

Impacts Of Fuel Subsidy Removal On Undergraduates' Studying And Examination In Public Tertiary Institutions In Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the impacts of fuel subsidy removal on undergraduates' studying and examination in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. Two purposes, research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study comprised of 68,560 undergraduates in four tertiary institutions in the study area. The sample size of the study comprised 398 students. Two instruments were developed by the researcher to collect data for the study. These are the Subsidy Removal Impacts Assessment Scale (SRIAS) and the Undergraduates Academic Activities Questionnaire (UAAQ). The instruments were validated by three experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha coefficient for both instruments. The reliability coefficient obtained for Subsidy Removal Impacts Assessment Scale (SRIAS) was 0.87. The reliability index obtained for Undergraduates Academic Activities Questionnaire (UAAQ) was 0.84 and 0.76. However, the overall reliability of UAAQ was 0.92. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to answer the research questions while regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings indicated that fuel subsidy removal has a strong negative impacts on undergraduates studying and examination activities in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State. There is a significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and study of undergraduates in tertiary institutions. Also, there is a significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and examination of undergraduates in tertiary institutions. It was recommended among others that government should design and implement targeted educational palliatives for undergraduates in public tertiary institutions. This should include subsidized shuttle bus services on major student routs, and tax waivers on educational materials to cushion the direct financial impact on students.

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I. Introduction

A subsidy is the financial assistance provided by the government to support certain sector of the economy or individuals. Scott and Kvilhaug (2024) defined a subsidy as a benefit given to an individual, business, or institution, usually by the government. As captured by Mehtiyev and Magda (2020), subsidies are state expenditures which are applied with the purpose of supporting production of goods and services. This definition presents subsidy as a general sector benefit. A subsidy is a financial assistance provided by governments to support specific sectors, promote social welfare, and stabilize prices. This assistance can come in the form of direct payments, tax breaks, or other incentives and are often used to promote economic growth, encourage innovation, and support disadvantaged groups.

Subsidy can be applied to different sectors of the economy or commodity that has enormous benefits to citizens like fuel. Thus, in this study, the interest is on fuel subsidy. Onyeizugbe and Onwuka (2012) conceived fuel subsidy as a fraction of the price that consumers are supposed to pay to enjoy the use of petroleum products paid by government so as to ease the price burden. Fuel subsidy refers to a government policy of providing financial assistance or other forms of support to reduce the cost of fuel for consumers. This is typically done by setting a lower price for fuel than what would have been determined by the market forces of demand and supply. In the assertion of Ori et al. (2023), the goal of fuel subsidies is to make fuel more affordable for consumers, particularly those on low incomes or living in remote areas where transportation costs are high.

Fuel subsidy policy in Nigeria dates back to the 1970s when the government began subsidizing petroleum products. Oyedele et al. (2023) asserted that fuel subsidies became institutionalised in 1977, following the promulgation of the Price Control Act which made it illegal for some products (including petrol) to be sold

above the regulated price. In confirmation with the stated assertion, Zinami (2024) posited that petrol subsidies were institutionalised in 1977 by General Olusegun Obasanjo's regime to ameliorate the effects of the global 'Great Inflation era' of the 1970s, engineered by the increase in energy prices. The policy was aimed at making fuel affordable for the citizens and stimulate economic growth. Olatunbosun (2024) explicated that the aim of fuel subsidy was initiated to cushion and monitor the effects of the high end cost of petroleum products after implementing the need to carry out Turn Around Maintenance (TAM) on the refineries. In the same vein, Ori et al. (2023) captured that the government was forced to increase fuel subsidies to cushion the effects of the economic hardships on the population especially during the 1980s and 1990s, when the country experienced economic challenges, including high inflation, foreign debt, and currency devaluation.

In the past, significant amount of money has been budgeted to sustain the subsidy policy in an attempt to cushion the effects of economic hardships in the country. NEITI (2022) noted that between 2005 and 2021, Nigeria spent 13.7 trillion to finance fuel subsidy and in April 2022, the National Assembly passed the 2022 supplementary appropriation that increased the subsidy budget by 700% to N4 trillion. This amount is reported to be the largest budget ever allocated as expenditure on subsidy in any year in the history of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. The allocation budgeted for fuel subsidy explicate the increasing and mounting cost of financing fuel subsidy in Nigeria. Olatunbosun (2024) reported that cost of maintaining fuel subsidy in Nigeria kept increasing to the extent that the Muhammadu Buhari's government had to borrow to pay for fuel subsidy.

