

PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL-RELATED STRESS ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA

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Abstract

The paper examined the perceived influence of fuel subsidy removal-related stress on students' academic performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra state. The study was guided by four research questions. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. Population of the study included 5,053 undergraduate students at the faculty of education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka in 2022/2023 academic session. The sample of the study was obtained through simple random sampling techniques; a sample of 200 undergraduate students was selected from the population. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Fuel Subsidy Removal and Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire (FSRSAPQ)." The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach alpha coefficient which yielded an index of 0.82. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers and data was collected and analysed using mean. The findings of the study include increased cost of transportation which led to various academic challenges on students' like 'cost of transportation and educational resources which influenced students' school activities attendance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka'. The study recommended among others that government and university management should work together to make educational resources more affordable and accessible to students.

Introduction

The reason government exist is not only to bring about law and order in the society, but to make life easier for the people. Given this, governments all over the world initiate and execute special state sponsored policies and programmes aimed at improving the welfare of their people. One of such policies or programmes is the subsidisation of certain essential commodities and services which ordinarily could have come at a huge economic cost to the citizens, and many unable to access them. Subsidy is a government incentive or intervention in the form of cash transfer, grants, or tax breaks to producers of certain essential commodities or providers of certain essential services, aimed at lowering consumer costs and stimulating production (International Monetary Fund, 2022; Corporate Finance Institute, 2019). These interventions by the government come at a huge financial cost to the state.

Like other countries of the world, subsidy is not new in Nigeria. Over the years, the Nigerian government have been subsidising petroleum products as a way of cushioning the negative impact of global crude oil price shock on the domestic economy (Omosho, 2019). Under this system, the federal government oversees petroleum products pricing within the country, compensating domestic marketers who imported the products in Nigeria, largely as a result of non-functionality of the country's refineries for the gap between the regulated domestic price and the Expected Open Market Price (EOMP), a value determined by the Petroleum Products Pricing and Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) (Ayanruoh, 2023). Petrol popularly known as fuel in Nigeria has remained one major commodity the Nigerian government have been subsidising for years.

The increased cost of transportation and logistics can hinder business operations, reduce overall economic productivity, exacerbate poverty and inequality, as lower-income groups spend a larger portion of their income on energy-related expenses. The government may also face pressure arising from public unrest (Ayeyemi, 2023; Suleiman, 2023). Fuel subsidy removal has been an issue of longstanding debate. Supporters of fuel subsidy removal argues that corruption and inefficiency have plagued the system, often resulting in the mishandling of designated subsidy funds and poses a significant economic challenge to the government due to its considerable cost. They are also of the view that the removal of fuel subsidy would free up financial resources for critical infrastructure, education, healthcare, and social welfare programmes while promoting greater resource efficiency and private sector investment in the oil industry (Gwangwangwan, 2023).

There is no doubt that the Nigerian government spends much of its financial resources on subsidising fuel which has no substantial long-term benefit and comes with so many economic consequences. It was estimated that about N10 trillion was spent in fuel subsidy payments by the

Nigerian government from 2006-2018 (Budgit, 2019). The decision of the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu led federal government of Nigeria to completely suspend fuel subsidy had immediate sore impact on different aspects of the Nigerian state and the impact is still being felt. One sector the increase in fuel pump price affected as a result of fuel subsidy suspension is the education sector (Ogunode & Aregbesola, 2023). A country's education system determines its quality and level of development. At the same time, the quality of a country's education system is determined by the academic performance of students (Narad & Abdullah, 2016). The recent rise of fuel pump price as a result of subsidy removal has the capacity to negatively influence students' academic performance, particularly those in the country's institutions of higher learning (Okonkwo, 2023; Tribune Online, 2023a). This is evident in its impact on the costs of academic stress, transportation, feeding and educational resources which are essential for better academic performance of students.

Transportation enables students to attend school regularly and punctually, reducing absenteeism rates and ensuring they have equitable opportunities to learn. Moreover, transportation systems facilitate access to educational institutions, especially for those living in remote or underserved areas, promoting inclusivity and diversity in student populations (Daily Trust, 2023; Tribune Online, 2023b; Okonkwo, 2023). Additionally, transportation provides students with the mobility to engage in extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, and internships, enhancing their overall personal and professional development. However, the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria in the face of poor rail transport system has seen an astronomical increase in road transport fares which has negatively affected daily human movement, including attendance to class by students (Ayeyemi, 2023; Nwachukwu & Tumba, 2023).

