

Benefits and Challenges of School Lunch Program in Osun State

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Abstract

This study examined the benefits and challenges of school lunch program in Iwo local government of Osun State. It was a survey. The population consisted of all teachers in the 60 public primary school of the local government which is 623. A sample of 244 respondents was drawn from the schools using simple random technique. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using mean. Findings revealed, among others that, the school lunch program has helped to increase daily attendance of the pupils in the schools and eliminate classroom hunger among the pupils. Recommendations were made for the government to create general level of awareness on cleanliness among the people handling the foods by employing private agencies to follow certain hygiene norms for food preparation and service and to also involve some accredited representatives of the parent/teachers' association in whatever that will be given for the project:

Keywords: School, Lunch, Program, Children and Diet.

Introduction

National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a government assisted meal program for the children in the public primary schools. The program is aimed at ensuring that every school child gets at least one adequate diet daily because one of the major ways to achieve the mission and vision of Education is through proper feeding for children. Similarly, School Feeding Programmes (SFP) have been defined by the World Bank as targeted social safety nets that provide both educational and health benefits to the

most vulnerable children, thereby increasing enrolment rates, reducing absenteeism, and improving food security at the household level.

The program is in operation globally, for instance, in Indian, according to Deodhar, Mahandiratta, Ramani, Mavalankar, Ghosh and Brangaza (2010), the program is operating in over 100,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions. In Nigeria, through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, the Home Grown School Feeding and Health

Programme (HGSFHP) was introduced in 2004 by the Federal Government to, among other things, help in achieving the Education for all and the Millennium Development Goals. The legislation provided that at a minimum, all state primary schools must provide at least one meal a day to each pupil (Eno-Abasi & Ujunwa,2015). The phased-pilot rollout spearheaded by the Federal Ministry of Education set sail with 13 states including Abuja, from the six geo-political zones on board. The states were Kebbi, Cross River, Enugu, Ogun, Imo, Kano, Kogi, Rivers, Osun, Nasarawa and Yobe and Bauchi states. At different times, they all abandoned the programme.

In relation to this, two village schools were established in May 2006, by UNDP and its millennium village project partners. One in Pampaida community school of Kaduna State and the second, Ikaram/Ibaram community of Ondo State. The introduction of an innovative school feeding programme which offers lunch to the pupils at midday has boosted school enrolment and curbed truancy among the pupils. More girls are also going to school than ever before. There are currently 196 girls out of the 420 pupils in Pampaida- a remarkable leap in girl-child enrolment for a poor, rural community that customarily marries off its girls at the age of twelve. According to Olori (2005), it is a government program in Nigeria to provide primary-school

children with free lunches and to ensure that pupils learn effectively.

In Osun State, which is the only state in the country where the program is presently ongoing, the program was later officially launched in 30th May, 2012 by Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola and tagged, "Osun Elementary School Feeding and Health Programme"(OESFHP) and has been sustained since then. OESFHP now known as O-MEALS (where the "O" stands for Osun) is one of the few surviving school meal programmes in the country. Beneficiaries of the programme are 254,000 while in the process, capacity building and empowerment of 3,007 community caterers has taken place and the local poultry industry given immense boost. Akanbi (2011); Yunusa, Gumel, Adegbusi and Adegbusi(2012),the aim of OESFHP was to provide a nutritionally adequate meal during school hours while boosting food production by local farmers. According to the State Government of Osun State (The Sun and Guardian news paper, 2016), the programme, has helped increase school enrolment by a minimum of 38,000 pupils, representing 25% since the commencement of the revised programme. Ajani (2009) documented the beneficial effect of the school feeding program on school attendance, advocating that the program be extended to all the states and all primary school classes in Nigeria so as to increase attendance of

school age children and improve enrolment of children in schools.

Despite the numerous benefits the program is bringing or likely to bring to Nigeria children; it is still faced with a lot of challenges. According to Olori (2005), a previous attempt at providing free meals at primary schools proved unsuccessful, due to inadequate planning, a lack of resources and corruption. In Osun State which is the only state where the program is still sustained presently in Nigeria, they are confronted with the challenge of the raw food disbursement and transportation of the prepared food to the various schools. In collecting raw foods like chicken, beef and egg from the local government where the study was carried out, the food vendors' will have to wait for hours before the arrival of the food items. Transporting the prepared foods to the schools is also majorly by motorcycle. The locations of some of the kitchens where the foods are been prepared are not encouraging. The program has been affected by the economic downturn especially in developing countries (Akanbi, 2011). However, some strategies can be put in place to improve and to uphold the program. According to Deodhar *et al* (2010), appropriate mechanism can be set up for quality checks.

