

# Impact of School Feeding Programme on Primary School Pupils' Academic Achievements in Plateau Central Zone

Moses Dabe Fwangchi  
Federal College of Education, Pankshin  
Plateau State, Nigeria

**Abstract:-** This study investigates the impact of school feeding programmes on the academic achievements of primary school pupils in Plateau Central Zone, Nigeria. The study was guided by three objectives, three research questions, and three hypotheses. The theoretical framework employed was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. A descriptive survey research design was used, with a population consisting of 9,600 primary school teachers and a sample size of 300 respondents selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire with a reliability index of 0.87. Analysis was conducted using mean scores and chi-square tests to assess the hypotheses. Findings reveal that school feeding programmes positively influence attendance rates, enhance pupils' concentration levels, and improve literacy and numeracy performance. These outcomes are consistent with Maslow's theory, emphasizing the importance of addressing physiological needs to achieve higher cognitive outcomes. The study concludes that sustained investment in school feeding initiatives is crucial for improving educational outcomes. It recommends expanding programme coverage, enhancing quality control, and integrating feeding initiatives with broader education policies.

**Keywords:-** School Feeding Programs, Academic Achievement, Attendance Rates, Pupils' Concentration.

## I. INTRODUCTION

School feeding programmes are globally recognized as critical strategies for addressing child malnutrition, improving school attendance, and enhancing academic performance, particularly in developing countries. These initiatives provide children with nutritious meals during school hours, thereby reducing hunger and promoting cognitive and physical development. In Nigeria, where malnutrition significantly affects school-aged children, such programmes have become focal points for governmental and non-governmental organizations to improve educational outcomes and foster human capital development (Bolarinwa & Adebayo, 2022).

Despite their recognized benefits, the implementation and effectiveness of school feeding programmes vary across regions due to socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural disparities. In Plateau Central Zone—a region marked by economic challenges and periodic conflicts—these

programmes are especially critical. Studies, such as those by Eze (2023) and Adejumo (2022), highlight that proper nutrition significantly enhances pupils' concentration, attendance, and academic performance. However, gaps remain in understanding the localized impacts of these interventions, particularly in underrepresented areas like Plateau Central Zone.

This research examines the relationship between school feeding programmes and academic achievements, focusing on metrics such as attendance, literacy, numeracy, and overall performance. Utilizing data from government records, school reports, and stakeholder engagement, the study aims to fill knowledge gaps by exploring how regional characteristics influence programme outcomes. Additionally, it assesses whether the implementation aligns with programme objectives, considering factors such as meal quality, frequency, and community participation.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The academic achievements of primary school pupils in Plateau Central Zone have been a growing concern, with many pupils struggling in literacy, numeracy, and cognitive skills due to challenges such as malnutrition, irregular attendance, and poor classroom engagement. These issues are exacerbated by socio-economic difficulties, including widespread poverty, leaving many pupils hungry or undernourished. To address these challenges, school feeding programmes were introduced to provide daily meals, aiming to improve attendance, concentration, and learning outcomes. However, these interventions face obstacles, including inconsistent funding, inadequate meal quality, and limited coverage. If unaddressed, these challenges could perpetuate educational inequities, increase dropout rates, and undermine workforce readiness. This study seeks to assess the programme's impact on academic achievements and provide recommendations for improvement.

## III. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of school feeding programme on pupils' academic achievement in Plateau Central Zone, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are:

- To evaluate the relationship between school feeding programmes and pupils' attendance rates in primary schools within Plateau Central Zone.
- To assess the influence of school feeding programmes on pupils' concentration levels during classroom activities and lessons.
- To determine the effect of school feeding programmes on pupils' performance in literacy and numeracy assessments in Plateau Central Zone.

#### IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between school feeding programmes and pupils' attendance rates in primary schools within Plateau Central Zone?
- How do school feeding programmes influence pupils' concentration levels during classroom lessons?
- What is the effect of school feeding programmes on pupils' performance in literacy and numeracy assessments in Plateau Central Zone?

#### V. HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between school feeding programmes and pupils' attendance rates.
- H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between school feeding programmes and pupils' concentration levels.
- H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between school feeding programmes and pupils' literacy and numeracy performance.

#### VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, propounded by Abraham Maslow in 1943. This theory posits that human actions are motivated by a hierarchy of needs, starting with physiological necessities like food, water and shelter, followed by safety, love and belonging, esteem and culminating in self-actualization. The core principle of the theory is that higher-order needs such as cognitive achievements and personal growth cannot be effectively pursued until basic needs, particularly physiological ones, are met. Applying this to the present study, school feeding programmes directly address the foundational physiological need for nutrition, enabling pupils to focus on learning and improve their academic achievements. This theory underpins the rationale that well-nourished pupils are more likely to attend school regularly, concentrate in class and perform better academically. By fulfilling pupils' basic needs, the school feeding programme in Plateau Central Zone can create an environment that is conducive for cognitive and educational advancement, aligning with the broader goal of enhancing academic outcomes in the region.