Again, no student can perform better academically without having the necessary resources that helps them to study. These resources, ranging from textbooks and lecture notes to online resources and research materials, provide students with the necessary information and context to grasp complex subjects, enhance critical thinking skills, and complete assignments and examinations effectively (Tunde, 2022). Moreover, academic materials enable students to explore diverse perspectives, fostering a well-rounded education that encourages intellectual growth and creativity. Beyond the classroom, these materials empower students to stay informed, engage in lifelong learning, and adapt to the evolving demands of the modern world, ultimately equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue their career aspirations and contribute meaningfully to society (Omoniyi, 2023). The elevated cost of fuel indirectly raises the prices of goods and services, including textbooks and study materials, placing an additional financial burden on students. With limited financial resources, students may be forced to cut back on essential academic materials and experiences, hindering their ability to excel academically and achieve their educational goals. Also, increase in transport fares can worsen students' ability to purchase educational resources they need due to their budget, and access the school library when they are outside the school environment.

The removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria and its subsequent impact on transportation costs and the price of basic goods like food have the potential to significantly influence the academic performance of students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Abamara, Ezeh, Ikeorah, Oguamanam and Abamara (2018) in their study claimed that fuel subsidy removal has been a source of worry to most people in Awka, including students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka irrespective of their gender. This is because of the negative impact it has on their livelihood. Transportation is vital for students to attend classes regularly and punctually, ensuring equitable access to education. However, the skyrocketing road transport fares resulting from the removal of fuel subsidy have disrupted daily commutes, affecting students' class attendance thereby causing stress on students' daily activities. Additionally, the rising cost of food, linked to the fuel price hike, seems to threaten students' access to nutritious meals, potentially compromising their physical and cognitive development and, consequently, their academic performance. Furthermore, the increased cost of fuel indirectly affects the affordability of academic resources, including textbooks and study materials, placing financial constraints on students and hindering their pursuit of academic excellence. It is against this background, that this study wants to examine the perceived influence of fuel subsidy removal and its stress on students' academic performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Statement of the Problem

The decision of Nigeria's federal government to completely suspend fuel subsidies, resulting in a dramatic increase in fuel prices has had wide-ranging impacts on various sectors of Nigerian society, including education. As fuel prices soared, transportation costs surged, hindering students' ability to attend school regularly and punctually. This may affect their academic performance and thus cause stress on students. Additionally, the rising prices of food items, attributed to fuel subsidy removal, may have strained students' ability to afford nutritious meals, compromising their health and well-being and hindering academic success most especially in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Furthermore, the increased cost of fuel indirectly elevates the prices of academic resources, making it difficult for students to access necessary materials and potentially impeding their academic progress. The students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University are not exempted from the harsh realities of the Nigerian government decision to remove fuel subsidy which saw a sudden astronomical rise in the pump price of fuel. From the first-hand experience and observation of the researcher, transportation fare within the University campus which was once N50 per student has risen to N100 and N150. For those living outside the campus, transport fare to school that was once N100 and N150 have moved to N250 and N300. This has made it difficult for most students to be in school always.

Again, the prices of textbooks and writing materials have increased. Photocopying and printing of lecture notes and assignments that were once N20 per page have risen to N100 and N150 per page. Typing of assignment that was once N80 and N100 per page has risen to N200

and N250 per page. Internet browsing rates have also increased. These challenges triggered by fuel subsidy removal have limited the ability of many students of the University to get the necessary academic resources needed for their various courses. This has the capacity to influence students' performance in practical, quiz and examination poorly. It is against this background that the researcher intends to find out the perceived influence of fuel subsidy removal and its stress on students' academic performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived influence of fuel subsidy removal and its stress on students' academic performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Specifically, the study seeks to;

12. examine the perceived influence of increased cost of transportation on students' school activities attendance.
13. investigate the perceived influence of increased cost of feeding on students' ability to concentrate on their studies.
14. ascertain the perceived influence of increased cost of educational resources on students' academic grades.
15. suggest possible ways students can manage the fuel subsidy removal stress on their academic performance.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- xii. What is the perceived influence of increased cost of transportation on students' school activities attendance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
- xiii. What is the perceived influence of increased cost of feeding on students' ability to concentrate on their studies in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
- xiv. What is the perceived influence of increased cost of educational resources on students' academic grades?
- xv. What are the possible ways students can cope with the stress of the fuel subsidy removal on their academic performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University?

