

Effect of School Feeding Programme on Enrolment, Retention and Completion of Primary School Education in Kebbi State

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of school feeding programs on enrolment, retention, and completion rates in primary schools in Kebbi State. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzed data from surveys, interviews, and secondary sources. The findings revealed that school feeding programs significantly positively impact all three educational outcomes. By addressing nutritional needs, reducing poverty, and improving student well-being, these programs incentivize parents to enrol their children in school, reduce dropout rates, and enhance academic performance.

Keywords: School Feeding Programme, Enrolment, Retention, Completion and Primary Education.

INTRODUCTION

The school feeding programme emerged as a pivotal strategy to address the complex challenges of malnutrition, poverty, obesity and educational disparities in developed and developing countries. World Bank report (2016) described school feeding programme as a targeted social safety net that provides both educational and health benefits to the most vulnerable children, thereby increasing enrolment rates, reducing absenteeism and improving food security at the household level. Taylor & Ogbogu (2016) see the school feeding programme as a critical intervention that has been introduced in many developed and developing countries of the world to address the issue of poverty, stimulate school enrolment and enhance pupils' performance. It is a versatile safety net that is used as a platform to support children and their families in a variety of contexts (Uwameiye & Salami, 2013). However, Sabates-Wheelers (2021), cited in Ahmad (2022), observed that simply classifying school feeding programmes as a social safety net might be too narrow, failing to acknowledge the preventive, primitive and even transformative impact that school feeding can have. Thus, the authors explained further that school feeding is an all-encompassing social protection intervention which can achieve preventive, protective, primitive and transformative impact on multiple actors through various pathways.

The school feeding programme attracts children to school by providing nutritious meals in exchange for school participation. It also boosts learning and cognitive development by improving attention spans and nutrition (Taylor & Ogbogu, 2016). Thus, the attraction of these programmes is their potential to improve both school participation, learning, and cognitive outcomes.

Over the years globally, school feeding programmes have attracted massive support and attention from governments, international organizations and many development partners. India has a long tradition of the School Feeding programme started since the 1920s, largely by the state governments with some external assistance (Akan & Alaande, 2011 in Ahmad, 2022). Similarly, the emergence of school feeding programmes in the United Kingdom and the United States of America can be traced to the 1930s, focused on improving the growth of children (Tomlinson, 2007, cited in Ayuba, 2021). In Africa the introduction of the school feeding can be 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, and economic growth, political and corporate governance and also, to make the continent an attractive destination for foreign investment.

Nigeria was one of the 12 pilot countries invited to implement the school feeding programme by the Africa Agriculture Development Programme (AADP) in 2003, and some of the nations that implemented the school feeding programme in Sub-Saharan Africa are Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya and Mali. Nigeria was able to launch the programme in 2005 with assistance from the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The central objective of the programme is to improve the enrolment of primary school children in Nigeria and reduce the current dropout rates from primary school, which is estimated at 30% (Yusuf, 2021). The programme also seeks to address the poor nutrition and health status of many children who have been affected as a result of poverty, which has negatively affected the learning outcomes of those children (National Home Grown School Feeding Programme, 2017).

The multi-dimensional role (education, health, agriculture) of school feeding programme can be linked to several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) namely; eradication of extreme poverty, hunger, achieving universal basic education, promoting gender equality and women empowerment, developing a global partnership for development, hence, the use of programme in the developing countries is a significant intervention to be considered (Birdsall et al, 2005 in Ayuba, 2021).

Thus, for the pilot phase of the programme in Nigeria, the programme target 3.5m pupils of public primary schools in twelve (12) states in the six geopolitical zone; Bauchi, Edo, Enugu, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Imo, Kano, Nassarawa, Niger, Ogun, Yobe and Osun. Unfortunately, the programme never moved beyond the first phase. Soon after the commencement of the programme, 10 States out of the 12 States stopped the programme, leaving only Osun and Kano States in the programme (National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, 2017). The States blame the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) for not releasing funds as and when due to the pilot States, while the UBEC accuses the Participating States of non-remittance of counterpart funds, which is a condition attached to the disbursement of the school feeding grants to States (Jumare, 2020). In June 2016, the Federal Government re-launched the programme nationwide. The programme started with 12 States and later expanded to 14 States, 22 States, 24 and by 2019, 26 States of the Federation had joined the programme. The target is to provide one meal per school day to all primary school pupils in Nigeria with the objectives of improving the health of school children, increasing their enrolment, and stimulating retention as well as enhancing pupils' performance. (Jumare, 2020).