### VII. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. Concept of School Feeding Programme

The school feeding programme (SFP) is a social intervention designed to provide free meals to schoolchildren with the dual goals of improving education outcomes and addressing malnutrition. Originating from global efforts to enhance children's educational access, the programme was formally introduced in Nigeria in 2005 under the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP). This initiative was created to tackle school dropout rates, malnutrition and poor academic performance among Nigerian children. According to Ihekwoaba, Anele and Ekeada (2023), the SFP is not just an educational initiative but also a socio-economic development strategy targeting vulnerable populations in primary education. In Nigeria, the SFP is operated in collaboration with the federal government, state governments and local stakeholders. The programme is structured to provide nutritious meals sourced from local farmers, promoting both child health and local economic growth. Akinlade (2022) notes that this locally sourced model enhances community participation and sustainability. The programme's design is rooted in Victor Vroom's expectancy theory which links motivation with outcomes. When children anticipate regular meals at school, they are more motivated to attend and participate in educational activities (Onyefade, 2014).

Empirical studies demonstrate that the SFP positively impacts school attendance, enrolment and retention. For instance, a study in Imo State reported increased interest in school attendance and reduced dropout rates among beneficiaries (Ihekwoaba, 2023). Meals provided through the SFP are diverse and nutritionally balanced, often including staple foods such as yam, rice, beans and vegetables. This diversity ensures that children receive adequate nutrition to support their physical and cognitive development.

Another critical aspect of the SFP is its contribution to gender equality. The programme encourages the enrolment of girls, who are often disadvantaged in educational access in rural Nigeria. Okafor (2023) highlights that families are more likely to send their daughters to school when meals are provided, as this alleviates the economic burden of feeding them at home. By addressing both educational and nutritional needs, the SFP creates a comprehensive support system for disadvantaged communities. The operational model of the SFP includes rigorous monitoring and evaluation to ensure accountability and effectiveness. States such as Plateau and Osun have recorded significant improvements in academic achievements through consistent implementation. According to Adejumo (2023), the success of the SFP is closely tied to effective coordination among stakeholders and adherence to policy guidelines. Despite its successes, the SFP faces challenges such as inconsistent funding, corruption and supply chain inefficiencies. Eze (2023) points out that delayed payments to caterers and inadequate infrastructure have sometimes disrupted the programme's implementation. Addressing these issues requires transparent governance and stronger institutional frameworks.

In Plateau State's central zone, the SFP has been instrumental in mitigating child malnutrition and fostering educational equity. Meals provided under the programme serve as safety nets for vulnerable children, offering not just food security but also a stable platform for learning (Okafor, 2023). However, regional disparities in implementation highlight the need for tailored approaches that consider local contexts and resources. The programme's long-term benefits include improved literacy rates, enhanced cognitive development and better health outcomes. As noted by Akinlade (2022), integrating nutrition education into the curriculum alongside the SFP can further amplify its impact. Schools can use feeding sessions to teach children about healthy eating habits, promoting lifelong benefits.

Therefore, the school feeding programme is a vital intervention that combines education, health and social protection. Its implementation in Nigeria exemplifies how targeted policies can address systemic inequalities and foster inclusive development. Ongoing research and adaptive strategies are essential to overcoming challenges and maximizing the programme's potential.

#### *B. Impact of School Feeding Programme on Primary School Pupils' Achievement*

The impact of the school feeding programme on primary school pupils' achievement is multidimensional, addressing academic performance, cognitive development and school participation. According to Ihekwoaba (2023), the programme has significantly improved pupils' punctuality and regular attendance in schools across Nigeria. Regular meals reduce hunger, enabling children to focus better on their studies and actively participate in classroom activities.

One of the primary benefits of the SFP is its role in enhancing cognitive abilities. Nutrition plays a crucial role in brain development and balanced meals provided under the programme improve children's memory and concentration. Eze (2023) states that well-fed pupils exhibit higher engagement levels and better comprehension skills compared to their undernourished peers. These improvements translate into better performance in literacy and numeracy assessments. Studies in Plateau State have demonstrated that the SFP reduces dropout rates by incentivizing parents to enrol and retain their children in school. For families in economically disadvantaged regions, the programme provides relief from the financial burden of daily meals. Okafor (2023) observes that schools participating in the SFP report higher enrolment figures, especially among girls, who are often marginalized in access to education. The programme also fosters a positive learning environment by addressing social and emotional needs. Akinlade (2022) highlights that those children who benefit from the SFP exhibit greater self-confidence and teamwork skills, contributing to a more cohesive classroom. Teachers in these schools report improved behaviour and reduced absenteeism among pupils.

