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Examining Free School Feeding Policy in Nigeria in the Contexts of Maslow's Dependency Theory and Sartre's Existence Precedes Essence

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Abstract

This paper examines the implications of the free school feeding on students' achievement and the problem facing the implementation of the programme of free school feeding in Nigeria. The paper posited that food is a major basic need which has a great effect on concentration and interest of students no matter the angle from which it is conceived and challenges facing its provision is a major threat to existence and essence. The paper identifies inadequate funding, increase in population, corruption, poor monitoring and evaluation, lack of data to plan, delay in releasing money,

inflation and insecurity problem as the challenges preventing the implementation of the programme. To address these challenges, the article recommended adequate funding of the programme, improvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme. It further recommended a redefine of the roles of each tier of government in the implementation of the program. Also, government should monitor the funds released for the implementation of the programme and ensure political will of the implementation of the programme.

Keywords: Free School Feeding, Nigeria, Collapsing Policy Maslow's Dependency Theory, Sartre's Existence Precedes Essence

Introduction

Nearly every day, millions of children around the world go to school on an empty stomach and hunger disturbs their concentration and ability to learn. There are also millions of children, particularly girls, who simply do not go to school because their families need them to help in the fields or perform some domestic duties. In many poor households, poverty and hunger has been a barrier to school participation. A hunger-stricken child is not only unable to enroll in school at the right age but also cannot attend properly even if enrolled. Besides, such children are also likely to quit school because they have to deal with their immediate subsistence needs before they get ready for schooling. Thus, low school enrollment, low class attendance and high student drop-outs are recurring problems in child education among poor households especially in areas of high food insecurity. Owing to these reasons, the level of education attainment has also been low in many developing countries although both private and social returns to education are recognized to be high (Adelman, Gilligan *et al.* 2008). However, there is no doubt that other manifestations of poverty other than hunger also affect school participation among poor households.

Most countries have put in place different forms of school feeding programs. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa only have school feeding interventions that are targeted toward the most food-insecure regions instead of being universally available.

Nigeria has one of the highest burdens of childhood malnutrition, with disorders affecting more than 42 per cent of school children in the country and responsible for 49 per cent absenteeism of primary school age children, according to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). School feeding programs (sometimes referred to as school meal programs) are interventions that regularly provide nutritious foods to children and adolescents attending school. Benefits of school feeding on children and adolescents include alleviating hunger, reducing micronutrient deficiency and anemia, preventing overweight and obesity, improving school enrollment and attendance, increasing cognitive and academic performance, and contribution to gender equity in access to education.

Contextualizing Maslow's and Dependency Theorists Perspectives for Food for Schooling and School Feeding Programmes

According to Maslow's classic hierarchy of needs, food is considered a basic need. Though this theory has been considered by some behavioural scientists as quaint, artificial and without much contemporary theoretical importance in today's world dominated by globalization and consumerism and the desire to have new goods and services which have changed the ways the world has been viewed, in recent decades (Abulof 2017), scholars and scientists still cannot deny that food, along with air and water, remains a basic human need (Douglas, *et al.* 2011). The emergence of consumerism and globalization only affects the higher-order needs (for example self-actualization, love, belongingness and esteem needs), and do not affect basic physiological needs (i.e. food and water). For example, people desire to have different things in life but when starved, the desire for food automatically trumps all other needs, goals, and desires and dominates the person throughout the process. After satisfying hunger, people then try to satisfy other needs in a hierarchical order. According to Abraham Maslow and modern scholars (for example, Abulof 2017; Douglas, *et al.*, 2011), if the lower ordered needs are not met, individuals will strive to achieve those before moving on to the higher-level needs. In this context of education, for learners to achieve quality education as defined by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, food as a basic physiological need must be provided to all learners (students). Only after achieving basic needs will a child (learner), strive to achieve higher-order needs which include quality learning or, simply, self-actualization according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. For quality learning to occur, it is necessary that all learners have access to food.

