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Article

Assessment of Social Safety Net Intervention to Reduce the Impact of Subsidy Removal on Public Secondary Schools in Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study evaluated the social safety net measures implemented to mitigate the effects of the removal of the fuel subsidy on the public secondary schools of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The study, in particular, focused on the extent to which social safety net interventions have limited the adverse impact of subsidy removal on public secondary schools and explored factors that limit the effectiveness of the interventions. With the elimination of fuel subsidy in Nigeria, transportation costs, inflation, prices of educational materials, and economic hardship for teachers, students, and parents, have risen. A descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. The study population consisted of public secondary school teachers' and administrators in FCT, ABUJA. The number of respondents is determined and selected by simple random sampling technique with a sample size of 185 respondents. Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire called Social Safety Net Intervention Questionnaire (SSNIQ). Mean scores and descriptive statistics were used for analysis of data collected. Results indicated that transportation problems, increased school operating expenses, increased student absence, and increased financial hardship are not being significantly lowered by social safety net interventions implemented after subsidy removal in public secondary schools. The study also identified inadequate funding, weak implementation of intervention programmes, weak monitoring systems, inflation and lack of government support as factors affecting the effectiveness of the interventions. The findings of the study were that the negative impact of subsidy withdrawal on public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja has not been sufficiently covered by the current social safety net interventions. The study suggested that there is need to increase government funding, enhance monitoring of intervention programmes, offering transportation support for both the teachers and the students as well as effective implementation of educational palliative measures.

Keywords: Social Safety Net Intervention, Subsidy Removal, Public Secondary Schools.

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1.0 Introduction

The removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria has resulted in many economic and social problems in various sectors of the economy, including the education sector. This policy was implemented in order to cut down on government spending and boost the management of national revenues, which resulted in the prices of petroleum products being raised considerably [1]. This resulted in a significant rise in transportation expenses, product and service prices, and cost of living nationwide. Even the public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT-Abuja) have been adversely affected by the policy by way of the burden of higher cost of running the schools, transportation challenges and lack of access to educational resources.

Social safety net interventions are government programmes and policies that aim to mitigate the economic shocks of economic reform or crisis to vulnerable groups. These can include transportation assistance, food aid, education palliatives, conditional cash transfers, and/or subsidized services to lessen economic stress on citizens [2], [3]. In the education sector, effective social safety net measures are expected to help school administrators, teachers and students adjust to the financial impact of subsidy removal. But with a number of government statements on palliative measures and economic support programmes, many schools and house-holds are still struggling with severe hardship.

Sanford noted that the removal of fuel subsidy had a negative impact on the development of teachers, transportation and school operations in Nigeria. In the same vein, Ogunode Niyi Jacob and Aregbesola reported the higher cost of running schools, instructional materials and educational supervision as a result of subsidy removal in Nigeria schools.

Ogunleye, Oderinde, and Awotayo also found that the removal of the subsidy adversely affected the welfare of poor people owing to the rising prices of goods and services and transportation fares. Similarly, Adedapo pointed out that the removal of the subsidy had impacted student retention and school attendance in rural secondary schools, as some families were unable to bear the cost of education [4].

Moreover, Ayo and Abubakar reported that the removal of subsidy negatively influenced science education, as the laboratory equipment and teaching and learning materials were more expensive in schools.

Government in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, has introduced government palliative measures and social intervention programmes, yet many secondary schools in the public sector in the metropolis are still faced with huge financial and operational challenges [5], [6]. This prompted the current study on the assessment of social safety net interventions to mitigate the effects of subsidy removal on public Secondary Schools in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the extent to which social safety net interventions have reduced the impact of subsidy removal on public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.
2. To identify factors hindering the effectiveness of social safety net interventions in reducing the impact of subsidy removal on public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria [7].

1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent have social safety net interventions reduced the impact of subsidy removal on public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria?
2. What factors hinder the effectiveness of social safety net interventions in reducing the impact of subsidy removal on public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria?