Fuel subsidy policy in Nigeria has attracted a high level debate on whether it should be sustained or removed. Proponents of the fuel subsidy policy have argued that it helps to alleviate poverty by making fuel affordable for the poor masses. In the opinion of Oyinlola et al (2023) subsidies are motivated by a desire to reduce inequality, move households out of energy poverty, and mitigate the impacts of commodity price volatility on consumers and producers. On the other hand, opponents of the fuel subsidy policy argued that it is unsustainable and places a heavy burden on the government budget, making it difficult for the government to sustain development in key areas of the economy. However, Onyeizugbe and Onwuka (2012) argued that subsidy removal savings can be better invested in refineries, roads and major infrastructural projects which in the long-term will ensure sustainable business development and wealth generation for her citizens.

It became clear to the Government of Nigeria that the continued maintenance of subsidies is not viable (Oyinlola et al., 2023). As a result, there has been series of attempts to phase out fuel subsidy over the years. Gwangwangwan (2023) confirmed that the Nigerian Government has made attempts to remove or reduce subsidies in the past, but these efforts have often been met with public outcry and protests. The Federal Government of Nigeria headed by President Ahmed Bola Tinubu, on his inaugural speech, announced the removal of fuel subsidy in the country on May 29, 2023. The announcement made possible a complete removal of fuel subsidy, marking the end of decades of government intervention in petroleum pricing.

Prior to the announcement, Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) was sold at a regulated price of # 378 per litre. Following the policy change, pump price rose sharply to N670 and above (about 77.25%) per litre depending on location and availability (Adagba et al & Omojuwa in Jolaiya & Akinmulegun, 2025). The immediate effect was a nationwide increase in transportation, food prices, and cost of essential services. The citizens in Nigeria felt the impacts of fuel subsidy removal. For students in public tertiary institutions, who largely depend on public transport and low cost services, the policy created new financial pressures that directly intersect with their academic activities.

Academic activities involves both the pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination and application through work including but not limited to research and scholarly activity, teaching, public lectures, conference communications, publications, professional practice, the building of library and archival collections, the provision of mediated access to information, and artistic production and performance (Rafindadi et al., 2023). These activities are not only regarded as fundamental in promoting students learning and facilitating the achievement of academic goals, but they are also regarded as efficacious in leading to up-gradation of the overall system of education. Academic activities comes in different types such debates, quizzes, competitions, role plays, workshops, seminars, group discussions and so forth (Kapur, 2021). Others include classroom discussions, completing projects, or preparing for assessments, lectures, tutorials, studying and examinations, as well as practical experiences such as lab experiments, internships, research, and field trips that contribute to a student's academic growth and skill development.

Studying is an activity involving research and gathering information with the purpose of learning something and adding to knowledge (Nadine, 2022). It is conceived as the pattern of behaviour adopted by students in their study which reveals their personality and serve as the vehicle of learning and may be seen as both means and ends to learning (Ajai et al., 2020). Studies have shown that fuel subsidy removal has caused hardship on many vulnerable groups including the undergraduates. Akpojotor et al. (2025) revealed that a lot of the students cannot feed or buy academic learning materials because of the high cost of commodities occasioned by the removal of fuel subsidy. Studying with an "empty stomach" is a problem at one end and not having the

resources to purchase materials to study is another problem. This could result to low students' academic performance especially in tertiary institutions. Another academic activity of interest in the study is examination.

Examination has been conceived as the procedure of finding out the outcome of learning over time through written objective tests and essay (Ukonze et al., 2013). In his opinion, Singh (2022) described examination as a summative assessments that evaluate candidate's proficiency at the end of the academic year or semester. Examination goes beyond testing the cognitive component of a person, it include testing how a person can respond to a given situation and if the person will pass or not. It refers to any theory based, oral, aural, online or practical activity which occurs on a specific date and for a specific duration (Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, 2020). The financial burden as experienced by students as a result of fuel subsidy removal has become more pronounces. This raises concern about possible increase in absenteeism, late arrival for test, examination anxiety and overall decline in academic performance. In this regard, Ogaba and Onimisi (2024) averred that financial strain has adversely affected students' academic performance, evidenced by increased dropout rates and lower examination results. If students cannot afford transport to class or fuel for night reading, learning outcomes may drop. Many studies exist on subsidy removal on general economy but few focus specifically on studying and examination outcomes of undergraduates. It is against this background that this study is designed to investigate the impact of fuel subsidy removal on undergraduates' studying and examination activities in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State.

Statement of the Problem

Education requires consistent access to learning resources, stable study routines and conducive examination conditions. However, the researcher observed that many undergraduates in Cross River State now spend more on daily transportation to and from campus, forcing some of them to reduce class attendance or relocate off-campus to distant, cheaper areas. The increased cost of petrol occasioned by fuel subsidy removal has raised the cost of photocopying, binding and charging phones or laptops, which are critical for accessing online materials and submitting assignments. For students who depend on generators for night reading due to irregular power supply, the high cost of fuel has directly reduced study hours. These changes suggest that the removal of fuel subsidy may be disrupting studying activities that undergraduates previously relied on.