Method

The design adopted for this study is descriptive survey design. According to Nworgu (2015) descriptive survey as a research design aim at collecting data and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. The population of this study is comprised of 5053 undergraduate students of Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in the 2022/2023 academic session. The sample size of this study is 200. This sample size was arrived using simple random sampling technique. Simple random sampling was used to draw out five (5) out of the nine (9) Departments in the Faculty of Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Hence, 40 respondents were randomly selected across the five departments selected for this study.

Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled “Fuel Subsidy Removal and Students’ Academic Performance Questionnaire (FSRSAPQ).” The instrument was based on four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a trial test was carried out. The instrument was administered to 30 undergraduate students of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam. The data collected was tested using Cronbach Alpha coefficients which yielded an index 0.82 which is considered reliable for the study. Data obtained from the field trip was analysed using mean rating. Considering the four-point Likert scale instrument adopted, a mean cut-off point of 2.50 was used for decision making on the outcome of the analysis.

Result

Research Question 1

What is the perceived influence of increased cost of transportation on students’ school activities attendance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 1: Perceived influence of increased cost of transportation on students' school activities attendance

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1.	Increased cost of transportation makes students living far away from the University campus absent from school	97	130			3.89	Agreed
2.	Students come to lectures late because they had to trek to class due to increased cost of transportation	80	120			3.4	Agreed
3.	Increased transportation cost makes students living outside the University campus leave lectures early because they had to trek back home	60	140			3.3	Agreed
4.	Students trekking to class because of increased transportation cost results in their late arrival to quiz and examinations	83	102	15		3.34	Agreed
5.	Increased cost of transportation reduces the rate at which students go on field trips related to the course of study to gain practical knowledge	78	115	7		3.35	Agreed
6.	Students' attendance to academic seminars and workshop within and outside the University environment reduces because of increased cost of transportation	65	135			3.33	Agreed
7.	Increased transportation cost affects students weekend visit to the school and town libraries for reading	91	100	9		3.41	Agreed
8.	Students reduce their involvement in extra-curricular activities because of increased transportation cost	104	91	5		3.5	Agreed
	Grand Mean					3.44	

Table 1 shows that items 1-8 obtained mean scores above 2.50, which is the study mean criterion. With a cluster mean of 3.44, the result shows that respondents agreed that increased cost of transportation influences students' school activities attendance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question 2

What is the perceived influence of increased cost of feeding on students' ability to concentrate on their studies in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 2: Perceived influence of increased cost of feeding on students' ability to concentrate on their studies

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
9.	Increased cost of food items in the market makes students worry about how to afford their next meal which affects their ability to concentrate on their studies	70	120	10		3.3	Agreed
10.	Hunger as a result of students' inability to buy what to eat affects their ability to read their course materials	50	150			3.25	Agreed
11.	Increased cost of food items has made students to miss lectures in search of jobs to support themselves financially	105	95			3.53	Agreed
12.	Students might skip meals they have per day due to increased food costs, leading to hunger and decreased concentration during study hours.	80	115	5		3.38	Agreed
13.	Inadequate food due to high cost of food items result in reduced energy levels, making it difficult for students to maintain concentration in their studies.	70	126	4		3.33	Agreed
14.	Poor nutrition among students as a result of increased cost of feeding affects the proper functioning of their brain towards academic activities	95	96	9		3.43	Agreed
15.	Poor nutrition due to increased cost of feeding leads to health issues among students which their focus on their studies negatively	65	130	5		3.3	Agreed
16.	Students' inability to feed well as a result of high cost feeding leads them to abandon their studies to engage in crime	45	145	10		3.18	Agreed
Grand Mean						3.34	

Table 2 shows that items 9-16 obtained mean scores of 2.50 and above, which is the study mean criterion. With a cluster mean of 3.34, the result shows that respondents agreed that increased cost of feeding affect students' ability to concentrate on their studies in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question 3

What is the perceived influence of increased cost of educational resources on students' academic grades?