For the effective and efficient programme implementation, in Kebbi State, just like other participating States, food vendors were recruited, trained and equipped with uniforms and working materials. In addition, a monitoring and evaluation committee was constituted and headed by the director of the quality assurance department in the Ministry of Education. Also, the local inspectors of education and zonal inspectors of education are members of the steering committee who supervise the programme. The Local Government Education Authorities, which are field offices of the State Universal Basic Education Board, Head teachers, Teachers, and Teachers' Associations, were also involved in the administration of the programme. The strategic and technical partners for the programme include the World Bank, Food Basket Foundation International. The School feeding programme relies on the continuous support and goodwill of these stakeholders.

Various studies carried out within and outside the country indicated that school feeding has increased enrolment and attendance rate, reduced the probability of dropout, improved attention span, enhanced retention and boosted learning and cognitive outcomes, thereby enhancing academic performance of students (Taylor and Ogbuogu, 2016; Ayuba 2021; Ahmad, 2022). Furthermore, in regions where School feeding programme is functioning well, analysts have seen consistent positive effects of school feeding in its different modalities on energy intake, micronutrient status, school enrolment, and attendance of the children participating in SFPs compared to non-participants (World Bank, 2012; Kristiansson, Gelli, Welch, Greenhalgh, Liberato, Francis & Espejo, 2016). Studies have also indicated that the effective provision of food enhances school children's participation. For instance, in the studies conducted by Igboji, Umoke, Umke, Nwazunku, Nwalieji, Umoke, Onwe, Nwafor and Nwalieji (2020) in relation to the effect of school feeding on enrolment, attendance and retention rate, 76.8% of the pupils perceived they attend school every day, 85.1% remain in school till school dismisses, 88.6% come to school regularly, and 73.1% told other children to come to their school. Enrolment means the total number of pupils properly registered and/or attending classes at a school at a particular

academic session or circle (Ayuba, 2021). Retention can be seen as the process where school pupils progress from standard one to two i.e. Staying in school for at least two years without dropping out while completion refers to a state of going through all the grades in primary level of education i.e. from standard one to six and acquiring the first school leaving certificate (Ayuba, 2021).

School feeding can be provided as meals or snacks to be eaten during school hours or distributed as dry take-home food rations to pupils at the end of each day, month or school term, if they attended school regularly (Uwameiye & Salami, 2013). Taylor and Ogbogu (2016) opined that in-school feeding, where children are fed in the school which can be divided into two categories, namely: i.) program that provides meals, ii.) Programs that provide high-energy biscuits or Snacks, and alternatively, some stakeholders offer take-home rations where families are given food if their children attend school.

Cummings and Kulutuye (2017) observed that school feeding has increased the interest of parents and children to be enrolled in school, motivated pupils to shun truancy and absenteeism and improved completion rates in other parts of the world. Findings from the study of Jumare (2020) indicated that the implementation of the school feeding programme has considerably enhanced school enrolment across all levels in public primary schools, but without a corresponding increase in school facilities. In many developing countries globally, school feeding has been employed as a strategy to encourage parents to send their children to school. In Pakistan a programme provides an income in the form of one or two tins of oil to families whose girls attend school for twenty days per month, In its pilot phase, the oil incentive programme demonstrated that it could make a significant contribution to full attendance and in participating schools, enrolment improved overall while attendance increased from 73% to 95% among participants (Taylor & ogbogu, 2016).

Furthermore, Taylor and Ogbogu (2016) conducted a study to determine the effect of the school feeding programme on students' enrolment, retention, and academic performance. It was discovered that the school feeding program in Osun State increased pupil enrolment (78.4%), retention (44.8%), regularity (58.6%), and punctuality (69%) in school attendance. It has also improved the students' curricular and extracurricular results (55.2%). Despite those significant milestones, high enrolment and attendance do not necessarily translate into increased completion rates for children. This is because a poor educational environment can contribute to the dropout rate. Ayuba (2021) pointed out that long distance and that by the time pupils arrive at school, they are too tired to concentrate on school work and also girls are less able than boys to fight against physical hazards such as swollen rivers especially during rain seasons, dangerous escarpment paths which they may encounter on the way to school. Thus, affecting pupils' enrolment, attendance and performance. Oyeniran (2014) also argued that the availability of schools does not automatically result in higher enrolment numbers and submitted that some families cannot send their children to school because the combined cost of fees, textbooks and uniforms is prohibitive.

