

IMPACT OF SCHOOL HOME GROWN FEEDING PROGRAMME ON PUPILS' ENROLMENT AND PERFORMANCE IN FCT ABUJA, PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study assessed the impact of the School Feeding Programme of public schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria on enrolment and academic performance of the pupils. It was done with a view to establishing its impact on school enrolment and academic performance of the pupils. The study adopted the survey research design and obtained its data from primary and secondary sources through the administration of structured questionnaire on 120 respondents in 12 selected public primary schools in FCT based on random sampling technique. An in-depth face-to-face interview of 20 purposively selected people involved in the general implementation and assessment of the school feeding programme complemented the questionnaire. The secondary sources included extrapolating themes and subject matter from published books, magazines, journal articles and government gazette. Administrative bottlenecks relating to processing of payments to vendors and suppliers, delays in crediting the accounts of the vendors and inability of the government of FCT to scale up the meals to senior classes in the schools were among the findings of the study. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were proffered: Government should increase the fund allocation for the programme to cater for the logistics problem associated with monitoring vehicles and to make provision for classroom furniture in schools to reduce classroom congestion; periodic evaluation should be carried out and records of enrolment should be carefully taken and adequately kept by the teachers for future reference for planning; and, government should make arrangement for food vendors prompt payment to reduce the rate at which some schools operate for a week or two without the pupils getting the one meal per day being provided by the government

Keywords: Enrolment, FCT, Meal, Performance, School feeding.

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Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and several conferences hosted by African leaders resulted in the introduction of school feeding policy. The aim was to address issues such as peace, security, good economy, political and corporate governance and to make the continent an attractive destination for foreign investment. Some of these initiatives include the 'New Partnership for African Development' which, according to the plan, is a promise of African leaders based on a common vision and strong commitment and consensus, eradicating poverty and putting their countries on the path to sustainable growth and development and, at the same time, active participation in the national economy and politics (NEPAD, 2003). Also, the 'Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program' and the 'Millennium Hunger Task Force' were, among other things, programmes designed to link school supply and agricultural development with the purchase and use of locally produced food (Bundy, 2017).

Nigeria has been one of the 12 countries that are trying to test and have been invited to launch the programme. Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya and Mali are countries that have begun implementing the school feeding programme. The law that provided the official backup for the implementation of the Home-Based School Nutrition Programme and the Global Primary Education Programme was enacted in 2004 by the government of Nigeria. Section 18 (3) (a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) provides for Free, Compulsory and Universal Primary Education as a government policy. To achieve the goals of the Universal Basic Education programme and the important role of nutrition in 2005, the Regional Department of Education introduced the School Nutrition and Health Programme. The overall aim of the Nigerian School Nutrition Programme is to reduce poverty and malnutrition among school children and to improve the success of the Global Primary Education Programme. The *Guradian* (2019) observed that "almost 60 million children are deprived of food every day despite continent's economic growth in what is 'fundamentally a political problem' and about 40 percent of them are from Africa". Providing school meals is therefore vital in nourishing children. Parents are encouraged to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home to work or care for young ones (Akanbi, 2013).

UNICEF (2005) opined that school feeding services are aimed at providing an adequate meal a day to all children enrolled in schools nationwide. The services build upon the government's current National Home-Grown Feeding and Health Programme (HGSH&HP) which aims to contribute to the realization of national and international initiatives for development. The programme was launched on September 26, 2005. It was expected to help reduce 'temporary hunger'. This is a type of chronic hunger that can affect physical strength and learning. The provision of good and nourishing food can have a positive impact on both the attendance and the understanding of the students. Although the provision of school meals is done in Nigeria but to a lesser extent and optional (Olusanya, 2010), a national study by School Health System in Nigeria by the Federal Ministries of Health and Education showed that 30% of students had a low body mass index (BMI) and common health conditions leading to absenteeism including fever (56%),

headache (43%), abdominal pain (29%), cough / catarrh (38%) and malaria (40%) (UNICEF, 2005)

Some studies on School Feeding have indicated that the Programme has a significant impact towards achievement of the programme objectives such as enrolment, attendance, improved academic performance and school completion. A study by Vermmeersch and Kremers (2015) indicated that in developing countries, there is an increase of 30% pupil enrolment in schools with introduction of School Feeding Programme. A study by Ahmed (2014) indicated positive relationship between school feeding programme and pupil retention in schools.