Table 3: Perceived influence of increased cost of educational resources on students'

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
17.	Inability of students to buy the necessary textbooks for their courses affects their ability to study ahead, which leads to poor grades in examinations	50	150			3.25	Agreed
18.	Increased cost of personal computers prevents students from doing their course assignments on time which result to them scoring low in the continuous assessment	5	145	50		2.78	Agreed
19.	Increased cost of photocopying makes it difficult for students to get course handouts from their course mates, which affects their grades negatively	105	95			3.53	Agreed
20.	Students are unable to afford the high cost of typing their assignments at business centres resulting to their inability to submit, which leads to not being scored	100	90	10		3.45	Agreed
21.	High cost of materials carryout projects given in different courses makes students unable to conduct quality work, which affects their grades	23	175	2		3.11	Agreed
22.	Inability of students to afford high cost of extra tutorial classes affects their grades in examination	35	160	5		3.15	Agreed
23.	Increased cost of subscribing to online academic materials makes students unable to learning about topics in their courses that are not yet to understood by them, which affects their grades	70	130			3.35	Agreed
24.	Students' inability to afford high cost of internet subscription hinders their ability to conduct research on issues in their courses which limits their knowledge	110	85	5		3.53	Agreed
Grand Mean						3.27	

academic grades

Table 3 shows that items 17-24 obtained mean scores above 2.50, which is the study mean criterion. With a cluster mean of 3.27, the result shows that respondents agreed that increased cost of educational resources affect students' academic grades in Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Research Question 4

What are the possible ways students can cope with the stress of the fuel subsidy removal on their academic performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University?

Table 4: Possible ways students can cope with the stress of the fuel subsidy removal on their academic performance

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
25.	Share ride with fellow students to reduce transportation costs and ensure they attend school regularly	50	150			3.23	Agreed
26.	Make use of public transportation options to reduce the personal fuel cost burden	97	100	3		3.49	Agreed
27.	Use bicycles for short distances to save on transportation costs and stay physically active	85	100	15		3.35	Agreed
28.	Create a detailed budget that includes transportation, feeding, and educational expenses, and stick to it to manage funds efficiently	65	125	10		3.28	Agreed
29.	Prepare meals in advance to save on the increased cost of eating out	60	130	10		3.25	Agreed
30.	Buy essential food items in bulk to take advantage of potential discounts	55	145			3.28	Agreed
31.	Consider part-time jobs to support their educational expenses	70	115	15		3.28	Agreed
32.	Collaborate with classmates in study groups to share educational resources and reduce individual costs while enhancing academic performance through group learning	80	120			3.4	Agreed
33.	Explore scholarship opportunities offered by the university or external organizations to offset educational costs	50	150			3.23	Agreed
Grand Mean						3.31	

Table 4 shows that items 25-36 obtained mean scores above 2.50, which is the study mean criterion. With a cluster mean of 3.31, the result shows that respondents agreed that there are possible ways students can cope with the influence of the fuel subsidy removal on their academic performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Summary of Findings

From the analyses of this study, the following major findings were made:

11. Increased cost of transportation influences students' attendance to school activities in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
12. Increased cost of feeding affect students' ability to concentrate on their studies in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
13. Increased cost of educational resources affect students' academic grades in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
14. There are possible ways students can cope with the influence of the fuel subsidy removal on their academic performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Discussion of the Findings

Perceived influence of increased cost of transportation on students' school activities attendance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

The analysis of data for the first research question of this study sought to find the perceived influence of increased cost of transportation on students' school activities attendance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The respondents agreed that increased cost of transportation leads to various academic challenges for students. These challenges include increased absenteeism for students living far from the university campus, late arrival to lectures due to trekking, early departure from lectures for those commuting from outside the campus, lateness to quizzes and exams due to trekking, reduced participation in field trips, decreased attendance at academic seminars and workshops, fewer weekend visits to school and town libraries, and reduced involvement in extracurricular activities. This finding corroborates with the findings of Ogunode and Aregbesola (2023) who affirmed that the hike in transportation fare as a result of fuel subsidy removal is a major cause of students' absenteeism in classes and poor academic performance in general, cutting across primary, secondary and higher education. This is because, students are at the receiving end of the education system, and whatever happens to it affects them directly.

