

# BREAKFAST SKIPPING AND ACADEMIC / SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF PUPILS IN PORT HARCOURT, SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The researchers sought to find-out the effects of breakfast skipping on the academic and social development of the primary school child. A nine item researchers designed questionnaire titled "Assessment of the effects of skipping breakfast on the children by pupils was the basic instrument". It was validated by experts in the area of study. It had a reliability coefficient of .70; and was responded to on a 4=point likert scale. It was administered to 100 pupils randomly selected from Port Harcourt Metropolis. It had a research question and 2 hypotheses. It found out that parents instructions, pupils choice and lack of food were responsible for skipping of breakfast by pupils. It also established that breakfast had strong relationship with academic and social developments of the school child. It concludes that since proper feeding is necessary for the child's academic and social development, the abandoned UBE feeding programme should be reinstated. To find the feeding programme, small amount may be deducted from workers salaries; while to create awareness over the effects of skipping breakfast, churches, mosque, schools and other agencies should engage in enlightening programmes

## BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Skipping of breakfast in Nigeria and the people of Port Harcourt in particular may be a common practice. This act may be carried out among all categories of persons. The primary school child is no exception. Those who do it may have the good reason to rationalize their actions. No matter how good they conceive the idea, it may not be without effect on their health. Naturally, individuals are expected to eat thrice per day. Therefore, the skipping of any feeding phase can be considered nutritional disorder otherwise a poor health practice. No doubt, the practitioner may suffer one form of disorder or the other. Infact attitude towards feeding or the way people feed influence their behaviour in a variety of ways. Considering that the kind of food and the way people feed may affect an individual in several ways ignites the need to assess the effect of breakfast skipping on the child's academic and social development. In lieu of the above account, this study is designed to find out:

1. The factors responsible for pupils skipping of breakfast;
2. Effects of breakfast skipping on the pupils academic development;
3. Effects of breakfast skipping on the pupils social development

In determining the effects of breakfast skipping on the child's academic and social development, the following hunger related factors was adopted as indices. They are; sleeping in class, yawning, begging food or money from others, inability to promptly finish class work, inability to ask and answer questions etc. others are inability to have friends, moody or unhappy appearance, display of aggression.

## Research questions

The following research questions are posed:

1. What factors are responsible for the skipping of breakfast among pupils in Port Harcourt?

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2. What is the nature of relationship between breakfast skipping and academic achievement of the pupils?
3. How is the relationship between breakfast skipping and academic achievement of the pupils?

### Hypotheses

Consequently the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. Breakfast skipping and academic achievement of pupils have no significant relationship.
2. There is no significant relationship between breakfast skipping and social development of the pupils.

## METHODOLOGY

### Population

All the pupils in the public primary schools in Port Harcourt constitute the population of this study. The total 104,278 pupils (Igwe, 2008: Head of Research/Education management Information system, Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board).

### Sampling and sampling technique

The simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 schools out of 68 public primary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. In each of the 10 schools selected random sampling technique was adopted to sample 10 pupils. In all, 100 pupils were sampled.

### Instrumentation

The researchers made questionnaire titled "Assessment of the Effects of Skipping Breakfast on the Academic and Social Development of the Pupils (AESBASDP)" was the main instrument. It was made of two sections; namely the demographic data as section A and other variables as section B. the section B is made of 9 items. Items 1-3 addressed the causes of breakfast skipping among the pupils; 4-6 addressed the effects of breakfast skipping on the pupils academic achievement and items 7-9 addressed the effects of breakfast skipping on

the pupils social development of the pupils. The questionnaire was responded to on a 4-point Likert scale which was scored as follows: Strongly agree as SA = 4-points, Agree as A = 3-points, Disagree as D = 2-points and Strongly disagree as SD = 1-point.