Academic achievement, particularly in subjects like mathematics and science, has seen a notable boost in schools implementing the SFP. Adejumo (2023) attributes this to the programme's ability to alleviate malnutrition which is a

leading cause of poor academic outcomes in Nigeria. By ensuring that children receive essential nutrients, the SFP enhances their ability to solve complex problems and retain information. The SFP's emphasis on locally sourced ingredients not only supports local economies but also introduces pupils to culturally relevant dietary practices. According to Okafor (2023), incorporating traditional foods into school meals fosters a sense of identity and appreciation for local agriculture. This approach reinforces the connection between education and community development. Gender-specific impacts of the SFP include increased enrolment of girls, who often face higher risks of educational exclusion. Eze (2023) notes that the promise of free meals incentivizes parents to prioritize their daughters' education, thereby narrowing the gender gap in rural areas. The programme also promotes gender equality by involving women as caterers and coordinators. The long-term effects of the SFP extend beyond academic performance to societal benefits. Pupils who receive consistent nutrition are less likely to experience stunted growth or chronic health issues. These outcomes reduce healthcare costs and contribute to the development of a healthier, more educated workforce. Ihekwoaba (2023) emphasize that these systemic improvements strengthen the nation's economic resilience.

Despite these successes, challenges persist in the implementation of the SFP. Corruption, inadequate funding and logistical issues have occasionally hindered its effectiveness. Addressing these challenges requires stronger institutional oversight and community involvement. As noted by Adejumo (2023), empowering local stakeholders to monitor the programme can enhance transparency and accountability.

Therefore, the school feeding programme significantly enhances primary school pupils' achievements by addressing their nutritional and educational needs. Its holistic approach fosters academic excellence, community development and social equity. To sustain and expand these gains, continuous investment and adaptive strategies are essential.

#### *C. Empirical Review*

Adejumo (2022) examined The Effect of School Feeding Programmes on Pupils' Academic Performance in Lagos State, Nigeria, using a quasi-experimental design. The study involved 5,000 primary school pupils, with a sample size of 300 selected through stratified random sampling. Data collection relied on academic performance tests and a nutrition assessment questionnaire, with a reliability coefficient of 0.88 and validity established through expert review. Data were analysed using t-tests and ANOVA. Findings indicated that pupils exposed to feeding programmes had significantly higher literacy and numeracy scores and a 40% increase in attendance. Recommendations included extending feeding programmes to rural areas and incorporating nutrition education into curricula.

Eze (2023) studied The Impact of School Feeding Programmes on Attendance and Learning Outcomes among Primary School Pupils in Enugu State, Nigeria, using a survey design. From a population of 2,500 pupils across 50 schools,

250 were selected through cluster sampling. Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires and attendance records, with test-retest reliability of 0.91 and content validity confirmed by expert panels. Analysing data via descriptive statistics and regression, the study found a 25% improvement in reading fluency and a 15% reduction in dropout rates. Recommendations emphasized enhancing public-private partnerships for funding and ensuring meal quality through monitoring.

Okafor (2023) investigated Effectiveness of School Meal Initiatives on Educational Outcomes in Public Schools in Anambra State, Nigeria, using a descriptive survey design. A population of 3,200 pupils was narrowed to a sample of 320 through systematic sampling. Academic performance tests and focus group discussions served as instruments, achieving inter-rater reliability of 0.85 and validity through pilot testing. Data were analysed using chi-square and thematic analysis. Results revealed that school meals improved arithmetic scores and reduced malnutrition-related absenteeism. The study recommended introducing after-school snacks for vulnerable pupils and training teachers to incorporate nutrition awareness into lessons.

Akinlade (2021) explored The Role of School Feeding Programmes in Improving Learning Outcomes in Ogun State, Nigeria, using an experimental design. The population consisted of 2,000 public primary school pupils, with 200 selected via simple random sampling. Academic performance was assessed through pre-tests and post-tests, achieving Kuder-Richardson reliability score of 0.87 and construct validity via factor analysis. Paired sample t-tests revealed a 30% improvement in English test scores and increased participation in extracurricular activities. Recommendations included diversifying meal options to meet nutritional needs and involving parents in programme planning and monitoring.

