRODUCTION

School Feeding (SF) is provision of food to school children. The Free School Feeding Programme (FSFP) is an intervention programme established for the provision of food to school children for free especially at lower basic education. The Free School Feeding Programme (FSFP) has been a significant intervention in the Nigerian education sector, aimed at improving the enrolment and retention rates of children in primary schools. However, the effectiveness of the programme has been subject to various debates and controversies, with some stakeholders questioning its impact on educational outcomes.

In Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, where the FSFP has been implemented, little is known about its influence on primary school enrolment. Couple with the fact that access to education is a fundamental right of every child, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, noticeable children in developing countries, including Nigeria, and particularly in Asa Local Government of Kwara State do not have access to basic education due to various factors which may include feeding, poverty, cultural barriers, and inadequate infrastructure. The FSFP has been implemented in different states of Nigeria, including Kwara State, which has a high prevalence of poverty and malnutrition. Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State has been a beneficiary of the programme since its inception, but its impact on primary school enrolment in the area is not well understood. This study seeks to examine the influence of the FSFP on primary school enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, with the aim of providing insights into the effectiveness of the programme in improving access to education.

School feeding (SF) is simply the provision of food to children through schools. Different countries have one or a combination of the two feeding modalities in place for various objectives (Oyefade, 2014). However, they can be grouped into two broad categories: in school meals and take-home rations where families are given food if their children attend school. Historically, in-school meals have been the most popular modality of school feeding interventions (Oyefade, 2014). The school feeding can be in turn 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 (Akanbi, 2013).

The introduction of the school feeding is traced 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. Historically, in-school meals have been the most popular modality of school feeding interventions. The school feeding can in turn 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 (Akanbi, 2013).

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It is the assumption of many that, some pupils drop out of school as a result of lack of nutritional meals (Oyefade, 2014). In Nigeria, where there is food insecurity, many of the households find it difficult to give their wards good meals that will help to enhancing their cognitive and sensory abilities in school (Osun Defender, 2014). United Nation quoted in Osun Defender (2014) corroborated its findings that, only one out of five pupils eat good calories in developing countries, in Nigeria less than 500,000 pupils eat nutritional meal in school. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) quoted in Ayoola (2014) also notes that in Nigeria, an estimated 7 million are out of school, from the 25.8 million pupils estimated to be enrolled in school.

Maijo (2018) carried out a study on impact of school feeding programme on learners' academic performance in Mlunduzi ward, Tanzania. Focus Group Discussion and Questionnaire were used. The study employed descriptive research to analyse the data and found out that the programme showed significant impact on pupils' academic performance, enrolment and reduction in the rate of pupil's absenteeism. Also, Lawson (2012) carried out a study on impact of school feeding programmes on educational, nutritional, and agricultural developmental goals: a systematic review of literature. The study used systematic literature review technique. The study discovered that school feeding programme has impact on micronutrient level of the targeted children but has a modest and mixed effect on their health status. Equally, Igboji, et al (2020) conducted a study on the Perception of Pupils, on Home Grown School Feeding Programme in Ebonyi State, South-East Nigeria. The study used quantitative technique of research with survey and analyses the result through non parametric tool of Chi-Squared. The study found that school feeding programme stimulated the pupils to enrol, attend and remain in school due to the quality and the size of the food served.

In recent years, school feeding programmes have become a popular intervention in many developing countries, aimed at increasing primary school enrolment and reducing hunger and malnutrition among school-age children (Gelli, Meir, &Espejo, 2015). The Free School Feeding Programme (FSFP) is one such programme,

implemented by the Nigerian government to provide free meals to primary school pupils in selected states across the country (Abdulraheem, Oladepo, &Amodu, 2010).

Kwara State is one of the states where the FSFP has been implemented, with the aim of improving primary school enrolment and retention rates among pupils. Asa Local Government Area is one of the local government areas in Kwara State that has benefited from the programme. However, little has been carried out about the influence of the FSFP on primary school enrolment in Asa Local Government Area. Several studies have been conducted in other parts of Nigeria on the influence of school feeding programmes on primary school enrolment. Another study by Oyinlade and Oladunjoye (2017) found that the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) increased primary school enrolment and retention in Lagos State.

Therefore, there is a need for more research on the influence of the FSFP on primary school enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State. This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by examining the influence of the FSFP on primary school enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State. the Free School Feeding Programme (FSFP) has been linked to an increase in primary school enrolment in various parts of Nigeria. Research has shown that when children are provided with free meals at school, it can lead to increased attendance and improved academic performance, as well as increased enrolment (Abdulraheem, Oladepo, &Amodu, 2010).

Similarly, a study conducted by Oyinlade and Oladunjoye (2017) found that the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) increased primary school enrolment and retention in Lagos State. The authors reported that the HGSFP had a positive impact on enrolment, particularly among children from poor households.