The following are the research questions for this investigation:

1. What is the enrolment trend in Abuja, FCT primary schools between 2018 and 2022?
2. Does school feeding programme have impact on pupils' performance in FCT Abuja primary schools?
3. What are the challenges associated with the implementation of school feeding programme policy in FCT Abuja primary schools?

The research objectives for this research are as follows:

The main objective of this research work is to assess Abuja, FCT School feeding programme impact on pupils' enrolment and performance. The following are the specific objectives:

1. To determine if school feeding programme increased pupils' enrolment in FCT Abuja primary schools between 2018 and 2022.
2. To examine if school feeding programme has impact on pupils' performance in FCT Abuja primary schools.
3. To investigate the challenges associated with the implementation of school feeding programme policy in FCT Abuja primary schools

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design and obtained its data from both primary and secondary sources to gain an insight into the impact of school feeding on pupils' enrolment and performance in FCT public schools. The primary data were obtained through structured questionnaire administered on 120 respondents in 12 public primary schools in FCT using the random sampling technique. Twenty officers selected for interview from the randomly selected schools in the area councils included desk officers, head teachers, food vendors and the Executive secretaries for the Local Education Authority who are involved in the implementation of the programme in their area councils. The secondary sources include extrapolating themes and subject matter from published books, magazines, journal articles and government gazette.

Conceptual Clarification

FCT Home Grown School Feeding

In support of education, health and social development, the School Feeding Programme is a tool to alleviate hunger (World Food Report, 2006). According to Uwameiye and Salami (2013), school meals can be served as snacks or snacks to be eaten during school hours or distributed as a dry

snack to take home by learners at the end of each day, if they go to school regularly. It is a multi-functional safety net that is used as a platform to support children and their families in a variety of situations (Uwameiye& Salami, 2013).

The primary goal of the School Nutrition Programme is to reduce school hunger. To also increase school enrollment, school attendance, retention and graduation, especially for children in poor rural communities and in urban areas (World Food Report, 2006). It enhances the nutritional status of school children and improves the understanding and reading ability of pupils.

Given the growing economic and security challenges in the country and the growing number of Nigerians needing more support the government of Nigeria launched a Special Intervention Project in 2016 to restore livelihoods, economic opportunities and to feed the poor Nigerians (Kudu, 2020). The project is designed for delivery under four (4) clearly defined programmes viz:

- i. Job Creation and Youth Employment Programme (N-Power)
- ii. Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) Programme
- iii. National Social Safety Net Programme (NSSNP). This component has two units SOCU and SCTO - one generates data for the other to use.
- iv. Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) (Kudu, 2020).

The coordination of the Federal Government's Social Investment Programme was originally domiciled in the Office of the Vice President, and in FCT it was domiciled in office of the Permanent Secretary on the order of the Hon. Minister, FCT. However, as the Ministry of Humanitarian, Disaster and Social Development was created the Social Investment programme was moved to the ministry. Likewise, as the Hon Minister of State for the FCT was appointed, the Social Investment Programmes were moved to the office of the Hon. Minister of State, FCT. In this wise, the FCTA is expected to provide support for the smooth implementation of the intervention programme in the six (6) Area Councils of the Territory (Kudu, 2020)

Content and Administration of School Feeding in FCT Abuja

National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSF) seeks to provide one free nutritional meal for children in primary 1-3 in all public primary schools in Nigeria using food produced within the State. The menu for the school feeding programme is based on national guidelines but adjusted to accommodate local availability. The initiative attempts to achieve the dual objectives of increasing nation's food production and ensuring children go to school. The key benefits of this laudable intervention are as follows:

- i. Improve school enrollment and completion;
- ii. Improve child nutrition and health;
- iii. Increase local agricultural production;
- iv. Create jobs and improve family and state economy (Kudu, 2020).