### Validity and reliability of instrument

The instrument was validated by giving it to colleagues who are specialist in the area of study. Their inputs accounts for restructuring of the items to suit the content of study. The test re-test was adopted to ascertain the reliability level of the instrument. The exercise yielded a reliability co-efficient of .70. as a result, the instrument was adopted for the study.

### Administration of the instrument

The administration of the questionnaire has the following procedures:

1. The researcher obtained permission from each headmaster in the 10 schools visited. And the headmasters on behalf of the researchers solicited for the teachers support.
2. The teachers to whose classes, the sampled pupils belonged were urged to explain the questionnaire to the pupils to enable them complete them correctly.
3. No teacher was allowed to explain or administer more than two questionnaires. This enhanced the quick completion and return of the instruments.

### Data analysis

The data generated from the instrument was analyzed by using mean to raise answers for the research question. Pearson Moment Correlation Co-efficient was used to determine the acceptance and rejection of the hypotheses.

### Summary of findings

The results of the findings can be summed as follows:

### Research question:

What factors are responsible for breakfast skipping among pupils in Port Harcourt?

**Table 1:** Mean analysis of the pupils responses on the factors responsible for breakfast skipping among pupils

S/N	Factors	Mean	Remarks
1	Instructions from parents and guardians	2.50	Positive
2	Choice of pupils to skip breakfast	2.50	Positive
3	Lack of food in the home	2.46	positive

The table above indicates the mean scores which range 2.46-2.50. This means that parental instruction, pupils choice to skip breakfast and lack of food are significant factors that account for the skipping of breakfast among the pupils.

**Hypothesis 1**

Breakfast skipping and academic achievement of pupils have no significant relationship.

**Table 2:** Pearson Moment Product Correlation Co-efficient test of relationship between skipping of breakfast and academic development among pupils

S/n	Variables	N	df	Cal r-value	r-critical value	Level of sig at .05	Remarks
1	Breakfast skipping by pupils	100	98	.36	.195	.05	Rejected
2	Academic achievement by pupils						

Since the r-calculated value of .36 at 98 degree of freedom and .05 level of significant is higher than r-critical value of .195; the null hypothesis is hereby rejected. And therefore there is significant relationship between breakfast skipping and academic achievement of the pupils.

**Hypothesis 2**

There is no significant relationship between breakfast skipping and social development of the pupils.

**Table 3:** Pearson Moment Product Correlation Co-efficient test of relationship between skipping of breakfast and social development of the pupils

S/n	Variables	N	df	Cal r-value	r-critical value	Level of sig at .05	Remarks
1	Breakfast skipping by pupils	100	98	.36	.195	.05	Rejected
2	Academic achievement by pupils						

Since the re-calculated value of .39 is higher than the r-critical value of .195 at 98 degree of freedom and .05 level of significant, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between skipping of breakfast and social development of the pupils.

**DISCUSSIONS/IMPLICATIONS**

The analysis of responses on the research question indicates, that factors such as instructions from parents, pupils' decision and

lack of food are poor nutritional habits or hunger related actions exhibited by those who indulge in the skipping of breakfast. The question therefore, is do they realize it's implication on the child's

academic and social development? This is so because research results have provided compelling evidence that poor nutrition even in its milder forms during any period of childhood can have detrimental effects on the cognitive development of children and their late productivity as adults (Brown, 2008). This means that those who engage in it may be ignorant of its side effects.

The reasons why breakfast may be skipped in some families cannot be devoid of religious fasting, financial poverty, ignorance/superstition, laziness to prepare breakfast, lack of devotion by parents/guardians to force children to each before going to school where the food is available, lack of food and many more. It can be accepted that lack of food is one of the major factors responsible for the skipping of breakfast in most homes; mostly these days of global food crisis. But this study reveals that it is the least factor. In as much as any rational individual is concerned, it stands not to be a negligible factor.