Sartre's Concept of Existence Precedes Essence

The proposition that existence precedes essence is a central claim of existentialism, which reverses the traditional philosophical view that the essence (the nature) of a thing is more fundamental and immutable than its existence (the mere fact of its being). To the existentialists, human beings, through their consciousness, create their own values and determine a meaning for their life because the human being does not possess any inherent identity or value. That identity or value must be created by the individual. By posing the acts that constitute them, they make their existence more significant.

To Jean-Paul Sartre, "existence precedes essence." This means that a personality is not built over a previously designed model or a precise purpose, because it is the human being who chooses to engage in such enterprise. While not denying the constraining conditions of human existence, Sartre argued that an oppressive situation is not intolerable in itself, but once regarded as such by those who feel oppressed, the situation becomes intolerable. So, by projecting my intentions onto my present condition, "It is I who freely transform it into action".

To claim that existence precedes essence is to assert that there is no such predetermined essence to be found in humans, and that an individual's essence is defined by the individual through how that individual creates and lives his or her life. As Sartre puts it in his Existentialism is a Humanism: "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards".

Human beings are free to choose their own purpose and thereby shape their essence.

To further contextualize, a student would not concentrate in the classroom if hungry or in fear of dying from starvation. Food is a major basic need which, no matter how individual conceive it goes a long way to determine one's existence either physically or psychologically and therefore, on the long run shapes the essence of an individual. The desire to learn would be overwhelmed by the need for food, thus hindering effective learning and the effort of achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, specifically, equitable quality education for all. Therefore, food should be provided to all learners, including the poor and the marginalized, enabling all learners (children) to concentrate on learning. While food remains a basic need and a necessary ingredient to enhance learning, some scholars argue that such notions (providing food to enhance all learners' learning) are shallow, and would provide minimal benefit compared to the Tuition Fee Free Education Policy, which would improve the education of boys, girls and marginalized students, specifically the education of children from families from poor backgrounds, for whom Tuition Free Education programmes should be introduced instead of 'Food for Education Programmes. While this could be true for example, in Third World countries where poor families may not be able to afford school fees, if fees were introduced, boys would usually be given an opportunity of education before girls. Despite this, food remains an important aspect to consider in delivering quality education. Food, poverty, and other discriminating factors are intersectional, combining to affect student's quality learning. If Tuition Fee Free learning is introduced without students' basic physiological needs (food) being met, the students would become firstly concerned about their physiological needs before their learning needs. In such an event, student enrolment and retention numbers in the system would be mere statistics lacking quality outcomes. Therefore, 'Food for Education' programmes should be introduced in Third World countries where fees are generally much less affordable. 'Food Aid' as 'Food for Education' programmes should be considered to achieve Sustainable Development goal 4 and not only to quantitatively achieve increased enrolment and retention rates, but also to qualitatively achieve lifelong learning for all learners.

The Nigerian Experience

In year 2016, when President Mohammadu Buhari-led government launched the school feeding programme, the idea was to address the growing number of out-of-school children, tackle malnutrition due to poverty among Nigerian children and their attendant consequences on education. These, among other crises confronting education, especially poor school enrolment and retention of pupils at primary school level and the need to improve nutrition among school children, were some of the core mandates the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) was set to address.

From inception, the NHGSFP had the core objectives of increasing school enrolments, participation and completion, improvement of nutritional status of beneficiaries and stimulation of the local economy through the school feeding value chain, with over 127,000 cooks currently engaged in the programme, along with 100 aggregators mopping up

protein items. Also, thousands of other service providers in the school feeding value-chain are participating in the production, processing, preparation and delivery of these free meals to the targeted beneficiaries.

In 2019, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development was created with Sadiya Umar Farouq as minister. With the appointment of Farouq as pioneer minister, different programmes hitherto handled by the office of the Vice-president were transferred to the ministry, including the NHGSFP.

However, six years down the line, stakeholders have lamented that the scheme, instituted by the Federal Government under its National Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) has failed to achieve its set objectives, given the high rate of out-of-school children in the country and complaints from both pupils and contractors handling it. Presently, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children, with the COVID-19 lockdown, challenges of insecurity, especially in the north as well as poor implementation of the school feeding programme.