The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme was formally launched by the Vice-President, Prof. Yemi Osinbanjo at a special meeting of Federal and State Ministers and School Stakeholders in Abuja in 2016. The Federal Government pays 70 naira per meal per child while

the State Governments provide Operational Cost: that includes provision of a dedicated office space and provision of running cost etc.

a. Logistics:

b. Monitoring Support: Printing of monitoring tools, provision of vehicles etc. (Kudu, 2020)

Based on the above, a steering Committee Meeting on the programme of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) headed by the Permanent Secretary was held on 9th August, 2018. The outcome and resolutions of that meeting include

- i. The School Feeding Programme in FCT was to commence in September, 2018;
- ii. The setting up of a State Committee and appointment of a Programme Manager was imperative;
- iii. The modalities for distribution of vendors' forms, adequate sensitization of the public and key requirements for take-off was critical;
- iv. The FCT to provide office facility where the Team would operate from;
- v. Food handlers test and de-worming exercise to be carried out;
- vi. That Cooks would be selected based on number of pupils per school (primary 1-3).

The above resolution was ratified and approved by the Honorable Minister, FCT on 31st August (UBEB Gazette, 2020)

Following the approval of Hon. Minister of State for FCT to commence school feeding in FCT public primary schools (primary 1-3), the steering committee complied. For the effective and efficient programme implementation, food vendors were appointed, trained and equipped with uniforms and working materials. Aggregators distributed them to their various schools as the link between the government and the food vendors. Some accredited vendors got alert while others did not. In the year 2019/2020 academic session 58,491 learners out of 1,119,810 were fed. This number of learners fed came from 322 out of 629 primary schools in FCT (UBEB Gazette, 2020).

Enrolment and Academic Performance

For a child to attend school regularly after being enrolled in the school is influenced by certain factors. Some of the factors that have significant influence on school enrolment and education quality are early childhood malnutrition, deprivation based on gender and income inequalities (Oyefade, 2015). According to Akanbi (2013), data reveal that the programme has increased enrolment and attendance rates over the years in countries like Brazil, Philippines, Cambodia, Mali, El Salvador, Indonesia, Ghana, Bangladesh and Ecuador.

According to Adekunle and Christiana (2016):

In Bangladesh, the research carried out by The International Food Policy Research Institute on the effects of school feeding programme found that the programme raised school enrolment rates by 14.2%, reduced the probability of dropping out of school by 7.5% and increased school attendance by 1.3 days a month. Similarly, in Pakistan the 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. In participating schools, enrolment improved overall while attendance increased from 73% to 95% among participants. The programme also claims to put additional food in the hands of mothers to serve as a contact between mothers and teachers on distribution days (Adekunle and Christiana, 2016: 41).

In Bangladesh, a study of impact of school feeding on pupils' enrolment revealed that it increased by 20% and a 2% decline in non-participating schools (Ahmed, 2014). According to Bundy, Burbano, Grosh, Gelli, Jukes & Drake (2009), "There is evidence that school feeding programs increase school attendance, cognition and educational achievement, particularly if supported by complementary actions such as deworming and micronutrient fortification or supplementation".

Alabi (2003) observed that "there is relationship between nutrition and academic performance because past studies on nutrition show that children that are not well fed with balanced diet do have retardation in their growth and mental development". Nutritional and health status are powerful influences on a child's learning and how a child performs in school. Children who lack certain nutrients in their diet do not have the same potential for learning as healthy and well-nourished children. When pupils are well fed they are motivated to get into school and it can have significant impact on their nutritional status and development, cognitive capabilities and academic performance. According to Jukes et al (2008), previous studies have shown that the quality and nutrient components of food affect the development and learning potential of the learners. Yunusa (2014) noted that students in School Feeding Programme have the potential for improving their performance because it enabled them attend school regularly and studied more effectively.