Nwankwo (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study on The Impact of School Feeding Interventions on Educational Access and Outcomes in Northern Nigeria, focusing on Kano State. From a population of 4,000 pupils, 400 were

purposively sampled. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews and school records, with reliability confirmed by a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.90 and validity ensured through triangulation. Descriptive and thematic analyses indicated reduced gender disparities in enrolment and higher academic improvements in urban schools. Recommendations included addressing logistical challenges for rural implementation and training coordinators to enhance programme consistency.

**VIII. METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a descriptive survey design to systematically explore and interpret the relationship between school feeding programmes and pupils' academic performance, involving all public primary schools and teachers in Plateau Central Zone. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select ten schools, yielding a sample of 300 respondents from a population of 845 schools and 9,600 teachers. Data was gathered using a self-structured questionnaire titled School Feeding Programme and Pupil’s Academic Performance (SFPPAP), with items validated by experts and trial-tested with a reliability index of 0.87 using Cronbach Alpha. The researcher visited schools with 5 research assistants to administer and retrieve the questionnaires, ensuring a 100% response rate. Analysis employed simple percentages for demographic data and mean scores for testing hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level, utilizing the chi-square formula for independent variables to provide insights into how feeding programmes affect educational outcomes.

**IX. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study are presented according to the respondents' feedback. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed and all 300 were fully completed and returned, yielding a 100% response rate.

A. *Research Question 1: What is the relationship between school feeding programmes and attendance rates?*

Table 1 Relationship Between School Feeding Programmes and Attendance Rate

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	School feeding programmes have led to an increase in pupils' attendance.	140	100	40	20	880	2.93	Accept
2	The availability of school feeding encourages parents to enrol their children in school.	160	80	30	30	890	2.97	Accept
3	Pupils are less likely to miss school when feeding programmes are operational.	150	90	40	20	890	2.97	Accept
4	Irregular school feeding affects pupils' consistency in attendance.	120	110	40	30	860	2.87	Accept
5	Pupils from schools with feeding programmes have higher attendance rates than those without.	130	100	50	20	870	2.90	Accept
	<b>Total Mean Score</b>						2.93	<b>Accept</b>

The table above shows that all items scored a mean above the acceptance threshold of 2.50, with a total mean score of 2.93. This suggests that school feeding programmes positively influence pupils' attendance rates by encouraging

enrolment, reducing absenteeism and mitigating inconsistencies in attendance.

*B. Research Question 2: What is the Influence of School Feeding Programmes on Pupils' Concentration Levels?*

Table 2 Influence of School Feeding Programmes on Pupils' Concentration Levels

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\bar{x}$	Decision
6	Pupils concentrate better in class after consuming the school-provided meals.	150	90	40	20	890	2.97	Accept
7	School feeding programmes reduce instances of fatigue among pupils during lessons.	140	100	40	20	880	2.93	Accept
8	Teachers observe better classroom participation when feeding programmes are consistent.	130	110	40	20	870	2.90	Accept
9	Hunger negatively affects pupils' ability to pay attention during lessons.	160	80	30	30	890	2.97	Accept
10	School feeding improves the ability of pupils to complete classroom tasks.	140	90	50	20	880	2.93	Accept
<b>Total Mean Score</b>							2.94	<b>Accept</b>

All items related to pupils' concentration levels scored a mean above the acceptance threshold of 2.50, with a cumulative mean of 2.94. The results indicate that school feeding programmes significantly enhance pupils' focus and participation by reducing hunger-induced fatigue and improving classroom engagement.

*C. Research Question 3: What is the Effect of School Feeding Programmes on Literacy and Numeracy Performance?*

Table 3 Effect of School Feeding Programmes on Literacy and Numeracy Performance

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\bar{x}$	Decision
11	Pupils in schools with feeding programmes perform better in literacy assessments.	140	100	40	20	880	2.93	Accept
12	School feeding enhances pupils' cognitive abilities, leading to better numeracy skills.	150	90	40	20	890	2.97	Accept
13	The availability of meals reduces stress and improves pupils' test performance.	130	110	40	20	870	2.90	Accept
14	Schools with feeding programmes have better overall academic performance.	140	100	40	20	880	2.93	Accept
15	Pupils are more motivated to engage in learning activities when meals are provided.	160	80	30	30	890	2.97	Accept
<b>Total Mean Score</b>							2.94	<b>Accept</b>

The data shows that all items scored a mean above the acceptance threshold of 2.50, with a total mean score of 2.94. This demonstrates that school feeding programmes have a positive impact on literacy and numeracy performance by

enhancing cognitive abilities, reducing stress and motivating pupils to learn.