Therefore, the decision to enrol a child in school and, thereafter, for the child to attend regularly is influenced by many factors (Oyefade, 2014). These include the perceived value of education, the availability of employment opportunities, the direct and indirect cost of schooling and the availability and quality of school facilities (Tarlор & Ogbogu, 2016). This means a lot of factors can entice and promote interest in school. In Turkey, for instance, the interest of children in school was influenced by many factors, principal among them was the expectation of success (Ahmad, 2022). Expectation of success can include having high achievement in school and success in gaining a job after completion of school. Those incentives promoted interest in school attendance, which culminated in 100% school enrolment of children of school-going age according to an annual school census report (Education in Turkey, 2018). Food incentives offered to students, such as school meals, compensate parents for direct educational costs. In many countries, such as Brazil, the Philippines, Cambodia, Mali, El Salvador, Indonesia, Ghana, Bangladesh, Ecuador, etc., where school feeding programmes are implemented, data reveal that the programme has increased enrolment and attendance rates over the years (Akanbi 2013). Results from a study carried out by Igboji, Umoke, Umke, Nwazunku, Nwalieji, Umoke, Onwe, Nwafor and Nwalieji (2020) showed that the Home Grown School Feeding Programme motivates the pupils to enrol, attend, and remain in school. (Ayuba, 2021) observed that the public's interest in school feeding programs stems from a belief that education is critical to improving human life quality and advancing economic and social growth. However, Africa is said to have the fewest indicators in terms of interest for school attendance (Ahmad, 2022). This was attributed to cultural barriers, widespread poverty and inadequate

infrastructure (Alice, Joan & Cheruto, 2016). In developing countries in Africa, children are found idle or engaged in family businesses, roaming the streets in African towns or doing unskilled jobs during school hours and in some cases, girls are pushed to early marriage, trafficked as house helps or even pushed to prostitution (Ahmad, 2022). UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS, 2018) reported that more than 50% of global out of school children are from Sub-Sahara Africa and more alarming is fact that 20 out of every 100 out of school children in the world are from Nigeria leading to conclusion that Nigeria has the highest number of out of school children. In countries such as Nigeria and Niger republic, there are instances where children would prefer to do menial labour work at the expense of going to school or at times remain idle at home unwilling to go to school (Ahmed, 2022).

Despite the significant role of education in enhancing individual and societal good, a number of obstacles, such as poverty and hunger still keep about 67 million children of primary school age out of school, 43% of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa (World Food Programme, 2013). A survey conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2019) indicates that the population of out-of-school children in Nigeria has risen from 10.5 million to 13.2 million, the highest in the world. Narrowing it down to Kebbi state, in many poor households, poverty and hunger have been a barrier to school participation. Low school enrolment, low class attendance, and high student drop-outs are recurring problems in child education among poor households, especially in rural areas of the State. Households in such areas usually find it difficult to send their children to school due to their low level of income. Consequently, even children need to engage in some kind of activities to generate a livelihood for their households. Thus, many primary school-age children in those areas remain out of school. Also, most of the studies conducted in relation to the Home Grown School Feeding Programme in Nigeria were done outside Kebbi State and in other parts of the world. Based on the available literature reviewed on the school feeding programme, there has not been any study conducted about the school feeding programme in Kebbi State. This deficiency created the gap which the present study intended to fill. Thus, the thrust of the study is to assess the effect of the school feeding programme on pupils' enrolment, retention and completion of primary school in Kebbi State.

Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to find answers to.

What are the strategies employed in the implementation of the school feeding programme in Kebbi State?

What is the effect of the school feeding programme on pupils' Enrolment in Kebbi state?

What is the effect of the school feeding programme on the Retention of pupils in Kebbi state?

What is the effect of the school feeding programme on school completion by pupils in selected primary schools in Kebbi State?

Research objectives

The specific objectives of this study are;

To ascertain the implementation of the school feeding programme in Kebbi State.

Determine the effect of the School Feeding Programme on the rate of pupils' enrolment in selected primary schools in Kebbi State.

Determine the effect of the School Feeding Programme on the rate of Retention of pupils in Kebbi State.