Empirical Review

Alabede, Sawyerr, Ogunraku and Yusuf (2020) assessed the Impact of National Home Grown School Feeding Programme on the academic performance of pupils in selected primary schools, in Orire Local Government of Oyo State. The research work shows that the school feeding programme has a higher impact on the attendance of pupils than on academic performance. From the result of the analysis, the school feeding programme was able to increase the population of school attendance and regularity in school, comments from the educators also suggested that there are times that food will not be brought to a school for weeks and during the period the attendance in classes usually drop. It is therefore concluded that the programme was able to achieve the first benefit of the programme stated in the address of the vice president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria during the launching of the NHGSF programme in 2016; the benefit which states that "It

will improve school enrolment and completion and curb the current dropout rates from primary school estimated at 30% and thereby reduce child labour”

Akanbi (2013) in her research on the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) in Nigeria came out with the result that the programme has increased attendance and enrolment rates over the years in Osun State. According to that study, between 2002/2003 and 2005/2006 sessions before the introduction of HGSFP, the highest enrolment figure was 97,010; but after the introduction there was an upsurge in the enrolment which has since been maintained up to year 2010 and in 2010 the enrolment went as high as 130,000. Olusanya (2010) in his research on assessment of the “Food Habits and School Feeding Programme of Pupils in a Rural Community in Odogbolu Local Government Area of Ogun State” came out with the result that the programme has increased attendance and enrolment rates over the years in Osun State.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Theory of Change Model which is assumed to be relevant to the purpose of the study.

The Theory of Change Model

Theory of change model is a theory of development practice and it explains how and why initiatives work. Weiss (1995) defined theory of change as the theory that focuses on how initiatives are used to improve growth and social status of the people.

According to Lewin (1935), cited in Lewin (2018), Theory of change model is based around a 3-step process (Unfreeze-Transition-Freeze) that provides a high-level approach to change. Unfreeze are the forces that are striving to maintain the status quo, and dismantling the current mind set. This is usually by presenting a provocative problem or event to get people to recognize the need for change and to search for new solutions. Transition is a phase where new behaviours, values and attitudes are adopted. This may be a period of some confusion as we switch from the old ways of doing things to a new one. Freeze is the final stage of crystallizing and the adaptation of ownership of the new concept. The organization may revert to former ways of doing things at this point unless the changes are reinforced through freezing. It gives a change agent a framework to implement a change effort, which is always very sensitive and must be made as unified as possible. This is what the school feeding programme wanted to do with the provision of food for pupils to attract them to school.

The constructs or variables of the theory of change are problem, community needs or assets, desired results, strategies, influential factors and assumptions. Problem, as in the case of this study, is the enrolment, attendance and performance and the influential factors are the availability of funds as enabling factor in the provision of meals, supervision and other related elements. Community needs or assets also have to do with the contribution(s) from the community in question accepting a change in their attitude towards enrolling their children who are of school age in school. The desired result should reflect an increased enrolment, attendance and performance of school children in that community.

This theory is applicable to this work because it explains how a given intervention or set of intervention is expected to lead to a specific development change. It provides a framework for learning through articulating development challenges, testing assumptions against evidence and the application of logic to facilitate change

Results and Discussion

Table1: Summary of Feeding Done Across the Six Area Councils in FCT Abuja in 2019/2020 Academic Session.

| S/No. | Area Councils/ Vendors | Abaji | Bwari | Gwagwalada | Kwali | Kuje | AMAC | Total |
|-------|--|-------|--------|------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1 | No of Vendors Accredited | 153 | 167 | 236 | 93 | 51 | 181 | 881 |
| 2 | No of vendors that received credit alert | 80 | 151 | 213 | 22 | 36 | 54 | 558 |
| 3 | No of vendors that did not received credit alert | 73 | 16 | 23 | 71 | 15 | 127 | 323 |
| 4 | No of school doing feeding | 44 | 38 | 77 | 19 | 43 | 101 | 322 |
| 5 | No of pupils fed | 8,486 | 12,400 | 17,693 | 2,027 | 3,583 | 14,300 | 58,491 |