Establishing and upholding SLP, especially with the public schools is very important. In a research, Ugochukwu, Onubogu, Edokwe & Okeke, (2014) observed that about half

of pupils in public schools had no lunch pack, that lunch packs play a significant role in the nutritional status and academic performance of school children. According to Oyinlade, Ogunkunle and Olanrewaju (2014), poor nutritional status affects children's ability to learn and that children may not attend school at all due to the inability to purchase food to eat at school. Ugochukwu *et al* (2014) remarked similarly that, children often rush out from their homes very early, with little or no breakfast and may spend long hours (8-10 h) in school daily thereby missing lunch at home. While Olusanya (2010) opined that, malnutrition is likely to result in poor attendance at school, low health status which will invariably lead to high withdrawal rate; if the millennium goal of education for all by 2015 is to be achieved, there is the need to put in place measures that will increase children enrolment, retention and improved academic performance. When children are well fed, their learning abilities heightens and their level of concentration better because their sugar levels would be affected.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the benefits and challenges of school lunch program in Osun state. Specifically the study determined the:

1. benefits of school meal program to public primary schools in Osun state.
2. challenges facing school meal program in Osun state.

- possible strategies to adopt in combating the challenges of school lunch program in Osun State.

Methodology

The design and area of the study: The research was a survey. The area of the study was Iwo local government (LGA) of Osun State

Population of the study: The population consisted of all the teachers in the public primary schools in Iwo local government area of Osun state. The total number of public primary schools in the local government was 60 in all the 15 wards that made up the local government. The total number of teachers in all the primary schools in the local government was 623 (Universal Basic Education Commission, UBEC, 2010)

Sample for the study: Simple random sampling technique was used to select one primary school, from each ward; this enabled a good representative across the whole local government. 17 teachers were then selected from each of the schools, making a total of 155 teachers.

Instrument for data collection: Structure questionnaire was used for

data collection. The questionnaire contains four sections 'A', 'B' and 'C' and formulated based on the 4-points Likert scale type. The response categories for all the sections of the questionnaire were; Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was face validated by three experts in the department of Home Economics in Adeyemi College of Education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha procedure as it dealt with multiple scored items; it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83.

Data collection and analysis technique: Two hundred and fifty five copies of the questionnaire were distributed, 248 were retrieved representing 97% retrieval. 244 copies were appropriately filled which were eventually analyzed. Mean scores were used to answer the research questions. Any item with the mean rating of 2.50 and above was regarded as agreement while anyone with the mean rating of below 2.5 was taken as disagreement.

Findings

Table 1: Mean responses of the teachers on the benefits of school lunch program to the public primary schools in Iwo local Government of Osun state.

N = 244			
S/N	Benefits of school meal programs	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Increase in pupil's enrolment.	3.96	Agreed
2	Socialization among pupils	2.95	Agreed
3	Reduce classroom hunger.	3.47	Agreed
4	Increase daily attendance in school.	3.77	Agreed
5	Improve nutritional status of the pupils.	2.61	Agreed

6	Contribute to the improvement of the academic performance of the pupils	3.44	Agreed
7	Imparting good hygiene in the pupils	2.74	Agreed
8	Imparting table manner in the pupils.	2.72	Agreed
9	Imparting nutritional education in the pupils	2.94	Agreed
10	Accessibility to low income family.	3.95	Agreed
11	Understanding of balance diet	2.58	Agreed

Key: N = Number of the teachers, \bar{X} = Mean.

Table 1 reveals that the respondents agreed that all the item are benefits the SLP has brought to the public primary schools and the pupils in Iwo local government area of Osun State.

Table 2: Mean responses of teachers on the challenges facing school lunch program in Iwo local Government of Osun state.

N = 244

S/N	Possible challenges facing the school lunch program.	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Inadequate infrastructure such as stores and kitchen.	3.62	Agreed
2	Recess time not enough to serve the food	3.98	Agreed
3	Possibility of food borne diseases.	3.17	Agreed
4	Lack of adequate supervision of meal preparation and handling process	3.35	Agreed
5	Transportation problem in delivery the food on time.	3.91	Agreed
6	Problem of pure drinking water.	3.95	Agreed

Key: N = Number of the teachers, \bar{X} = Mean.

Table 2 reveals that the respondents agreed that all the 6 items are part of the challenges facing the SLP in Osun State.

Table 3: Mean responses of teachers on the strategies that can be adopted in combating the challenges of the school lunch program.

N = 244

S/N	Possible strategies for the school lunch challenges	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Food preparation should be done within the school premises.	3.73	Agreed
2	The food should be disbursed to the school directly	2.42	Disagreed
3	Skilled personnel should be employed to supervise the preparation of the food.	3.07	Agreed
4	Clean drinking water should also be supplied to the pupils.	3.37	Agreed
5	Special vehicle for the transportation of the food items	3.06	Agreed
6	Food stores within the school premises	2.16	Disagreed

Key: N = Number of the teachers \bar{X} = Mean.

Table 3 reveals that the respondents agreed with items 1, 3, 4 and 5 as part of the possible strategies that can be adopted to combat the challenges and disagreed with items 2 and 6.

