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Review Article

A narrative review of trends and challenges in the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme in Nigeria

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Highlights/Key Messages

- The Nigerian Home-Grown School Feeding Programme improves enrolment and attendance where delivery is consistent.
- Nutrition gains are possible, but evidence is uneven.
- Local procurement can support farmers and vendors.
- Funding and weak monitoring limit quality and equity.
- Better national data and longitudinal evaluation are needed.

Background
The Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) in Nigeria remains one of the country's most ambitious social investment initiatives, aimed at reducing hunger, improving school attendance, and promoting rural economic growth.

Objective
This narrative review examines the programme's trends, regional variations, and implementation challenges across Nigeria.

Methods
A qualitative, non-systematic narrative review synthesised evidence from nine empirical peer-reviewed studies and three policy/technical documents (including relevant government/institutional reports) to summarise programme outcomes, nutritional evidence, and implementation gaps.

Results
States such as Osun, Ogun, Kaduna, Kano, and Enugu continue to implement HGSFP programmes with varying degrees of coverage and efficiency, while others, including Oyo (suspended since 2022), Kebbi, Rivers, Cross River, and Nasarawa have discontinued or suspended implementation due to inadequate funding, weak political will, or logistical breakdowns. Across regions, the programme has shown measurable progress in school enrolment and attendance, modest improvements in pupils' nutrition, and enhanced participation of smallholder farmers in local food supply chains.

Conclusion
Challenges persist, particularly concerning funding irregularities, poor monitoring, corruption, and inequitable coverage. In addition, ethical and governance lapses have raised concerns about transparency and accountability in procurement and meal quality. Overall, the review reveals a mixed but instructive trajectory. While Nigeria's HGSFP contributes to educational and agricultural development, its sustainability depends on consistent financing, state–federal coordination, and robust monitoring mechanisms. Further research should quantify nutritional outcomes nationally and explore policy strategies for ensuring equitable access and ethical governance of the programme

Keywords: home-grown school feeding programme, school feeding, nigeria, social protection

Introduction

In low- and middle-income countries, child hunger and poor nutrition remain critical barriers to educational attainment and cognitive development (Kirolos et al., 2022). Millions of school-age children in Africa attend classes hungry, impairing their focus, learning outcomes, and long-term productivity. In response, school feeding programmes (SFPs) have gained recognition as cost-effective strategies that combine nutrition improvement with educational and social protection goals, contributing directly to the achievement of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 3, and 4) (Verguet et al., 2020).

Education and nutrition have long been intertwined in social policy debates, especially in developing contexts where hunger directly undermines learning. SFPs have emerged globally as integrated interventions that address the dual challenges of child malnutrition and low school attendance. From their early beginnings in Europe in the eighteenth century, where countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom institutionalised school meals to support impoverished children, school feeding evolved into a strategic social protection mechanism for promoting human capital development (Ugi et al., 2025). The approach was later adopted by international organisations including FAO, WFP, and UNICEF, which promoted the model across Africa as a means of improving educational outcomes and supporting local economies (Igboji et al., 2022; Agu et al., 2023). In Nigeria, the concept dates to 2004, when the Federal Government under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative launched the pilot Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) in the following twelve states: Osun, Ogun, Enugu, Cross River, Rivers, Nassarawa, Bauchi, Yobe, Kebbi, Kogi, Kano, and the Federal Capital Territory (Elvis & Odinka, 2015; Odoh et al., 2024; Agu et al., 2023). Despite the initiative's promise, inadequate funding, absence of clear legal frameworks, and weak monitoring mechanisms led to the suspension of most pilot phases within a year (Olutola & Aguh, 2023). Notably, Osun and Kano States sustained implementation through independent state funding and redesigns, and Osun's O'Meals model became the first sub-national success story. Following the setbacks of the early 2000s, the programme was relaunched in 2016 under the presidency's Social Investment Programme, with the goal of providing one nutritious meal daily to pupils in Primary 1–3 across public schools nationwide (Agu et al., 2023). The revamped version sought to integrate nutrition improvement with local agricultural development by sourcing food from smallholder farmers and creating jobs for cooks and suppliers, thereby strengthening local economies (Odoh et al., 2024). According to the Federal Government's reports, by 2020, the initiative had reached over nine million pupils across thirty-five states and the FCT, engaged about 107,000 cooks, and provided livelihoods for thousands of small-scale farmers (Agu et al., 2023).