Source: FCT UBEB Gazette, 2020

Table 2: The Views of Pupils on the Effectiveness of the School Feeding Programme Policy in FCT Abuja Primary Schools

| S/N | QUESTIONS FOR LEARNERS | SA | A | SD | D | AGREE | DIS AGREE | TOTAL |
|-----|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1 | They serve food daily in the school? | 84 (70%) | 31 (25.8%) | 3 (2.5%) | 2 (1.7%) | 115 (95.8%) | 5 (4.2%) | 120 (100%) |
| 2 | The meals are nutritious | 76 (63.3%) | 42 (35%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (1.7%) | 118 (98.3%) | 2 (1.7%) | 120 (100%) |
| 3 | The programme captured all schools | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 108 (90%) | 12 (10%) | 0 (0%) | 120 (100%) | 120 (100%) |
| 4 | The food served encourage learners to come to school | 68 (56.7%) | 31 (25.8%) | 18 (15%) | 3 (2.5%) | 99 (82.5%) | 21 (17.5%) | 120 (100%) |
| 5 | They serve the food promptly? | 58 (48.3%) | 23 (19.2%) | 39 (32.5%) | 0 (0%) | 81 (67.5%) | 39 (32.5%) | 120 (100%) |
| 6 | Classrooms are overcrowded | 34 (28.3%) | 48 (40%) | 21 (17.5%) | 17 (14.2%) | 82 (68.3%) | 38 (31.7%) | 120 (100%) |
| 7 | Quantity of food served is small | 46 (38.3%) | 41 (34.2%) | 19 (15.8%) | 14 (11.7%) | 87 (72.5%) | 33 (27.5%) | 120 (100%) |
| 8 | There is dining hall where to serve the meal | 0 (0%) | 10 (8.3%) | 64 (53.3%) | 46 (33.8%) | 10 (8.3%) | 110 (91.7%) | 120 (100%) |
| 9 | School feeding encourages punctuality | 42 (35%) | 58 (48.3%) | 11 (9.2%) | 9 (7.5%) | 100 (83.3%) | 20 (16.7%) | 120 (100%) |
| 10 | Inspectors come during cooking and dishing of the food | 23 (19.2%) | 44 (36.7%) | 34(28.3 %) | 19 (15.8%) | 67 (55.8%) | 53 (44.2%) | 120 (100%) |

Source: Field survey, 2022

While 95.8% of the pupils agree that food is served every day the schools open, 4.2% disagree. But 98.3% agree that the meals served in the schools are nutritious, while 1.7% is saying the meals are not nutritious as they expected. In addition, 82.5% of the respondents indicated that the meals served encourage learners to come to school, but 100% of the respondents disagree with

the claims that the programme is implemented in all schools in FCT. Though 67.5% agree that the meals are promptly served according to the time-table, 32.5% disagree. From the table, it is observed that the meals are served daily and promptly, also they are nutritious and learners are encouraged to come to school because they are sure of taking a meal when they come to school.

The data above confirm Ahmed study in Bangladesh; a study of impact of school feeding on pupils' enrolment revealed that it increased by 20% and a 2% decline in non-participating schools (Ahmed, 2004). Although it is clear that the programme did not cover good percentage of the pupils in FCT Abuja schools, table two above confirms this as only 58,491 learners out of 1,119,810 were fed in FCT primary schools in 2019/2020 academic session.