Furthermore, examination activities are closely linked to preparation time, attendance and psychological readiness. With higher transport fares, students may arrive late for examinations or miss tests entirely due to inability to afford fare. The financial stress and anxiety associated with increased cost of living may also affect concentration during study and examinations. While studies exist on the macroeconomic effect of subsidy removal, few have focused on its direct impact on undergraduates' academic activities, particularly in a state like Cross River State where transportation infrastructure is limited and electricity supply is unstable. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the impacts of fuel subsidy removal on undergraduates studying and examination in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the impacts of fuel subsidy removal on undergraduates' studying and examination in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically the study examined the relationship between:

1. Subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates studying in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria.
2. Subsidy removal impacts and examination of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for the study:

1. What is the relationship between subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates studying in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between subsidy removal impacts and examination of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study and was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates' studying in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and examination of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria.

II. Methodology

The study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study comprised of 68,560 undergraduates in four tertiary institutions in the study area. The sample size of the study comprised 398 students, determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Proportionate sampling was used to determine the sample size from each of the institutions under study, and simple random technique was used to sample the required number of students. Two instruments were developed by the researcher to collect data for the study. These are the Subsidy Removal Impacts Assessment Scale (SRIAS) and the Undergraduates Academic Activities Questionnaire (UAAQ). The instruments were validated by three experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha coefficient for both instruments. The reliability coefficient obtained for Subsidy Removal Impacts Assessment Scale (SRIAS) was 0.87. The reliability index obtained for Undergraduates Academic Activities Questionnaire (UAAQ) was 0.84 and 0.76. However, the overall reliability of UAAQ was 0.92. The instruments were administered to the respondents and all the copies were retrieved but 69 copies across the four institutions were not correctly completed and were sorted out. Three hundred and twenty-nine (329) were properly responded to and were used for analysis. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to answer the research questions while regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

III. Results

Table1: Summary of index of relationship between subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates studying in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State

Variables	N	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	Covariance	Pearson Correlation r	R Square
Subsidy Removal Impact	329	78200.274	238.415		
				-0.888**	0.789
Studying	329	-59380.395	-181.038		

Table 1 reveals that the calculated Pearson correlation coefficient r is -0.888, indicating a very strong negative relationship between subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates studying activities. This implies that the higher the impact of fuel subsidy removal, the lower the undergraduates studying activities. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient r square (r^2) value is calculated to be 0.789. This implies that approximately 79% of the variance in subsidy removal has negative impacts on undergraduates studying activities. In other words, fuel subsidy removal has negative impacts on undergraduates studying in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State by 79%.

Table 2: Summary of index of relationship between subsidy removal impacts and examination of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State

Variables	N	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	Covariance	Pearson Correlation r	R Square
Subsidy Removal Impact	329	78200.274	238.415		
				-0.844**	0.713
Assignment	329	-62124.438	-189.404		

Table 2 reveals that the calculated Pearson correlation coefficient r is -0.844. This indicates a very strong negative relationship between subsidy removal and examination of undergraduates. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient r square (r^2) value is calculated to be 0.713. This implies that approximately 71% of subsidy removal has negative impacts on assignments. In other words, fuel subsidy removal has negative impacts on examination of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State by 71%.

Table 3: Test of significance of relationship between subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates studying in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria

Computed r	r. Square	Adjusted r Square	Standard Error	Beta	T	Sig of t
0.888	0.78	0.788	0.030	-0.888	34.958	0.000

Table 3 shows that the alpha level (0.05) is greater than the significance of t (0.000). Since the significance of t value is less than the alpha level, the null hypothesis is rejected. Furthermore, the calculated-t value of 34.958 is greater than the critical-t value of 1.96. This means that null hypothesis one is rejected. Therefore, the relationship between subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates studying is statistically significant. In other words, there is a significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates studying activities in tertiary institutions in Cross River State.

Table 4: Test of significance of relationship between subsidy removal impacts and examination of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria

Computed r	r. Square	Adjusted r Square	Standard Error	Beta	T	Sig of t
0.850	0.72	0.722	0.025	-0.850	29.172	0.000

Table 4 indicates that the alpha level (0.05) is greater than the significance of t (0.000). Since the significance of t value is less than the alpha level, the null hypothesis is rejected. More so, the calculated-t value of 22.172 is greater than the critical-t value of 1.96. This means that null hypothesis four is rejected. The researcher rejects the null hypothesis and posits that the relationship between subsidy removal impacts and examination of undergraduates is statistically significant.