Despite these achievements, inconsistencies persist across regions. Studies by Igboji et al. (2022) and Agu et al. (2023) reveal considerable variation in programme coverage, nutritional adequacy, and implementation capacity. Some states remain fully active and integrated into federal funding cycles, while others have either scaled down or entirely discontinued due to governance, ethical, or fiscal constraints (Ugi et al., 2025). The identified ethical issues include procurement corruption, food quality irregularities, and inequitable coverage across rural and urban schools (Jacob & Musa, 2022). Beyond addressing educational access, the SFP serves as a vehicle for rural economic development. Odoh et al. (2024) demonstrated that the HGSFP stimulated local agricultural productivity, particularly among smallholder farmers, by guaranteeing market access for their produce. This linkage between agriculture, education, and nutrition aligns the Nigerian model with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8). Yet, researchers such as Azubuike and Mbah (2019) argue that the nutritional impact on pupils remains uneven, with many still experiencing food insufficiency or low-quality meals due to poor supervision, high inflation, and weak logistics. Despite extensive implementation and government reporting, there remains limited consolidated evidence on how Nigeria's school feeding programme has evolved across states and over time. Recent Nigerian evidence nevertheless provides useful state-level insights into the nutritional and implementation dimensions of the programme. For example, studies from Kaduna, Osun, and Southwestern Nigeria have shown that while the National HGSFP has potential to improve children's nutritional well-being, dietary adequacy and programme impact vary considerably by context, meal composition, implementation quality, and household background. Evidence from these settings suggests that the nutritional contribution of school meals may be meaningful but not always sufficient to meet broader dietary needs, reinforcing the importance of examining school feeding not only as an educational intervention, but also as a nutrition-sensitive social protection strategy (Zailan et al., 2023; Adebisi et al., 2020; Olumakaiye 2013). Hence, this paper draws on empirical and qualitative literature on the HGSFP to synthesise patterns, achievements, and persistent challenges.

Methods

A qualitative, non-systematic narrative review approach was adopted to synthesise evidence on trends, outcomes, and implementation challenges of Nigeria's HGSFP. Consistent with guidance on narrative reviews, the approach emphasised transparency, breadth of coverage, and conceptual integration rather than statistical aggregation (Snyder, 2019). Evidence was drawn from peer-reviewed studies and relevant policy/technical documents, including government and institutional reports, to support contextual interpretation.

Search Strategy and Source Selection

A structured literature search was conducted to identify evidence examining the SFP in Nigeria. Academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ProQuest, PubMed, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, and African Journals Online (AJOL), were searched for publications released between 2018 and 2025. Search terms were applied in various combinations, including "school feeding in Nigeria," "Home-Grown School Feeding Programme," "effect of school feeding on enrolment," and "school feeding and learning outcomes." In addition, earlier landmark policy and conceptual sources were cited selectively to describe the

programme's historical development and policy background. In addition to peer-reviewed journal articles, relevant grey literature (including government, institutional, and development partner reports) was considered to support contextual understanding of programme evolution, implementation processes, and governance arrangements. Grey literature was identified through targeted searches of institutional websites and repositories (e.g., HGSFP/government pages and partner organisations) and international agency portals (e.g., WFP, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank). This was supplemented by Google advanced searches using combinations of the above keywords with terms such as "report," "policy," "evaluation," and "implementation," as well as backward reference searching of included sources.