2.0 Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The design was deemed suitable as the researchers were able to obtain the views of the respondents as regards the effectiveness of the social safety net measures introduced to mitigate the effects of the removal of fuel subsidy on public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Nigeria. The study was conducted in public secondary schools in six Area Councils in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, namely: Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Kwali, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje and Abaji. The FCT was included because, after the removal of the fuel subsidy in Nigeria, public secondary schools in the FCT have faced increased transportation costs, inflation, and operational challenges. The respondents of the study were teachers and school administrators of public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja. The categories of respondents were chosen because they are directly linked to the administration and instructional practices in schools, and the implementation of government intervention programmes in schools.

The respondents of the study were selected through simple random sampling technique with a sample size of 185 respondents. The sampling technique provided equal chances for every respondent to be included in the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire known as Social Safety Net Intervention Questionnaire (SSNIQ) which was split into two parts. In Section A, there were questions regarding the respondents' demographic information and in Section B the questions in the questionnaire were developed based on the research questions of the study. The questionnaire was designed using the four-point Likert rating scale (LRS) Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by two Educational Management experts and one expert in Economics from a reputable tertiary institution in Nigeria. Their comments and suggestions were used to revise the final edition of the instrument to make the items in the questionnaire clear, appropriate and relevant. Twenty teachers from public secondary schools which are not part of the sampled schools but within FCT Abuja were used as case study. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used in the pilot study data obtained, and the reliability coefficient was 0.83. The coefficient showed that instrument was reliable for the study.

The questionnaire was directly administered to the respondents assisted by trained research assistants. Of the 185 copies of questionnaire sent, all were returned with appropriate answers and the return rate was 100%. Analysis of data collected was done by mean scores and descriptive statistics in order to answer the research questions. The criterion mean of 2.50 was used in the decision making. The mean score for each item was computed and the items with a mean score of 2.50 or higher were accepted, those with a mean score of less than 2.50 were rejected.

3.0 Result and Data Analysis

Table 1. Extent to Which Social Safety Net Interventions Have Reduced the Impact of Subsidy Removal on Public Secondary Schools in FCT, Abuja (N = 185).

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Government palliative measures have reduced transportation challenges among teachers	30	40	65	50	2.27	Rejected
2	Social intervention programmes have improved school operational activities	32	41	63	49	2.30	Rejected
3	Educational palliatives have reduced student absenteeism in schools	35	40	62	48	2.33	Rejected
4	Social safety net interventions have reduced the cost of running schools	31	42	63	49	2.29	Rejected
5	Government interventions have improved teachers' welfare after subsidy removal	33	41	62	49	2.31	Rejected
6	Subsidy removal interventions have reduced the cost of	2	4	6	5	2.26	Rejecte

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
	instructional materials	9	0	6	0		d
7	Students from low-income families benefit adequately from intervention programmes	34	41	61	49	2.32	Rejected
8	Social intervention measures have improved students' academic participation	35	42	60	48	2.35	Rejected
9	Government support has adequately cushioned the effects of inflation on schools	30	43	63	49	2.29	Rejected
10	Existing interventions have significantly reduced hardship in public secondary schools	32	40	64	49	2.30	Rejected

Grand Mean = 2.30

Table 1 revealed that all the items recorded mean scores below the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates that social safety net interventions have not significantly reduced the impact of subsidy removal on public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja [8]. The findings showed that intervention programmes have not adequately addressed transportation challenges, inflation, school operational costs, teachers' welfare, and student hardship in schools [9], [10].

Table 2. Factors Hindering the Effectiveness of Social Safety Net Interventions in Public Secondary Schools in FCT, Abuja (N = 185).