Perceived influence of increased cost of feeding on students' ability to concentrate on their studies

The analysis of data for the second research question sought to examine perceived influence of increased cost of feeding on students' ability to concentrate on their studies in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The respondents agreed that the rising cost of feeding triggered by the removal of fuel subsidy has affected their ability to concentrate on their studies as they worry about affording their next meal. Additionally, hunger resulting from their inability to buy food affects their ability to study, causing them to miss lectures in search of jobs for

financial support, skip meals, and suffer from reduced energy levels and poor nutrition, ultimately negatively impacting their academic performance and potentially driving some to engage in criminal activities. This finding corroborates with that of Omoniyi (2023) who argued that the negative consequences of the removal of fuel subsidy have led to significant hardships, particularly in the area of rising costs of food and students from lower-income backgrounds are most affected as soaring inflation has eroded the financial support students receive for their upkeep. Omoniyi also stated that increased cost of feeding which is one of the adverse effect of fuel subsidy removal is responsible for increased crime rates, with cultism and fornication among female students becoming more prevalent. Again, this study finding is in line with that of Nwachukwu and Tumba (2023) which claimed that the removal of fuel subsidy has made the cost of food and groceries to rise sharply due to higher transportation expenses incurred by businesses transporting produced food from point of production to where they are needed. This therefore affects not only the purchasing power of people but also their nutrition, particularly students.

Perceived influence of increased cost of educational resources on students' academic grades

The analysis of data for the third research question sought to examine the perceived influence of increased cost of educational resources on students' academic grades in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The respondents agreed that their inability to purchase necessary textbooks, increased costs of personal computers for assignments, high cost of photocopying and typing of assignments, high material costs for projects, expensive tutorial classes, costly online academic materials, and expensive internet subscription negatively impact their academic performance, particularly their grades in quiz and examinations. This means that increased cost of educational resources negatively influences students' academic grades in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This finding agrees with that of Omoniyi (2023) who revealed that due to removal of fuel subsidy, sellers of academic materials have been forced to increase the prices of their goods, further burdening students, especially those from economically disadvantaged families which affects their academic performance. He also revealed that both public and private institutions, such as the University of Lagos, have increased their school fees substantially, making education less accessible for many.

Possible ways students can cope with the influence of the fuel subsidy removal on their academic performance

Lastly, analysis of data for the third research question sought to examine the possible ways students in can cope with the influence of the fuel subsidy removal on their academic performance. The respondents agreed that sharing rides with fellow students, using public transportation, using bicycles for short distances, creating a detailed budget, preparing meals in advance, buying essential food items in bulk, considering part-time jobs, forming study groups, and exploring scholarship opportunities. This finding corresponds with that of Omoniyi (2023)

which state that the government should urgently introduces palliative measures to alleviate the suffering of students and their parents. Also, Nwachukwu and Tumba (2023) stated that government should compensate the poor with measures like transport vouchers and promoting energy-efficient practices and alternative transportation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study revealed that fuel subsidy removal which led to increase in cost of transportation, feeding, and educational resources has negatively influenced students' academic performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The findings underscore the multifaceted adverse influence of fuel subsidy removal on students, including heightened academic challenges such as absenteeism, late arrivals, reduced participation in activities, and compromised nutrition due to the escalating cost of living. These factors collectively contribute to decreased academic performance and increased hardships for students. The study also highlighted potential coping mechanisms, emphasizing the importance of collective solutions from both individuals and the government to alleviate the burdens imposed by the removal of fuel subsidies. Implementing palliative measures, promoting alternative transportation, and enhancing financial support for students and their families emerged as crucial strategies to mitigate the impact of subsidy removal on academic pursuits.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

14. There is need for government to implement a subsidized transportation scheme, specifically targeted at students to alleviate the financial burden of increased transportation costs places on them. This should be executed in collaboration with transportation providers or introduce a student discount card system to reduce transportation expenses for students commuting to the university.
15. Government should establish food assistance programmes within the university or in collaboration with local vendors to provide affordable and nutritious meals for students. These programmes can include subsidized meal plans, food vouchers, or on-campus food banks to ensure students have access to adequate nutrition without straining their finances.
16. Government and university management should work together to make educational resources more affordable and accessible to students. This can be achieved through initiatives such as bulk purchasing of textbooks for resale at reduced prices, establishing a central repository of academic materials for students to access at a lower cost or for free.

17. Government and university management should expand financial aid programmes and provide information about scholarship opportunities to support students financially. Additionally, collaborate with local businesses to create part-time job opportunities on or near the campus, enabling students to earn income to cover their living and educational expenses.

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