In 2021, there were 25 different attacks carried out on schools by bandits; while 1,440 children were abducted; 16 killed and 618 schools were closed in six northern states of Sokoto, Zamfara, Kano, Katsina, Niger, and Yobe over fears of attacks and abductions of pupils and teachers (The Guardian, 2021) ^[16]. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), in its report, had revealed that Nigeria has the world's highest rate of out-of-school children with 10.5 million children out of school. The UNICEF Representative in Nigeria, Peter Hawkins explained that "an estimated 35 per cent of Nigerian children who attend primary school do not go on to attend secondary school, while half of all Nigerian children did not attend secondary school in 2021." Conscious of the need to boost school enrolment and retention of pupils in schools, Farouq announced plans by the Federal Government to re-invigorate the NHGSFP for optimal benefits, ensure high school enrolment and retention in which every child of school-age will be attracted to schooling with healthy nutrition.

President Muhammadu Buhari according to Sadiya Umar Farouq, "took decisive measures by launching the NHGSFP to fight the impact of poverty and its attendant consequences on children." Therefore, the launch of the National Social Investment Programme, the four unique clusters of the N-POWER, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) and the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) were integrated to provide maximum impact.

However, the school feeding programme, has been experiencing serious challenges across the states. These challenges have led to the halting of the programme in some states to clarify funding and implementation issues.

Challenges to School Feeding in Nigeria

Poor Monitoring and Evaluation

A major problem facing the implementation of the national feeding programme in Nigeria is the problem of poor monitoring and evaluation. The monitoring and evaluation programme designed for the implementation of the programme at the federal, states and local government levels is weak and ineffective. Adekunle and Christiana, (2016) ^[1] observed that the importance of monitoring and evaluation system in the implementation of programmes cannot be underestimated. The state ministry of education and the state

universal basic education board are responsible for collecting data on school enrolment and attendance on regular basis; the ministry of health is responsible for collecting state-wide data on general child health and nutritional status; Local government education authority secretaries and planning officers are responsible for collecting weekly feeding forms that consist of the number of pupils that have been fed and for collating the data for the programme and the zonal inspectors of education are responsible for monitoring the feeding process, environmental health and enrolment data. At the school level, the school-based monitoring committees are responsible for the programme oversight; the quality of the food is monitored by the head teacher or health teacher while the Parents' Teachers' Associations' representative and the school prefects randomly inspect the food. Surprise checks are also conducted regularly by programme monitors. These monitoring systems are challenged by lack of funds, vehicles and growth monitoring gadgets required for effective programme planning, review and improvement. Tomlinson (2007) concluded that although the school feeding programme contributed to an increase in enrolment and attendance, enhanced participation of beneficiaries in the classroom and generated jobs in the communities, it has come under criticism for its poor management, poor coverage, inconsistencies and high-cost.

Lack of Data for Planning

Lack of data for planning the national feeding programme is another problem confronting the implementation of national feeding programme. There is problem of getting reliable data to plan the implementation of the national feeding programme in Nigeria. Ogunode, Ahmed, Gregory & Abubakar (2020) ^[11] submitted that another problem facing the administration of public education in Nigeria is the lack of current and reliable data to plan. Data are very important for educational planning. No meaningful educational planning can take place without adequate current and reliable data/information. One of the basic challenges facing the Nigerian educational sector is lack of data. There is lack of information on key areas of the Nigerian educational system. This is because educational data are not constantly being generated and if generated, the methodology of collection is poor. Many data collection officers in the country lack the new method of generating data due to poor capacity development. The data collection officers also lack working tools. The attitude of the government towards generating current and reliable data is poor. There are many factors responsible for poor data collection in Nigeria and they include inadequate funding of data collection agencies, inadequate data collection officers, insecurities, lack of political will, poor capacity development of data collection officers and corruption. A study by Adekunle, & Christiana, (2016) ^[1] showed that very few (26.8%) of the respondents indicated that an absence of a legal framework and policy to back up the programme was a challenge. The response from the State programme officer interviewed revealed that efforts were being made by the Osun state government to back the programme up with appropriate legislation in order to enhance it and ensure its sustainability.