Determine the effect of the School Feeding Programme on the rate of pupils' Completion in selected primary schools in Kebbi State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques (Focus group discussions & Interviews). Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The population of the study consists of three thousand, two hundred and fifty six (3256) primary schools, three thousand, nine hundred and thirty-three teachers (3933) and 154,024 students' from six local government under study: Argungu, Bagudo, Dandi, Danko-wasagu, Gwandu, and Shanga making a total of six (6) Local governments with two local governments each representing the three (3) senatorial districts in the state. Primary 1, 2, 3 and 6 are the classes under study. Six LGAs were purposively selected as the sample population for the study to represent the State, two from each Senatorial District. The enrolment criterion was used in the selection of schools visited in each of the selected LGAs. Thus, schools with the lowest, moderate and highest pupils' enrolment are selected across the LGAs. Research Advisor (2006) was used to obtain a sample size of teachers and head teachers, which recommended a 333 head teachers and 346 teachers as sample size for the study. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire. Using a 5-point Likert rating scale of: Strongly Agreed (SA) - 5, Agreed (A) - 4, Undecided (U) - 3, Disagree (D) - 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1. Questionnaire and checklist for in-depth interview were adapted from the work of Ayuba (2021), Tarlor & Ogbogu (2016) and Ahmad (2022). To ensure content validity, experts in test and measurement were consulted. To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, the instrument was pilot tested on respondents outside the study area in some selected primary schools in Kebbi State. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through the use of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, and a reliability index of 0.70 was achieved. The instrument was administered to 679 respondents (333 Head teachers and 347 teachers) in public primary schools in the six selected local governments of Kebbi state. The sample of the study was selected using both the random sampling and proportionate sampling technic. The Quantitative data retrieved was analysed using simple descriptive statistics in the form of frequency counts, percentages, Mean and standard Deviation. Qualitative data were gathered through an in-depth interviews with purposively selected 40 key stakeholders and officers involved in the implementation of the school feeding programme including school administrators, Universal Basic Education Board desk officers on school feeding programme, the Local Government Education Authority Staff, Cooks engaged for the school feeding, SBMC members, parents and community leaders. Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes and patterns in the qualitative data. Secondary data were sourced from relevant records and documents from the sampled schools to complement the primary data (Annual School Census reports from the SUBEB office and school registers). Results from the analysis of the research questions were reported using the triangulation process.

RESULT

Q₁: What are the strategies employed in the implementation of the school feeding programme in Kebbi State

The table below

Table 1: Perception of respondents on the implementation of the school feeding programme in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State.

S/No Item statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
Meals are provided for the pupils daily and promptly while in school	9677	2.81	0.80	Accepted
The SFP is funded through cost-sharing between the Federal and State governments.	679	3.04	0.79	Accepted
The government monitors the implementation of the school feeding programme	679	2.79	0.83	Accepted
There is a policy guideline to ensure the sustainability of the	679	2.83	0.82	Accepted

programme				
The programme enjoys support from international organisations.	679	2.80	0.73	Accepted
Average	679	2.75	0.79	Accepted

Source: field survey 2023.

Table 1 above is a summary of descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation conducted to assess participants' perception of the implementation of the school feeding programme in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State. The data analysis revealed an average response mean score of 2.75 (N=679, Mean=2.75, SD=0.79), indicating that all the suggested opinions on the implementation of the school feeding programme in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State were accepted. The analysis further revealed that school feeding programme was implemented in primary schools as identified by the participants in the study and the results from the findings are presented from the highest to the lowest in order of hierarchy as follows The school feeding programmes is funded through cost sharing between the Federal and State government (Mean=3.04, SD=0.79), There is policy guideline to ensure the sustainability of the programme (Mean=2.83, SD=0.82), Meals are provided for the pupils daily and promptly while in school (Mean=2.81, SD=0.80), The programme enjoys support from international organizations (Mean=2.80, SD=0.73), The government monitors the implementation of the school feeding programme (Mean_2.79, SD_0.83).

RQ₂:What is the effect of the school feeding programme on pupils' Enrolment in Kebbi state?

The answer to this research question was presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Perception of respondents on the impact of the feeding programme on school enrolment in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State.

S/No	Item statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Pupil enrolment has increased significantly since the introduction of the school feeding programme	679	2.89	0.95	Accepted
2	The provision of regular meals has encouraged parents to send their children to school	679	2.98	0.95	Accepted
3	Pupils have encouraged other children to enrol in school because of the food given	679	2.68	0.96	Accepted
4	The new enrolment rate increased significantly in schools with a feeding programme compared to those in neighbouring schools without it.	679	3.16	0.96	Accepted
5	School feeding programme alleviates food insecurity & reduces poverty-related barriers to education.	679	3.04	0.89	Accepted
	Average	679	2.95	0.94	

Source: field survey 2023.