To enhance transparency and minimise bias, included sources were assessed for traceability and methodological clarity. Where multiple sources reported similar outcomes or challenges, findings were compared across sources and interpreted as convergent only when they were consistent in direction and plausible in relation to programme context. In total, twelve key sources were retained as directly relevant to this narrative review. These comprised nine empirical peer-reviewed studies summarised in Table 2 and three policy/technical documents used for contextual background and triangulation. To strengthen the narrative synthesis's relevance to Nigeria, additional state-level empirical studies examining dietary diversity, meal adequacy, and nutritional outcomes among school-aged children were incorporated during revision.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were included if they explicitly examined the School Feeding Programme or the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme as implemented in Nigeria, at the local, government, state, or national levels. Eligible sources addressed implementation processes, governance and accountability arrangements, and programme outcomes, including impacts on enrolment, attendance, learners' nutritional status/health, meal quality and delivery, and local agricultural or rural economic development. Sources focusing on unrelated nutrition topics, continental-level analyses without Nigeria-specific evidence, or programmes implemented outside the Nigerian context were excluded to maintain thematic precision.

Qualitative Synthesis Process

Data were qualitatively synthesised using a structured thematic narrative approach rather than statistical aggregation. All included studies were read repeatedly, and key findings relevant to the review objectives were extracted. These findings were then organised into recurring thematic categories:

- ***i. Educational outcomes:*** (enrolment, attendance, participation/retention, learning-related indicators where reported)
- ***ii. Nutrition and health outcomes***: (anthropometry/diet quality, meal adequacy, food acceptability)
- ***iii. Agricultural and economic outcomes:*** (local procurement, smallholder/family farmer linkages, vendors/cooks' livelihoods, rural spillovers)
- ***iv. Governance, funding, and implementation challenges*:** (financing reliability, monitoring/quality control, infrastructure, ethics/accountability, state discontinuation)

Synthesis involved comparative interpretation across studies, identifying areas of convergence and divergence in reported outcomes and experiences across states. Reliability was strengthened through triangulation within the included evidence base by comparing patterns across the nine empirical studies and corroborating contextual claims using the three policy/technical documents.

Results

Educational Outcomes

Across multiple states, evidence consistently indicates that the School Feeding Programme has contributed to improved school enrolment, attendance, and pupil retention, although the magnitude of these effects varies by region and implementation stability. States with sustained programme funding and administrative continuity—such as Osun, Ogun, Kaduna, Kano, and Enugu—reported marked increases in enrolment and regular attendance shortly after implementation (Gbenga-Adeaga et al., 2021; Agu et al., 2023; Ologele et al., 2024). In contrast, states experiencing irregular funding or partial implementation, including Benue, Abia, and Taraba, reported more modest or inconsistent educational gains (Igboji et al., 2022).

Comparative evidence suggests that rural and semi-urban schools benefited more strongly than urban schools, where hunger was not always the primary barrier to attendance. Overall, the findings point to a positive association between school feeding and educational participation, with outcomes strongly conditioned by programme continuity and local administrative capacity.

Nutritional and Health Outcomes

Evidence on nutritional outcomes suggests modest but measurable improvements, although findings remain mixed across studies and states. Reported improvements were primarily reflected in anthropometric indicators, particularly reductions in underweight and stunting among pupils in schools implementing feeding programmes (Azubuike & Mbah, 2019; Gbenga-Adeaga et al., 2021). These outcomes suggest gains in short- and medium-term nutritional status rather than comprehensive dietary adequacy.