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Inadequate funding affects the effectiveness of intervention programmes	94	66	15	10	3.32	Accepted
2	Poor implementation of government policies hinders intervention programmes	95	65	15	10	3.33	Accepted
3	Inflation reduces the effectiveness of social safety net programmes	96	64	15	10	3.33	Accepted
4	Weak monitoring systems affect distribution of intervention benefits	93	67	15	10	3.31	Accepted
5	Corruption affects the implementation of social intervention programmes	94	66	15	10	3.32	Accepted
6	Rising transportation costs weaken the impact of intervention measures	92	68	15	10	3.30	Accepted
7	Many schools do not receive adequate government support	95	65	15	10	3.33	Accepted
8	Lack of proper planning affects the effectiveness of intervention programmes	91	69	15	10	3.29	Accepted
9	Delay in implementation affects the success of intervention measures	93	67	15	10	3.31	Accepted
10	Poor economic conditions reduce the impact of social safety net programmes	94	66	15	10	3.32	Accepted

Grand Mean = 3.32

Table 2 showed that all the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that respondents agreed that inadequate funding, inflation, corruption, poor

implementation, weak monitoring systems, and poor economic conditions hinder the effectiveness of social safety net interventions in reducing the impact of subsidy removal on public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja [11], [12].

3.1 Findings

The study found that social safety net interventions have not significantly mitigated the impact of subsidy removal on public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja. Transportation challenges, inflation, and rising school operational costs continue to affect schools despite intervention programmes. Teachers and students still face economic hardship after subsidy removal [13], [14]. Inadequate funding and poor implementation undermine the effectiveness of intervention programmes [15], [16]. Corruption, weak monitoring systems, and inflation reduce the impact of government social safety net measures. Many public secondary schools do not receive adequate government support after subsidy removal.

3.2 Discussion of Findings

It was found that in FCT, Abuja, subsidy removal has not been significantly affected by social safety net interventions on public secondary schools. This discovery is in line with the Sani's study that found that the removal of subsidy led to a rise in transportation cost and impacts negatively on educational activities in Nigeria. Many teachers in Abuja now spend more percentage of their salary on transportation to school as the cost of transportation has also gone up considerably post subsidy removal [17], [18].

The study also revealed that the operational activities of the school were not properly enhanced through the intervention programmes. This finding corroborates the earlier findings of Ogunode Niyi Jacob and Aregbesola that the removal of subsidy led to Nigerian school administration and educational supervision to become more costly. Many public secondary schools in satellite communities like Gwagwalada and Bwari are facing difficulties in paying for routine operations due to the hike in the price of fuel, transportation and school commodities.

Another finding was that inflation and poor economic conditions dampened the impact of social safety net interventions [19]. This is consistent with the study by Ogunleye et al. which showed that subsidy removal in Nigeria had negative impacts on the living standard of low-income households. In real life, many parents are unable to pay transportation fees and educational materials for their children and some children have been unable to attend school on a regular basis.

The study also found that intervention programmes are less successful when they are not well implemented and/or corruption is present [20]. This discovery is in tandem with Nigerians' public opinion on the inadequate implementation of subsidy palliative programmes and lack of cushioning by government for citizens following subsidy removal. The study showed that even though the government has taken measures to alleviate the transportation problem, this situation continues to have an impact on students and teachers. This discovery corroborates the reports that subsidy removal hiked transportation costs and further contributed to the plight of many Nigerians.

3.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that the social safety net intervention after the removal of the fuel subsidy has not sufficiently ameliorated the negative effects of the fuel subsidy removal policy on public secondary schools in FCT, Abuja. Although the government has launched interventions to address transportation, teachers, students and school leaders are still facing transportation problems, skyrocketing prices and costs, and economic hardship. The study also revealed that the effectiveness of social safety net interventions in schools is hampered by inadequate funding, corruption, poor implementation, weak monitoring systems, and rising inflation. Hence, more effective and powerful measures of intervention are needed to mitigate the impact of subsidy removal on education. From the results, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Government should increase funding for educational intervention programmes in public secondary schools.

2. Transportation support should be provided for teachers and students to reduce the hardship caused by subsidy removal.
3. Government should improve monitoring and supervision of social safety net programmes to ensure effective implementation.
4. Educational palliative measures should be properly distributed to vulnerable students and schools.
5. Anti-corruption measures should be strengthened in the implementation of intervention programmes.
6. Government should provide subsidized instructional materials and educational resources for public secondary schools.

School administrators should collaborate with community leaders and development agencies to support vulnerable students.

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