These studies, along with others, suggest that free school feeding programmes can be an effective strategy for increasing primary school enrolment, particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. By providing children with access to nutritious meals at school, these programmes can help to reduce hunger and malnutrition, and create a more conducive learning environment for children, which ultimately leads to increased enrolment and better educational outcomes.

Vermmeersch and Kremers (2015) indicated that in developing countries, the there is an increase in pupils' enrolment in schools by 30% with introduction of School Feeding Programme. A study by Ahmed (2014) indicated positive relationship between school feeding programme and pupil retention in schools. Several factors play a pivotal role in ensuring a pupils' enrolment and attendance at school. Factors such as early childhood malnutrition, gender-based deprivation, and income inequalities significantly impact both school enrolment and the quality of education (Oyefade, 2015). Akanbi (2013) states that data indicates a notable increase in enrolment and attendance rates over the years in countries like Brazil, the Philippines, Cambodia, Mali, El Salvador, Indonesia, and Ghana due to the implementation of school feeding programmes.According to Yunusa (2014), School Feeding Programme has the potential to enhance pupils' enrolment and academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

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 Asa Local Government Area of Kwara 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 in the primary education sector. The primary education sector in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State has been facing challenges in terms of low enrolment rates among school-aged children. One of the measures taken to address this challenge is the implementation of the Free School Feeding Programme. However, the impact of this programme on primary school enrolment remains unclear. Therefore, this study is carried out to determine the influence of the free school feeding programme on primary school pupils' enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the influence of free school feeding programme on primary school pupils' enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of KwaraState?
2. What is the difference in the influence of free school feeding programme on primary school pupils' enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State based on gender?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey to assess the influence of the school feeding programme on the pupils' school enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State. The descriptive survey design allows the researcher to gather information, summarize, present and interpret data for the purpose of clarification. The population of the study comprised of all primary schools in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State. The target population was all primary schools in Asa Local Government benefiting from free school feeding programme from the Kwara State Government. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the 20 primary schools out of the schools benefiting from regular free school feeding programme from the targeted population. Researcher's designed enrolment proforma was used to collect data from schools and Ministry of Education. The programme started in the year 2020, school enrolment from 2018/2019 session to 2022/2023 session were collected. The instrument was validated by lecturers in Early Childhood and Primary Education department. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, and bar chart.

Results

Research Question One: What is the Influence of Free School Feeding Programme on Primary School Pupils' Enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State?

Figure 1: Pie chart showing the pupils enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State.

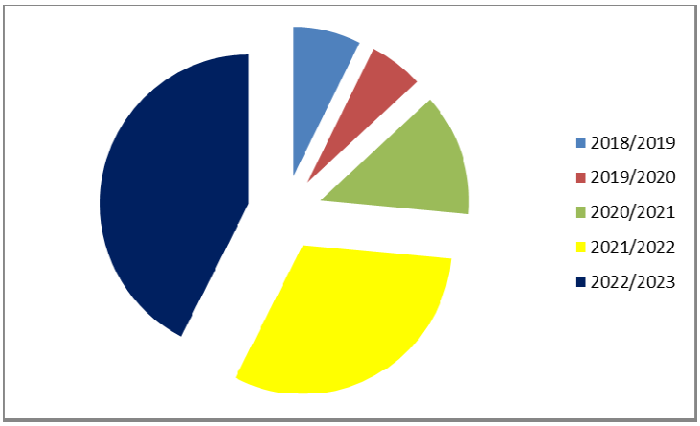
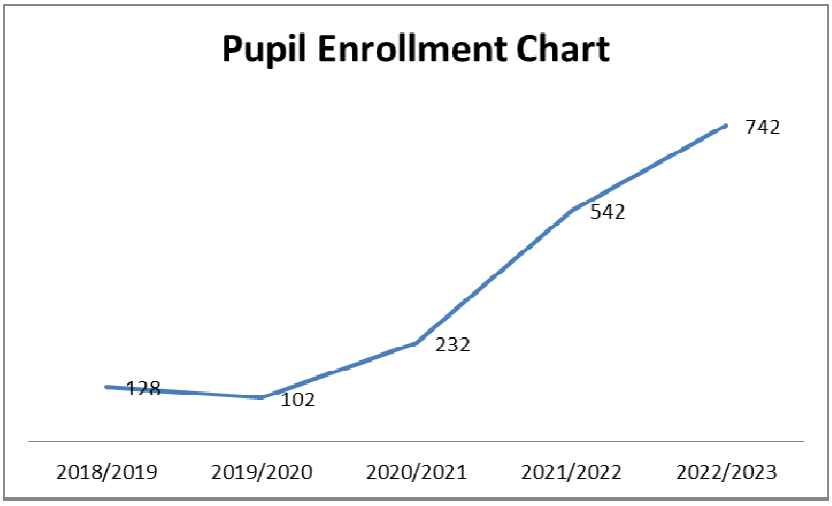


Figure 2: Line chart showing the pupils enrolment in Asa Local Government Area, Kwara State.