Nevertheless, recent Nigerian studies provide a more nuanced picture of nutritional quality and meal adequacy under the programme. In Kaduna State, school meals served under the HGSFP were found to contribute meaningfully to children's recommended nutrient and energy intake, particularly for some macronutrients and selected micronutrients, but remained inadequate for nutrients such

as fibre, potassium, and vitamin C (Zailan et al., 2023). Additional evidence from Southwestern Nigeria also indicates that undernutrition among school-age children is shaped not only by exposure to school feeding but also by broader dietary diversity and household conditions. Olumakaiye (2013) identified dietary diversity as an important correlate of undernutrition among school-age children, also indicating that school meals alone may not fully address nutritional vulnerability where overall household diets remain poor. In parallel, evidence from Osun State suggests that programme exposure was associated with improved nutritional outcomes among children in rural households, underscoring the importance of implementation quality and delivery continuity (Adebisi et al., 2020).

Taken together, the evidence indicates that the programme has the potential to improve pupils' nutritional status, but the magnitude and consistency of benefit vary substantially across settings. Most studies still do not report comprehensive micronutrient intake, dietary diversity scores, or biochemical indicators, thereby limiting conclusions about broader nutritional quality. Consequently, while anthropometric and meal-based improvements have been observed in some settings, the programme's overall nutritional impact remains uneven and context-dependent.

Agricultural and Economic Outcomes

Evidence on agricultural and economic outcomes suggests that programme effects vary across states and depend strongly on how procurement is organised. Multi-state analyses indicate that participation in the HGSFP generated measurable benefits for smallholder (family) farmers, particularly in states where procurement systems explicitly operationalised the programme's home-grown design—i.e., deliberately sourcing food items from local smallholder farmers and local supply chains—such as Osun, Kaduna, and Kano (Odoh et al., 2024). In these settings, approximately 9.6% of the variance in rural agricultural output in participating areas was linked to programme-related food supply chains. In contrast, states that discontinued or scaled down programme implementation experienced weakened or absent farmer linkages, limiting local economic spillovers.

Across regions, the programme also created income opportunities for women engaged as cooks and food vendors, contributing to household income and local economic activity (Jacob & Musa, 2022). Overall, the evidence indicates that the programme can function as a rural development instrument when implementation is consistent, and procurement arrangements intentionally include local smallholder farmers as key suppliers.

Governance, Funding, and Implementation Challenges

Governance and implementation constraints emerged as cross-cutting factors shaping programme performance across Nigeria. Irregular funding, delayed disbursements, and the absence of a binding legal framework were repeatedly cited as key threats to sustainability and to the consistency of delivery (Jacob & Musa, 2022; Ugi et al., 2025). States that discontinued or scaled down implementation, such as Rivers, Kebbi, Cross River, and Nasarawa were reported to share common constraints, including weak political commitment, limited monitoring capacity, and allegations of corruption and inefficiencies, which undermined continuity and public confidence in programme integrity (Jacob & Musa, 2022; Ugi et al., 2025).

Operational constraints also affected the quality and reliability of meal delivery. Agu et al. (2023) reported head teachers' concerns about the poor quality and quantity of meals, noting that some schools lacked kitchens and adequate storage facilities, necessitating off-site cooking and raising hygiene concerns. Azubuike & Mbah (2019) further reported that 70% of children in Anambra State skipped at least one school meal per week due to either unavailability or poor taste, highlighting lapses in supervision, quality assurance, and supply reliability. These findings indicate that implementation challenges extend beyond financing to include infrastructure readiness, vendor capacity, and enforcement of service standards. Recent evidence from Oyo State indicates that programme suspension (reported since 2022) can rapidly undermine vendors' livelihoods and household food security (Manawa et al., 2025). States with stronger institutional oversight and co-funding arrangements were associated with more consistent implementation and greater programme resilience, suggesting that administrative capacity and accountability systems play a decisive role in performance (Odoh et al., 2024; Ugi et al., 2025). Monitoring gaps were particularly evident in settings reporting poor meal quality and inconsistent delivery, reinforcing the link between governance capacity and programme outcomes.