On the issues of unwillingness of children care givers to prevail on them to eat at required intervals one would wish to say that observation has shown that children within first early years are reluctant to eat and those who eat appear stronger and healthier than those who do not. Similarly, those who eat seldomly do not appear strong and do not play as much as those who eat more regularly do. But they rather appear stickler. In consideration to this, the care givers may be held responsible for poor nutritional habits among children mostly when it has to do with resistance by children to eat any available food.

The first hypothesis of this study establishes that there is relationship between skipping of breakfast and academic development of the child. This study adopted sleeping in the class, inability to finish class work promptly and exhibition of poor ability to ask and answer questions as indices for measuring effects of skipping breakfast on the academic development of the child. This finding therefore, suggests that those who do not take breakfast are poor participants in class work and the more they do not take breakfast the poorer they would be in their school work. Pollit (1998) in a study titled "the role of key nutrition programmes for children" tested the effect of school breakfast programme on pupils academic achievement. He adopted children's scores on standardized achievement tests as well as rate of lateness and absences prior to the implementation of the programmes as

criteria. And a year later, he found out that those who participated in the school breakfast programme have significantly higher standardized achievement test scores, and reduced absence from school than those who did not participate in the programme. In as much as this appears convincing, Grantham-McGregor, Walker and Chang (2008:24) gave more support by asserting that "there is substantial evidence to support a link between poor nutrition and long-term deficits in cognition and school achievement". To them, poor nutritional habits and other health factors are associated with poor overall development among children is not more influenced by nutritional conditions than psychological factors. This declaration, however does not seem to gain clamorous supports; and therefore may not be relied on.

The study further reveals that there is a significant relationship between breakfast and the child's social development. It adopted lack of friends, moody and unhappy dispositions and begging as factors associated with poor social development in relationship to skipping of breakfast among children. Kleinmann, Murphy, Little Pgana, Wehler, Regal and Jellinek (1998) carried out a study to find out the correlation between hunger in children and their behavioural and emotional potential. They took a study of 300 families in Pittsburgh. The analysis of their findings showed that virtually all behavioural, emotional and academic problems were more prevalent in hungry children. From their findings, it was established that aggression and anxiety had the strongest degree of association. Based on this report, it could be just to conclude that children who do not take breakfast or suffer from other forms of nutritional problems are bound to demonstrate poor behavioural and emotional conducts. It can also be deduced that the effects vary from one child to another. For instance, in this study, one of the strongest correlates for skipping of breakfast is lack of friends and unhappy disposition; while some people would infer that it exerts pronounced influence on the child's psychosocial disposition such as anger. This is so because the common saying which says "a hungry man is an angry man" as proven over the years. Observations and deductions from oral interviews carried out on the children and teachers show that most children who fight or exhibit other forms of aggression are more of those who come to school without eating breakfast or food.

The implications of these findings point to the fact that skipping of breakfast or poor nutritional habit is an evil wind that does no good to humanity in all sense of it. Perhaps, it is on this promise that some meaningful government of nations participate directly or indirectly in encouraging proper feeding of children. In Nigeria, the UBE home grown feeding for primary school pupils is a good example. Gardner (2007) reports that US government pays more than \$90 billion annually for the indirect cost of hunger related charities, illness and psychosocial dysfunction and the impact of less education/lower productivity. The cost is said to be borne by Americans; and if distributed on individual basis, it means that an average person residing in US pays \$300 annually for the hunger bill and if on the house hold basis, the annual cost is \$800 each year. Although in Nigeria, Anero (2007) observes that the pupils feeding programme has been abandoned. He as such questioned if the government and managers of the feeding programme wish that the Nigerian child should suffer from the chains of problems associated with poor nutritional habits.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The UBE feeding programme should be revived.
2. An insignificant fraction of the worker, salaries may be deducted and remitted to the feeding panes for Nigerian children.
3. An enlightenment campaign should be carried out by churches, mosques, schools and other voluntary agencies to explain the dangers of breakfast skipping on the overall development of the child.

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