Table 3: The Views of Teachers/Management Staff on the Challenges of the School Feeding Programme Policy in FCT Abuja Primary Schools

| S/N | QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS/MANAGEMENT STAFF | SA | A | SD | D | AGREE | DIS AGREE | TOTAL |
|-----|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 | The food vendors are supervised? | 45 (37.5%) | 48 (40%) | 10 (8.3%) | 17 (14.2%) | 93 (77.5%) | 27 (22.5%) | 120 (100%) |
| 2 | The programme improves pupils learning ability | 54 (45%) | 45 (37.5%) | 12 (10%) | 9 (7.5%) | 99 (82.5%) | 21 (17.5%) | 120 (100%) |
| 3 | Government monitor the implementation of the policy for sustainability | 69 (57.5%) | 44 (36.7%) | 7 (5.8%) | 0 (0%) | 113 (94.2%) | 7 (5.8%) | 120 (100%) |
| 4 | The programme is adequately funded? | 12 (10%) | 23 (19.2%) | 51 (42.5%) | 34 (28.3%) | 35 (29.2%) | 85 (70.8%) | 120 (100%) |
| 5 | There are adequate provision for logistics | 48 (40%) | 44 (36.7%) | 13 (10.8%) | 15 (12.5%) | 28 (23.3%) | 92 (76.7%) | 120 (100%) |
| 6 | There are sufficient classroom furniture's to cater for increase in the pupils enrolment | 23 (19.2%) | 12 (10%) | 51 (42.5%) | 34 (28.3%) | 35 (29.2%) | 85 (70.8%) | 120 (100%) |
| 7 | School feeding programme reduced dropout rate of pupils | 55 (45.8%) | 44 (36.7%) | 12 (10%) | 9 (7.5%) | 99 (82.5%) | 21 (17.5%) | 120 (100%) |

Source: Field Survey, 2022

About 77.5% of the respondents agree that the food vendors are adequately supervised while 82.5% are of the opinion that the programme improves pupils learning ability. In the area of policy sustainability 94.2% agree that government is putting everything in place to achieve that. 70.8% of the respondents are of the opinion that the programme is not adequately funded while 76.7% of the respondents disagree that adequate provision was made for logistics. 82.5% agree that the school feeding programme reduced the rate of drop out in the schools while 17.5% disagree.

Below are some of the statements made by some interviewed respondents:

"The food vendors are supervised though not at all times because some of the vendors still steal part of the raw food meant for the pupils"(49 years old, male, head-teacher in Gwagwalada Area Council, and 52 years old, male, Education Secretary in Kuje Area Council).

The food vendors are greedy to pack the raw food stuff home for their family use, though with reference to the number of food vendors that received credit alert on table 1, one can see that government was not totally committed as many vendors do not receive credit alert after they have invested their personal efforts into the programme.

"I do not think that government is committed to the sustainability of the programme because school feeding programme is not well funded, many food vendors do not receive credit alert." (46 years old, female, Quality Assurance officer in AMAC, and 52 years old, male, Head-teacher in Abaji Area Council).

Considering the number of food vendors that received alert of payment (558 out of 881) one can infer that the government is not taking the programme serious because those that did not receive alert will stop cooking which can have negative impact on the programme.

"Logistics are not adequately provided as some of the supervisors still use their personal car for monitoring and there is no field office for the supervisors where suggestion or complaint letters can be submitted" (48 years old, female, Quality Assurance officer in Bwari Area Council, and 51 years old, male, Head-teacher in Kwali Area Council).

"There are no sufficient classroom furniture to cater for increase in the pupils enrolment as some of the schools paired pupils three or four on a desk that is meant for two" (48 years old, female, Quality Assurance officer in Kuje Area Council).

"School feeding programme reduced dropout rate and absenteeism of pupils as they are always eager to receive their ration" (56 years old, male, Education Secretary in Gwagwalada Area Council).

Considering the responses of the people interviewed; classroom furniture are not sufficient to cater for the increase in enrolment as most of the classrooms are overcrowded, supervisors are still using their personal vehicles for monitoring, food vendors alert is not regular one can conclude that the programme is not well funded in FCT Abuja.