Table 1 shows the current state-level implementation status of Nigeria's Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, highlighting marked variations in programme continuity across the federation. While several states, such as Osun, Ogun, Kano, Kaduna, and Enugu, demonstrate sustained implementation supported by federal funding and state co-financing, a number of states operate the programme only partially, often constrained by irregular funding and logistical challenges. In contrast, several early pilot states have discontinued implementation entirely following the initial rollout, largely due to weak political commitment, inadequate financing, and governance concerns. In summary, the table illustrates the uneven institutionalisation of the programme across states, underscoring the influence of political will, funding stability, and administrative capacity on programme sustainability.

Table 1. State-Level Status of Nigeria's Home-Grown School Feeding Programme

Category	States	Key Notes / Evidence Source
Currently Active / Ongoing Implementation	Osun, Ogun, Kaduna, Kano, Enugu, Lagos, Plateau, Anambra, Ekiti, Kwara, Jigawa, Gombe, Katsina	Sustained through federal support and state co-funding. Demonstrated increased enrolment and job creation (Odoh et al., 2024; Agu et al., 2023; Gbenga-Adeaga et al., 2021).
Partially Active / Scaling Down	Benue, Delta, Abia, Imo, Taraba, Niger	Irregular funding and food-supply delays reported; partial coverage of schools (Igboji et al., 2022; Ugi et al., 2025).
Discontinued / Suspended Implementation	Oyo (suspended since 2022), Kebbi, Rivers, Cross River, Nassarawa, Kogi, Bauchi, Yobe, FCT (pilot phase only)	Includes early pilot locations that ceased after initial rollout and states reported to have suspended/discontinued implementation in later phases due to financing constraints, weak policy backing, or governance concerns (Odoh et al., 2024; Jacob & Musa, 2022, Manawa et al., 2025).

Source: Compiled by author from Odoh et al. (2024); Igboji et al. (2022); Ugi et al. (2025); Agu et al. (2023); Azubuike & Mbah (2019); Manawa et al., 2025.

Table 2 shows key empirical evidence from studies examining the implementation, outcomes, governance, and nutritional adequacy of Nigeria's Home-Grown School Feeding Programme. Across diverse methodological approaches and geographic contexts, the reviewed studies consistently report positive effects on school enrolment, attendance, and rural economic participation, while newer nutrition-focused studies add evidence on meal adequacy, dietary diversity, and anthropometric outcomes. However, these benefits are tempered by recurrent challenges, including inadequate funding, weak monitoring systems, poor meal quality, and inequitable coverage.

Table 2. Key Empirical Findings and Thematic Insights from Reviewed Studies

S/N	Author(s)	Focus Area	State(s)/Sample	Key Findings	Core Implications
1.	Agu et al. (2023)	Implementation & policy appraisal	Enugu (24 head teachers)	Improved enrolment and participation; poor meal quality due to low funding	Quality control and better funding are essential
2.	Igboji et al. (2022)	Perception of administrators	Ebonyi (61 respondents)	96.7% confirmed improved enrolment; 70.5% cited lack of monitoring	Monitoring gaps and weak supervision limit impact
3.	Odoh et al. (2024)	Agricultural linkage analysis	Multi-state survey	9.6% variance in rural output linked to HGSFP participation	Strong rural development potential if scaled
4.	Azubuike & Mbah (2019)	Nutritional impact assessment	Anambra (396 pupils)	Reduced stunting and underweight; irregular meal supply	Nutritional monitoring remains inadequate
5.	Jacob & Musa (2022)	Governance and sustainability	Nationwide review	Chronic funding delay, corruption, and lack of law	Legal framework needed for continuity
6.	Ugi et al. (2025)	Ethical and equity issues	National analysis	Corruption, ghost beneficiaries, inequitable coverage	Stronger accountability mechanisms required
7	Olumakaiye, M. F. (2013)	Dietary diversity and undernutrition	Southwestern Nigeria	Low dietary diversity was associated with undernutrition among school-age children	School feeding should be interpreted alongside wider household diet quality
8	Adebisi et al. (2020)	Effect of HGSFP on nutritional status	Osun State	Programme exposure was associated with improved nutritional outcomes among children in rural households	Sustained and context-sensitive implementation may improve child nutrition
9	Zailan et al., (2023)	Nutrient and energy contribution of school meals	Zaria, Kaduna	School meals contributed meaningfully to recommended nutrient and energy intake, but some nutrients remained inadequate	Meal provision supports intake, but menu quality still needs strengthening