Table 2 above is a summary of descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation conducted to assess participants' perception of the impact of the school feeding programme on school enrolment in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State. The data analysis revealed an average response mean score of 2.95 (N=679, Mean=2.95, SD=0.94), indicating that all the suggested items on the impact of the school feeding programme on pupils' enrolment identified in the instrument were accepted to be the factors influencing school enrolment

in public primary schools in Kebbi state, Nigeria. The analysis further revealed that public primary schools in Kebbi state use school feeding programme as a strategy to help increase enrolment rate as identified by the participants in the study and the results from the findings are presented from the highest to the lowest in order of hierarchy as follows: New enrolment rate increased significantly in schools with feeding programme compared to those in neighbouring schools without it (Mean=3.16, SD=0.96), School feeding programme alleviate food insecurity & reduced poverty related barriers to education (Mean=3.04, SD=0.89), Provision of regular meals has encouraged parents to send their child to school (Mean=2.98, SD=0.95), Pupil enrolment increased significantly since the introduction of school feeding programme (Mean=2.89, SD=0.95), Pupils have encouraged other children to enrol in school because of the food given (Mean=2.68, SD=0.96).

RQ₃: What is the effect of the school feeding programme on the Retention of pupils in Kebbi state?

The answer to this research question was presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Perception of respondents on the impact of the feeding programme on school pupils' retention in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State.

S/No	Item statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	Pupils are regular and punctual to school since the introduction of SFP	679	2.82	0.94	Accepted
2.	SFP has encouraged most pupils to remain in school till closing hours.	679	2.85	0.98	Accepted
3.	The percentage of absenteeism reduced drastically during the implementation of SFG	679	3.04	0.89	Accepted
4.	There was a decrease in pupils' school dropout as a result of SFP	679	2.86	0.95	Accepted
5.	SFP has helped to stabilise school attendance by pupils	679	2.73	1.10	Accepted
6.	Average	679	2.86	0.97	

Source: field survey, 2023

Table 3 above is a summary of descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation conducted to assess participants' perception of the impact of the school feeding programme on pupils' retention in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria. The data analysis revealed an average response mean score of 2.86 (N=679, Mean=2.86, SD=0.97) indicating that all the suggested responses on impact of feeding programme on school pupils' retention identified in the instrument were accepted to be the factors that can increase retention rate in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria. The analysis further revealed that public primary schools in Lagos state use school feeding programme to help improve retention rate as identified by the participants in the study and the results from the findings are presented from the highest to the lowest in order of hierarchy as follows: The percentage of absenteeism reduced drastically due to the implementation of school feeding programme (Mean=3.04, SD=0.86), There was decrease in pupils' school drop out as a result of school feeding programme (Mean=2.86, SD=0.95), SFP has encourages most pupils' to remain in school till closing hours (Mean=2.85, SD=0.98), Pupils are regular and punctual to school since the introduction of school feeding programme (Mean=2.82, SD=0.94), school feeding programme has help to stabilize school attendance by pupils' (Mean=2.73, SD=1.10).

RQ₄: What is the effect of the school feeding programme on school completion by pupils in selected primary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria?

The answer to this research question was presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Perception of respondents on the impact of the feeding programme on school completion in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State.

S/No	Item statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	Pupil average completion rate has improved since the introduction of SFP	679	2.93	0.82	Accepted
2.	As a result of SFP pupils enrol and progress up to primary 6	679	2.80	0.90	Accepted
3.	There is a significant increase in the number of pupils who completed primary school as a result of the school feeding programme	679	2.79	0.83	Accepted
4.	School feeding influenced parental attitudes towards continuing their children's education beyond the elementary stage.	679	2.86	0.96	Accepted
5.	Schools with a feeding programme experienced a significantly higher rate of student completion compared to neighbouring schools without school feeding.	679	3.00	0.75	Accepted
6.	Average	679	2.87	0.85	Accepted

Source: field survey 2023.