Table 4: Public Schools {1-3} Enrolments in FCT Abuja Before and After School Feeding Commenced

| S/N | | AMAC LEA | BWARI LEA | KUJE LEA | ABAJI LEA | KWALI LEA | GWAGWA LADA LEA | TOTAL |
|-----|-----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------|
| 1 | 2018/2019 | 76,453 | 20,812 | 19,053 | 22,645 | 16,908 | 16,998 | 172,869 |
| 2 | 2019/2020 | 77,426 | 21,221 | 19,231 | 23,798 | 17,761 | 17,595 | 177,032 |
| 3 | 2020/2021 | 81,328 | 46,943 | 25,990 | 24,115 | 24,733 | 46,943 | 250,052 |
| 4 | 2021/2022 | 83,947 | 48,066 | 30,071 | 26,566 | 29,044 | 48,067 | 265,761 |
| | TOTAL | 319,154 | 137,042 | 94,345 | 97,124 | 88,446 | 129,603 | 865,714 |

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 4 presents the enrolment trend in FCT Abuja public schools in the six area councils. The Table shows a steady and consistent increase in the enrolment of primary school pupils from 2019/2020 that the school feeding commenced in the territory up till 2020/2021 academic session. For instance, the enrolment was 177,032 in 2019/2020 and 250,052 pupils in 2020/2021 (29.2%) increase in the pupils enrolment. In 2021/22 academic session, the enrolment increased to 265, 76, which could be linked to the school feeding programme as the motivating factor that caused the sharp increase in the pupils’ enrolment. Thus, with this result, it could be inferred that enrolment trend has been steady and consistent since the programme started in 2019/2020 academic session because in 2018/2019 before the commencement of school feeding programme enrolment increased only by 2.4% (2018/2019 academic session) compared with the 29.2% increase after the introduction of the school feeding in 2019/2020 academic session. The reason for low enrolment of the pupils in 2018/2019 academic session could be attributed to lack of motivating factors that can draw the interest of the pupils to school, the gap which the school feeding programme filled that led to increase in the enrolment. This is attested to by the Education Secretary in Gwagwalada. *“School feeding programme increases the enrolment of primary school pupils in FCT Abuja schools.”* (56 year old, male, Education Secretary in Gwagwalada Area Council).

In the results of interview conducted as well as data generated from the questionnaire presented in tables 2 & 3 above, 82.5% agree that school feeding encourages pupils to attend school regularly and it also has positive impact on their learning ability while 17.5% disagree. This is in line with the study of Bundy *et al* (2009) titled “Rethinking School Feeding” which revealed that there is evidence that school feeding programmes increase school attendance, cognition and educational achievement.

Findings

The following are the summary of findings from the study:

- The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) Act of 2004 made provision for a meal for pupils every school day. This encourages pupils to attend school and enhances performance in FCT Abuja primary schools.

- The school feeding programme led to increase in pupils' enrolment without sufficient classroom furniture to cater for the increase.
- The programme reduced rate of dropout and absenteeism among pupils in FCT Abuja primary schools.
- Logistics was not adequately provided for as some of the supervisors still use their personal vehicles for monitoring.
- Many of the food vendors do not receive credit alert promptly; that shows that government is not committed to sustainability of the programme. Delays in crediting the accounts of the vendors sometimes result in some schools going on for a week or two without the pupils getting the one meal per day.

Conclusion

One of the social intervention strategies to ensure that pupils have access to education is the school feeding programme because it removed hunger among the school pupils. This programme is an initiative of the government that has helped in increasing school enrolment over the years in FCT Abuja primary schools. The study concluded that the FCT Abuja government should make efforts to address the gaps that exist in the programme implementation in order to sustain the good intention of the government that had led to drastic increase in pupils' enrolment and performance in FCT Abuja primary schools.

Recommendations

The study proffered the following recommendations to make the school feeding in FCT Abuja schools effective and sustainable based on the findings made.

- Government should increase the fund allocation for the programme to cater for the logistics problem associated with monitoring and to make provision for classroom furniture in schools to reduce classroom congestion.
- As school feeding programme reduced rate of dropout and absenteeism, periodic evaluation should be carried out and records of enrolment should be carefully taken and adequately kept by the teachers for future reference for planning.
- Government should make arrangement for food vendors' prompt payment to reduce the rate at which some schools operate for a week or two without the pupils getting the one meal per day being provided by the government. This can affect the enrolment trend and the aim of the programme disrupted.

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