Corruption

Corruption is a major problem facing the implementation of the national feeding programme in Nigeria. The funds

released for the implementation of the programme is looted and mismanaged by some officers handling the implementation across the federation. The former coordinator of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme in Nigeria Mrs. Uwais reported that she noted that government has suspended some officials of the programme in Benue and Niger States because some of them have taken money without the knowledge of government and even opened personal accounts where they had directed that some money for the programme should be lodged into, adding that those that were caught in the act were currently under investigations by the Economic And Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Corruption on fund diversion has been reported in all the forms of education in Nigeria. At the early child and basic education, the Education Secretary of Sabon Birni Local Government Area of Sokoto State, Ishaka Abdullahi was arraigned before Justice Malami Umar Dogondaji of the state high court for fraud. Abdullahi was arraigned by the Sokoto zonal office of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) after investigators traced school feeding funds to bank accounts linked to him (The whistler, 2020) ^[17]. Mismanagement was also cited as a challenge to the implementation of the School Feeding programme in the South Tongu District by (Eugene, Gabriel & Mark (2017) ^[7]. The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission, ICPC, announced that it found N2.67 billion in some private accounts which was meant for the provision of school feeding to federal colleges during the COVID-19 lockdown (Nairametric, 2020). 3.5. Delay in Releasing Money Delay in releasing funds for the programme is also affecting the implementation of the national feeding programme in Nigeria and other part of the world where the programme is being implemented. In Ghana for instance Eugene, Gabriel & Mark (2017) ^[7] submitted in their study that the participants believed that inadequate funding and delay in releasing funds have consequently resulted in delay in paying the remunerations of the matrons. Similarly, in Nigeria, Bosah, Bosah Chukwuebukaf and Obumneke-Okeke (2019) ^[4] identified some challenges such as delay in release of fund to the cooks, not providing food rich in quality and quantity to the pupils due to insufficient fund for teeming population and lack of supervision of the activities of the cooks due to exclusion of head teachers and teachers from the implementation of the program and other problems are some of the challenges facing the new program.

Insecurity

Insecurity is another factor that has affected the implementation of the national feeding programme in Nigeria. According to UNICEF (2017) the insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria has been especially damaging to the education system. Since 2011, an estimated 19,000 teachers have been displaced and 1,200 schools have been damaged or destroyed. Approximately 1 million children in need and 600,000 children have lost access to learning due to the conflict. The education sector sustained an estimated \$272.96 million of damages to its infrastructure with Borno State most affected. Many states in the Northern part of Nigeria cannot implement the programme as planned due to the insurgencies in the area. Ogunode & Adah (2020) ^[11] identified insecurity challenge, inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, inadequate professional

teachers, institutional corruption, lack of political will, lack of continuity in commitment to policy implementation, political instability, poor policy formulation, poor relationship between policy designers and policy implementers as challenges preventing effective implementation of educational policies in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

School feeding programs have been and will continue to be essential for the provision of nutrients, improvement of academic performance, and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle in schools. Therefore, there should be a strong political will to continue to fund new programs and to expand on existing programs. The design and implementation of school feeding programs should be based on the established benefits of such programs on specific educational and health outcomes of children and adolescents, for which an updated evidence base is needed.

It is imperative to expand the coverage of school feeding programs and to improve the quality of existing programs to maximize their benefits on children and adolescents. To address the problems identified in this paper, the following were recommended: increase in the funding of National Home Grown School Feeding programme (NHGSFP) by the federal, state and local government, improve the monitoring and evaluation system of the programme, ensure effective data generation and distribution to aid planning of the programme; funds meant for the implementation of National Home Grown School Feeding programme (NHGSFP) should be released on time and the government should tighten security across the Nigeria.

The federal, state and local government should increase the funding of the National Home Grown School Feeding Policy (NHGSFP). This will aid the administration of the programme;

The federal government should strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system of the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP). This will help to realize the objectives of the programme;

All form of corruption should be discourage in the implementation of the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) through effective use of anti-corruption agencies and ensuring accountability in the disbursement of the funds;

Current and reliable data should be generated and made available for the planners of the National Home Grown School Feeding programme (NHGSFP) for effective administration of the programme;

Funds for the implementation of the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) should be released on time to aid effective administration of the programme

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