Table 4 above is a summary of descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation conducted to assess participants' perception of the impact of the feeding programme on school completion in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria. The data analysis revealed an average response mean score of 2.87 (N=679, Mean=2.87, SD=0.85), indicating that all the suggested factors influencing completion rate, as identified in the instrument, were accepted to be the effect of the feeding programme on school completion in selected public primary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria. The analysis further revealed that public primary schools in Kebbi State has an increase in school completion rate as a result of school feeding programme as identified by the participants in the study and the results from the findings are presented from the highest to the lowest in order of hierarchy as follows; Schools with feeding programme experienced a significant higher rate of students completion compared to neighbouring schools without school feeding (Mean=3.00, SD=0.75) Pupil average completion rate has improved since the introduction of SFP (Mean=2.93, SD=0.82), School feeding influenced parental attitude towards continuing their children education beyond elementary stage. (Mean=2.86, SD=0.96), As a result of SFP Pupil enrolment and progress up to primary 6 (Mean=2.80, SD=0.90), there is a significant increase in a number of pupils that completed primary school as a result of the school feeding programme (Mean=2.79, SD=0.83).

Result of the Qualitative Study on the Effect of the School Feeding Programme on Enrolment, Retention, and Completion Rates

Common Theme 1: The School Feeding Programme (SFP) is a Welcome Initiative

Staff from the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), local government education authorities, Argungu education zone secretariat, School-Based Management Committees (SBMC), and school administrators were interviewed about their opinions on the implementation of the school feeding programme in the state. They unanimously agreed that the SFP is a commendable government initiative. It has significantly addressed issues of low school enrolment and hunger among pupils. Additionally, it has encouraged parents, especially in rural areas, to enrol their children in school and has helped students remain focused and engaged in their studies.

Common Theme 2: Increased Enrolment and Retention, but Not Completion Rates

Head teachers and teachers were asked about their views on enrolment, retention, and completion rates of pupils during the implementation of the SFP. They all concurred that the SFP has notably improved student enrolment rates and stabilised pupil retention in schools. However, many expressed concerns that the programme has not led to a significant increase in school completion rates, particularly in rural areas. Participants attributed the decline in completion rates to factors such as early marriages for female pupils, often occurring in primary grades 4, 5, and 6, before they complete their education. Additionally, during the rainy season, male pupils frequently join their parents in farming activities, resulting in them missing an entire term or more.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicate that the implementation of the school feeding programme has a significant positive influence on pupils' enrolment, retention, and completion rate in public primary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria. This means that the provision of regular free school meals has motivated parents to send their children to school, particularly in rural areas where food insecurity is prevalent, which has led to a noticeable increase in enrolment and retention rates in those schools with feeding programmes. The interview conducted also revealed that the programme has increased the enrolment rate and boosted the percentage of pupils' attendance to school, and also a significant rise in completion rate in both rural and urban areas. This implies that an increase in the School Feeding Programme would lead to a corresponding increase in primary school enrolment, retention and completion rate in Kebbi state. This finding supports the findings of Ayuba (2021) that SFP has significantly increased enrolment and retention rate in public primary schools and that of Taylor & Ogbogu (2016), which found that SFP in Osun state has resulted in an increase in pupils' enrolment, retention and academic performance. This study also supports the findings of Igboji, Umoke, Umke, Nwazunku, Nwalieji, Umoke, Onwe, Nwafor and Nwalieji (2020) who reported that 76.8% of the pupils who participated in their study indicated they attend school every day, 85.1% remain in school till school dismisses, 88.6% come to school regularly, and 73.1% tell other children to come to their school.

Therefore, the availability of free meals can significantly increase the population of pupils who enrol and remain in school till closing time, reducing absenteeism and incidences of dropout. Thus, increasing the enrolment rate, retention rate and also the completion rate in schools implementing such intervention.

CONCLUSION

School feeding programs have emerged as a valuable intervention for improving educational outcomes in Nigeria. By addressing the interrelated issues of malnutrition, poverty, and educational disparities, these programs have the potential to transform the lives of millions of children. The findings of this study provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of school feeding programmes in increasing pupils' enrolment, retention, and completion. Therefore, as Nigeria continues to invest in education and social development, it is essential to prioritise the reintroduction and sustainability of school feeding programmes to ensure that all children have access to quality education and a brighter future.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

Re-introduce the school feeding programme in order to increase school enrolment in public primary schools across the state.

The state government should provide adequate funding for the reintroduction of school feeding programmes for sustainability, aimed at improving the primary pupils' retention rate.

Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems: Regularly assess the effectiveness of school feeding programs and make necessary adjustments.

Foster partnerships with local communities: Involve communities in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of school feeding programs.

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