Source: Kwara SUBEB 2023

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Table 1:Frequency on the Pupils' Enrolment Rate in Primary Schools in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State

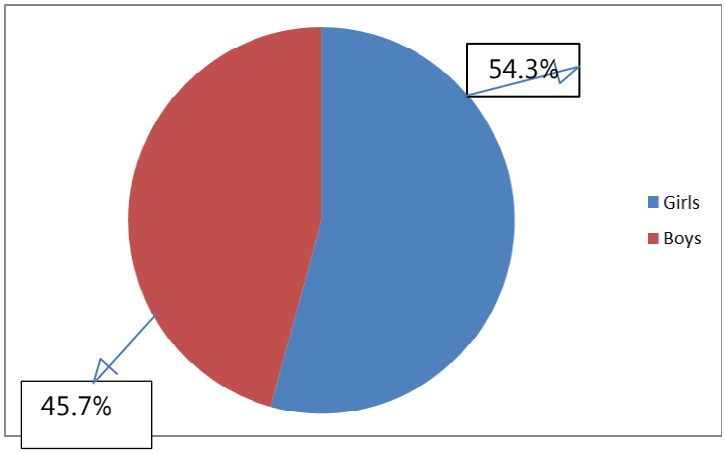
S/N	Session	Number of Pupils Enrolled	Percentage in years in focus
1	2018/2019	128	7.34%
2	2019/2020	102	5.84%
3	2020/2021	232	13.30%
4	2021/2022	542	31.06%
5	2022/2023	742	42.46%

Source: Kwara SUBEB 2023

Figure 1, 2, and table 1 revealed that the free school feeding programme has a positive influence on primary school pupils' enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State. Free school feeding programme increased school enrolment in Asa Local Government. Enrolment was on declining in 2019/2020 session (5.84%) compared to 2018/2019 session (7.34%) as shown in figure 1, 2 and table 1 above. With the introduction of the free school feeding programme by the state government, enrolment increased significant in 2020/2021 session (13.30%), 2021/2022 (31.06%) and 2022/2023 (42.46%). This is a clear indication that free school feeding programme has a positive influence on primary school pupils' enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State.

Research Question 2: What is the difference in the influence of free school feeding programme on primary school pupils' enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State based on gender?

Figure 3: Shows the difference in the influence of free school feeding programme on primary school pupils; enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State based on gender.



Discussion of Findings

This study found out that free school feeding programme has a positive influence on primary school pupils' enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State is consistent with previous researches. A study conducted in Ghana found that free school feeding programmes increased enrolment and attendance rates among primary school children (Akyeampong et al., 2007). Another study conducted in Nigeria found that school feeding programmes improved attendance and academic performance among primary school children (Owolabi&Asaolu, 2018). These findings suggest that the provision of free school meals is an effective strategy for improving access to education and promoting academic achievement among children in developing countries.

Another study conducted in Nigeria found that free school feeding programmes led to improvements in the nutritional status of primary school children, which may have contributed to improved academic performance (Adedeji&Oladipo, 2017). A study conducted in Malawi found that free school feeding programmes increased enrolment and attendance rates among primary school children, particularly among those from disadvantaged households (Mkwara&Munthali, 2019). These additional

references support the idea that free school feeding programmes can have a range of positive impacts on primary school children, including improvements in enrolment, attendance, academic performance, and nutritional status.

The finding that there is no difference in the influence of free school feeding programme on primary school pupils' enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State based on gender is consistent with previous research on a study conducted in Kenya which found that the provision of free school meals had a similar effect on enrolment and attendance rates among boys and girls (Okello&Kinyanjui, 2013).

Conclusion

The results obtained from collected and analyzed data showed that school feeding programme had positive influence on the enrolment and academic performance. The free school feeding programme has significant effect on pupils' attendance rates in Asa Local Government Area, Kwara State. The study further concluded that free school feeding programme has difference on pupils' academic performance in Asa Local Government Area, Kwara State. Moreover, the study concluded that free school feeding programmes are an effective strategy for improving enrolment and attendance rates among primary school children in developing countries such as Nigeria. Moreover, these programmes can promote gender equality in education by providing equal access to educational opportunities for both boys and girls.

Recommendation

Based on the findings discussed, this study recommends that

1. Policymakers and educators should strive to implement free school feeding programmes that are gender-sensitive and address the needs of children from disadvantaged households.
2. Since free school feeding programmes have been shown to be an effective strategy for improving access to education and promoting academic achievement among primary school children in developing countries, policymakers and educators can help to reduce educational inequalities and promote human capital development, which is essential for sustainable development.
3. Further research should be conducted to explore the long-term effects of free school feeding programmes on the educational and socio-economic outcomes of primary school children.

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