IV. Discussion

Findings in Table 1 indicated a very strong negative relationship between subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates studying activities. Findings also revealed that approximately 79% of the variance in subsidy removal has negative impacts on undergraduates studying activities. In other words, fuel subsidy removal has negative impacts on undergraduates studying by 79%. Studying requires consistent engagement of students in learning activity that enhances their acquisition of knowledge and skills. However, that consistency can be distorted by economic factors, notably fuel subsidy removal that can challenge concentration in studying. It is difficult to concentrate on studying when one is anxious about the next meal or whether they can afford a place to stay. Since studying is predominantly a mental or intellectual activity, any distortion in the form of economic hardship would negatively impact on it and could lead to low academic achievement of the undergraduates. This agrees with the findings of Evans et al. (2023) that fuel subsidy removal disproportionately affect vulnerable groups if there are no economic safety nets or social assistance programmes that can alleviate the economic hardship caused by fuel subsidy removal. Unsurprisingly, stress increases while concentration decrease and academic involvement suffers.

Further findings in Table 3 revealed there is a significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and undergraduates studying activities in tertiary institutions in Cross River State. This implies that subsidy removal impacts predicts undergraduates studying activities and the higher the fuel subsidy removal impacts, the lower the undergraduates studying activities. Students may not have sufficient money to buy study materials or carryout research. Some may not even have food to eat and have the energy to study. The finding in this regard agrees with Akpojotor et al. (2025) that a lot of the students cannot feed or buy academic learning materials because of the high cost of commodities occasioned by the removal of fuel subsidy. The finding agrees with that of Sakirudeen and Sann (2017) that students with financial constraints might find it difficult to perform excellently well in their academics. This could be that they may not be able to concentrate in their studies amidst the harsh economic situation. To meet up with the rising cost of living some undergraduates may take on additional work to cover the higher expenses, sacrificing study time and exhausting themselves. Their academic routines become disrupted and grades decline.

Findings in Table 2 revealed a very strong negative relationship between subsidy removal and examination activities of undergraduates. The findings further revealed that approximately 78% of subsidy removal has negative impacts on examination. In other words, fuel subsidy removal has negative impacts on examination of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State by 78%. This means that an increase in the impact of fuel subsidy removal will lead to a decrease in undergraduates' examination performance. The finding supports Ojo and Emeka-Nwosu (2025) that fuel subsidy removal contributed to the inability of many students to concentrate fully on campus and many of them are increasingly involved in anti-social behaviour in order to meet up with the cost of goods and services inside and outside the institutions. Such a situation can create psychological challenges for the students which can affect academic performance particularly in examination. The finding is also in line with Ogaba and Onimisi (2024) that financial strain has adversely affected students. Fuel price hikes push up the cost of almost everything including food, rent and daily essentials. Students may start feeling the squeeze, and could cut back on what they see as non-essentials: reading materials, private tutors among others. This aligns with Warrens (2025) that the removal of petroleum subsidy has affected the financial situation of students with many of them having difficulty in paying for extramural lessons, raising money for school fees, and having to walk to school instead of taking transportation and a large number of students go late to school. This could lead to lose out on the resources that help them succeed. Besides, psychological stress can make it even harder to focus and perform during exams.

More findings in Table 4 revealed that there is a significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and examination of undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Cross River State. The relationship is rather adverse causing harm than good on undergraduates' performance in examination. The finding is in line with Garba and Idris (2024) that there is a significant correlation between fuel subsidy removal and decreased academic performance. Fuel subsidy removal impacts students' performance in exams in many ways. First, on getting to

school. In many places, students rely on public transport. When fuel prices rise, so do fares. Suddenly, the simple act of getting to class or an exam becomes a strain. Sometimes, students miss school or skip exams altogether because the cost is just too high. This agrees with the findings of Ojo and Emeka-Nwosu (2025) that some students who are schooling in other states found it difficult to travel back to their respectful institutions. Some resumed very late, missing a lot of lectures. Missing school means missing the lectures and preparation they need to do well. Their less attendance could weaken performance in examination. Teachers too may reduce coming to schools to save cost and the scheme of work may not be covered adequately. This means fewer opportunities for the students to learn and prepare for exams.

V. Conclusion

The removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria, though a necessary economic reform, has significantly and negatively impacted undergraduates' studying and examination in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State. Without targeted institutional and governmental interventions, the policy risks widening educational inequality and reducing the quality of graduates from public tertiary institutions. Therefore, addressing the indirect educational costs of subsidy removal is critical to protecting the right to quality education as enshrined in Strategy Development Goal 4 (SDG) 4.

VI. Recommendations

1. Government should design and implement targeted educational palliatives for undergraduates in public tertiary institutions. This should include subsidized shuttle bus services on major student routes, and tax waivers on educational materials to cushion the direct financial impact on students.
2. Students should remain resilient and committed to their studies to actualize their educational goal and become relevant and competitive in the society.

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