Discussion of the Findings

The study has identified several benefits the school children are deriving from the SLP. These benefits are: Increase in pupil's enrolment; socialization among pupils; reduce classroom hunger. All these are in conformity with the opinion and findings of Khera (2006) Midday meal can play an important facilitating role in the universalization of elementary education by enhancing enrolment, attention and retention and also contribute to better educational achievement by at least eliminate classroom hunger; Ajani (2009), documented the beneficial effect of the school feeding program on school attendance in Lagos State, advocating that the program be extended to all the states and all primary school classes in Nigeria so as to increase attendance of school age children and improve enrolment of children in schools; Oyinlade, Ogunkunle and Olarnewaju (2014), a midday meal is an important instrument for combating classroom hunger and for promoting better learning; Falade Otemuyiwa, Oluwasola, Oladipo and Adewusi (2012) also documented the objectives of school feeding program in Nigeria as a way of improving the health of school age children, increase their

enrolment, retention and completion rate in the primary school. The SLP plays useful socialization roles, sharing a meal with children of diverse caste and class background can help children overcome traditional social prejudice. The SLP contribute to Increase daily attendance in school and improve nutritional status of the pupils. These are in accordance with Falade *et al* (2012), the continuation of the program would go a long way to preventing malnutrition among the public school children; Ugochukwu *et al* (2014), majority of the lunch packs of primary school pupils contain poor quality food especially in public schools; Steven, Nicholas, Wood and Nelson (2013), school lunches generally had a healthier nutrient profile, with lower Na and percentage of energy from fat, and higher fibre and micronutrient content; Yunusa *et al* (2012), the aim of SLP was to provide a nutritionally adequate meal during school hours. SLP contributes to the improvement of the academic performance of the pupils. Ugochukwu *et al* (2014) in a research observed that, lunch packs play a significant role in the nutritional status and academic performance of school children, access to a nutritious mid-day or afternoon meal is a very important determinant of the nutritional status as well as the overall well-being and cognitive development of school children. SLP helps in imparting table manner. According to Tanaka and Miyoshi (2012), the

children could also learn proper manners, by having meals together with classmates. The study also identified the following as part of the benefits of SLP: imparting good hygiene in the pupils; imparting nutritional education in the pupils; accessibility to low income family; understanding of balance diet. According to Tanaka and Miyoshi (2012), understanding of balanced diet and food culture can be enhanced through learning the menu of each meal.

The SLP in Osun State is facing the following challenges: Inadequate infrastructure such as stores and kitchen where it can be made possible for the food to be prepared within the school premises; recess time not enough to serve the food as the SLP was not yet in place when the school time-table was been designed. In a research conducted by Deordhar *et al* (2010) teachers complained that the recess time is not sufficient to serve meals, as the teachers have to manage the whole affair, they do not get time to eat their own lunch. Part of the challenges confronting the SLP was the possibility of food borne diseases; lack of adequate supervision of meal preparation and handling process. These might occur if the cooks are not trained and monitored to prepare the food under a hygienic condition. The other challenges faced are: transportation problem in delivery the food on time; provision was not made for portable drinking water.

The respondents agreed with the following strategies to combat the challenges faced: Food preparation should be done within the school premises. As reported by Deordhar *et al* (2010), in Indian, the government made provision for some utensil and space for the program, materials supplied by state government were of reasonable quality, all the cooking utensils looked clean and were made of stainless steel; there was a separate area for cleaning the vessels; Skilled personnel should be employed to supervise the preparation of the food. Deordhar *et al* (2010), have suggested setting-up of an appropriate mechanism for quality checks; Clean drinking water should also be supplied to the pupils; Special vehicle for the transportation of the food items; The following strategies were rejected: The food should be disbursed to the school directly and food stores within the school premises. This justifies Olori (2005) that there had been instances of the earlier program being abused by teachers who took away the things and contractors who shortchanged pupils; Deordhar *et al* (2012), report also claims that pilferage and adulteration of grains occurs since grains are supplied and distributed in loose form to schools.

Conclusion

The importance of midday meal can never be over emphasized, especially when it is made free to the less privileges, as most of the people in that category can be found in the

public schools. All the beneficial items identified for the study were accepted by the respondents.

The school lunch program in Osun State is facing some challenges among which are the transportation of the prepared food to the schools, possibility of food borne disease, inadequate infrastructure like kitchen and stores within the school premises. In other to prevent the collapsing of the program, there is need to adopt some strategies.

Recommendations

1. There should be general level of awareness on cleanliness among the people handling the foods by employing private agencies to follow certain hygiene norms for food preparation and service.
2. Accredited representatives of the PTA (parent/teachers' association) could be involved in whatever that will be given for the project.
3. Another set of people could be employed specially, for the monitoring during the meal time so as not to disrupt the program of the teachers.

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