HGSFP=Home-Grown School Feeding Programme

Discussion

The collective evidence reviewed in this paper suggests that Nigeria's SFP, under its current iteration as the HGSFP, is associated with gains in key programme domains, particularly school enrolment and attendance, as well as linkages to local agricultural supply chains. Evidence on nutritional and health outcomes indicates potential benefits, although measurement and reporting are inconsistent across states. This pattern is reinforced by more recent Nigerian studies, not limited to perception-based outcomes. For instance, evidence from Kaduna State suggests that school meals can make meaningful contributions to children's daily nutrient intake, yet nutritional adequacy remains incomplete across several nutrients, indicating that meal provision does not automatically translate into fully balanced diets (Zailan et al., 2023). Likewise, findings from Osun State suggest beneficial effects on children's nutritional status, though these effects appear closely tied to implementation quality and delivery continuity (Adebisi et al., 2020). Broader evidence from Southwestern Nigeria also shows that dietary diversity remains an important determinant of undernutrition among school-age children, underscoring that school feeding should be interpreted as one component of a wider nutrition-support environment rather than a complete solution in itself (Olumakaiye, 2013).

Integrating Education, Nutrition, and Economic Development

The SFP's underlying design demonstrates a multidimensional strategy for linking education, nutrition, and rural economic empowerment. As Odoh et al. (2024) and Agu et al. (2023) describe, the home-grown model of this programme deliberately links school meal provision to local food supply chains by purchasing agricultural products directly from smallholder farmers. This integration promotes both child and economic development, reinforcing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 4, and 8).

The programme's design also creates income opportunities for women engaged as cooks and food vendors, which may contribute to household livelihoods and local economic activity (Jacob & Musa, 2022). Together with smallholder procurement linkages, these features suggest that the HGSFP may generate broader socio-economic spillovers alongside education and nutrition objectives, where implementation is consistent.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual pathway through which the HGSFP may generate interlinked benefits across education, nutrition/health, and local economic development. Local procurement can strengthen smallholder supply chains, while regular meal provision may reduce short-term hunger and support attendance and classroom engagement. The strength of these pathways is likely to vary across states depending on the reliability of financing, procurement integrity, and monitoring capacity (Odoh et al., 2024; Agu et al., 2023).

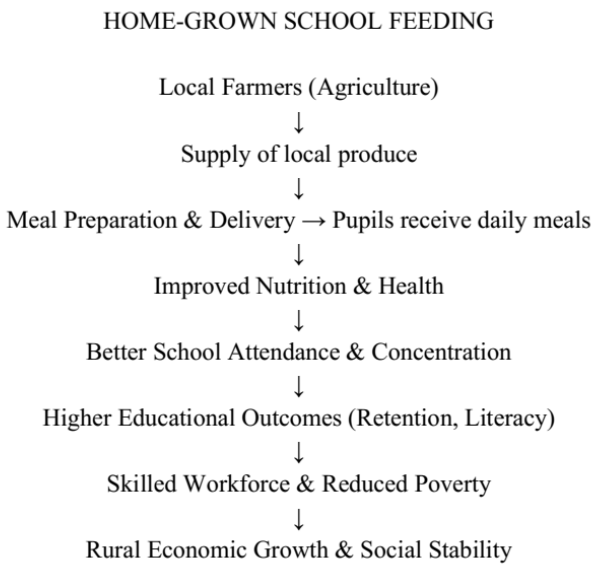


Figure 1. Integrating Education, Nutrition, and Economic Development into HGSFP

Source: Adapted from Odoh et al. (2024); Agu et al. (2023); Ugi et al. (2025)