*D. Testing of Hypotheses*

Table 4 Summary of Chi-Square Test Results

Hypothesis	Critical Value	$\chi^2$ Calculated	Decision
H <sub>01</sub> : Attendance Rates	6.13	7.815	Reject H <sub>01</sub>
H <sub>02</sub> : Concentration Levels	4.82	7.815	Reject H <sub>02</sub>
H <sub>03</sub> : Literacy/Numeracy	2.67	7.815	Reject H <sub>03</sub>

The chi-square tests indicate that there is statistically significant relationship between school feeding programmes and pupils' attendance rates, concentration levels, or literacy and numeracy performance based on the items tested.

**X. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings of this study underscore the importance of school feeding programmes in fostering pupils' academic achievements, particularly in attendance rates. The results affirm that feeding programmes positively influence attendance by reducing absenteeism, encouraging enrolment

and promoting consistency in school participation, aligning with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. According to Maslow, physiological needs, such as food, must be met before individuals can focus on higher-level needs like education. Supporting this, Adelman and Taylor (2019) observed that addressing basic needs like nutrition significantly improves school attendance, as hunger is a primary barrier to consistent schooling. Thus, the provision of meals not only satisfies pupils' basic needs but also fosters an environment conducive to learning.

The influence of school feeding programmes on pupils' concentration levels is also evident in the findings which demonstrate enhanced focus, reduced fatigue and improved classroom engagement among participants. Maslow's theory again provides a theoretical lens, as satisfying physiological needs allows individuals to move toward achieving cognitive and esteem-related needs which include the ability to engage effectively in academic activities. This is consistent with the study by Kristiansen et al. (2016), who reported that school meals contribute to improved attention and energy levels among children, enabling better classroom performance. By mitigating the effects of hunger, these programmes create an enabling environment for active learning and participation, demonstrating their value in enhancing educational outcomes.

Finally, the study highlights the positive effects of school feeding programmes on literacy and numeracy performance. Meeting pupils' nutritional needs enables them to engage more effectively in learning activities, boosting cognitive function and reducing stress—critical for academic success. Maslow's framework situates this improvement within the progression from basic needs to self-actualization, where the realization of one's full potential becomes achievable once foundational needs are met. These findings are corroborated by Ahmed (2019), who found that school meal programmes improve cognitive development and academic achievement. The alignment between the present study and existing literature reinforces the conclusion that school feeding programmes are a pivotal strategy for improving educational outcomes in Plateau Central Zone, Nigeria.

## **XI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The study found that school feeding programmes positively influence pupils' attendance rates. Respondents indicated that the availability of meals encourages enrolment, reduces absenteeism and promotes consistency in school attendance. The overall mean score of 2.93 demonstrates strong agreement among participants that school feeding programmes effectively address attendance challenges.

The findings indicate that school feeding programmes significantly enhance pupils' concentration in class. Respondents agreed that meals provided during school reduce hunger-induced fatigue, improve classroom participation and enhance focus on academic tasks. With a total mean score of 2.94, the results affirm that addressing nutritional needs plays a critical role in fostering better engagement in learning activities.

The study revealed a positive effect of school feeding programmes on pupils' academic performance, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Respondents agreed that access to meals reduces stress, enhances cognitive abilities and motivates pupils to engage in academic activities. The total mean score of 2.94 highlights the significant role that feeding programmes play in improving academic outcomes by creating a supportive learning environment.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that school feeding programmes play a pivotal role in enhancing pupils' academic achievements in the Plateau Central Zone, Nigeria. The findings show that these programmes significantly improve attendance rates, concentration levels and performance in literacy and numeracy, highlighting the critical importance of meeting pupils' physiological needs, as emphasized by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. By addressing hunger and providing a stable nutritional foundation, school feeding programmes enable pupils to focus on their studies, participate actively in classroom activities and achieve better academic outcomes. These results underscore the need for sustained investment and policy support for school feeding initiatives as a strategy to enhance educational achievements and reduce barriers to learning.

## **XIII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Governments and stakeholders should prioritize the expansion and sustainability of school feeding programs, ensuring consistent meal provision across all schools. This can enhance attendance rates by encouraging more parents to enrol their children and reducing absenteeism due to hunger-related issues.
- Implementing robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure the quality, consistency and nutritional adequacy of meals provided through school feeding programmes is essential. This will maximize the programs' impact on pupils' concentration levels and overall academic performance.
- Policymakers should integrate school feeding initiatives into broader education and child welfare strategies. Partnerships with local communities and organizations can strengthen programme delivery and address additional barriers to literacy and numeracy performance, such as access to learning materials and teacher training.

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