Uneven Implementation and State Disparities

Despite these advantages, the review highlights wide inter-state disparities in both programme continuity and impact. States such as Osun, Ogun, Kaduna, Kano, and Enugu have sustained success through proactive governance and co-funding mechanisms, whereas others, such as Rivers, Kebbi, Cross River, and Nasarawa, have discontinued operations (Jacob & Musa, 2022; Ugi et al., 2025). This divergence reflects differences in administrative efficiency, political will, and financial management.

The Osun O'Meals model, for example, became a benchmark for effective subnational adaptation. It combined decentralised meal preparation, independent monitoring, and community participation, ensuring both cost efficiency and public trust (Odoh et al., 2024). In contrast, states that discontinued the programme typically cited delays in fund disbursement, weak oversight, and inflation-related cost escalation as key deterrents. The variation also underscores a governance dilemma inherent in Nigeria's federal structure. Education and social protection are concurrent responsibilities, and thus coordination between federal and state governments remains essential but often inconsistent. The lack of binding legislation means that state-level adoption depends largely on executive goodwill rather than statutory obligation (Ugi et al., 2025). Without a legal framework mandating continuity, each political transition risks disrupting programme delivery.

Quality Control, Ethics, and Accountability

Ethical issues within the HGSFP cut across transparency, accountability, and quality assurance. Studies repeatedly identify corruption, ghost beneficiaries, and politically motivated vendor selection as recurring threats (Ugi et al., 2025; Jacob & Musa, 2022). These issues undermine both credibility and effectiveness.

Findings from Gbenga-Adeaga et al. (2021) revealed that challenges in the HGSFP included overcrowded classrooms, inadequate storage facilities, an ineffective monitoring and evaluation system, insufficient funding, and seasonality in the study area.

From an ethical standpoint, these findings raise concerns about equity and social justice. If certain communities consistently receive substandard or delayed meals, the programme risks reinforcing, rather than reducing inequality. Furthermore, the politicisation of procurement processes distorts the programme's original developmental vision.

To strengthen accountability, scholars recommend digitised beneficiary tracking, regular audits, and community-based monitoring systems (Jacob & Musa, 2022). These reforms could significantly reduce leakages and promote data-driven decision-making.

Impact on Learning and Social Outcomes

Although most studies focus on attendance and enrolment, some evidence also points to improvements in learning outcomes and cognitive performance. As Igboji et al. (2022) explain, head teachers perceived greater classroom attentiveness and reduced absenteeism among pupils receiving meals. These observations align with global evidence that nutrition and cognition are strongly correlated.

Socially, the HGSFP fosters community engagement and local entrepreneurship. The involvement of women as cooks, youth as logistics staff, and farmers as suppliers creates a network of stakeholders who collectively support the educational system (Odoh et al., 2024). In several states, local communities also participate in monitoring food quality, reinforcing trust between schools and households.

Evidence Quality and Reporting Gaps

Evidence quality and outcome reporting are key limitations in Nigeria's school feeding literature. At the same time, the inclusion of newer Nigerian studies on meal adequacy and dietary diversity highlights the value of moving beyond broad implementation assessments toward more nutrition-specific indicators. Studies that examine the nutrient contribution of meals, menu adequacy, and dietary diversity provide a stronger basis for assessing whether observed educational gains are matched by meaningful nutritional benefits. Expanding such evidence across more states would improve the precision and policy relevance of future reviews. In addition, there is limited availability of quantitative national-level evidence and few longitudinal evaluations capable of estimating sustained effects over time. This gap makes it difficult to attribute changes in educational performance and health outcomes to the programme beyond short-term participation indicators. Future research would benefit from harmonised national monitoring systems and longitudinal or quasi-experimental evaluation designs that combine implementation monitoring with objective education and nutrition indicators, enabling stronger inference about impact and equity across states.

Sustainability and Policy Implications

Sustainability remains the HGSFP's central challenge. As Jacob and Musa (2022) highlight, the absence of an enabling legal framework has made the programme susceptible to discontinuities during political transitions. Moreover, inflation and food price volatility erode financial viability. Reported per-child feeding allocations vary by period and state; for example, Oyo State vendors received fortnightly payments based on a daily budget of ₦100 per child (Manawa et al., 2025). Following suspension, severe household food insecurity among vendors increased markedly, highlighting that programme interruptions can harm secondary beneficiaries within the local supply chain (Manawa et al., 2025). Evidence from Oyo State further suggests that interruptions to HGSFP delivery can substantially affect vendors' access to food and dietary quality, strengthening the case for financing mechanisms to prevent prolonged suspensions.

Equally pressing is the need for institutionalised data systems to support planning and evaluation. Odoh et al. (2024) argue that the lack of centralised reporting undermines coordination between federal and state agencies. A standardised digital platform linking ministries of education, health, and agriculture could streamline oversight and transparency.

Finally, there is a growing consensus that the HGSFP should be embedded within Nigeria's broader social protection framework rather than treated as an isolated welfare scheme. Integrating it with agricultural extension, school health services, and nutrition programmes would ensure cross-sectoral alignment and cost-effectiveness.

Conclusions

The findings affirm that the programme, particularly in its current form as the National HGSFP, has made meaningful contributions to school enrolment, attendance, and rural economic participation. By sourcing food locally, it has strengthened linkages between education, agriculture, and community development, thereby supporting the nation's broader social protection and poverty-reduction goals. The review also exposes persistent weaknesses in governance, funding, and accountability that threaten long-term sustainability. Across multiple studies (e.g., Agu et al., 2023; Igboji et al., 2022; Jacob & Musa, 2022; Ugi et al., 2025), several structural challenges recur: inconsistent funding cycles, inflationary pressures, inadequate monitoring, political interference, and corruption. Evidence from Oyo State further indicates that suspensions can produce substantial adverse livelihood and food-security consequences for vendors, strengthening the case for financing and governance mechanisms that prevent prolonged interruptions (Manawa et al., 2025). These systemic flaws not only undermine nutritional quality and equity but also erode public confidence in the initiative. The uneven implementation across states, where some maintain robust engagement and others have discontinued altogether, reflects the fragility of social programmes lacking legal and institutional safeguards. While the evidence confirms positive educational and socio-economic effects, these gains remain context dependent. Nutritional evidence from more recent Nigerian studies further suggests that although school meals can meaningfully contribute to children's dietary intake and nutritional status, these benefits are not uniformly adequate across nutrients or settings, reinforcing the need for stronger menu standards, greater dietary diversity, and monitoring systems.

Policy Recommendations

Enact a Legal Framework: Federal and state assemblies should institutionalise the HGSFP through legislation to ensure continuity and protection against political discontinuities.

- Increase and Index Funding: Increase and index per-child feeding allocations to inflation and state cost structures
- Strengthen Monitoring and Data Systems: Introduce digital beneficiary tracking and real-time reporting platforms to enhance transparency and accountability.
- Enhance Intersectoral Coordination: Integrate school feeding with agriculture, health, and education

ministries to achieve nutritional and developmental synergy.

- Prioritise Equity and Ethics: Implement independent audits, community oversight committees, and ethical procurement guidelines to eliminate corruption and promote fairness.

Author Contributions

Conceptualisation: AEO, Writing – review and editing: AEO, EAO, IAB, FRS, AOA, TOA, POO. Data Extraction: AEO, EAO, IAB, FRS, AOA, TOA, POO, FOG Manuscript preparation: AEO, EAO, IAB, FRS, FOG. Writing – final draft: AEO. All authors have read and approved the final version of the paper and its submission and have given consent for publication.

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