

Impacts Of Fuel Subsidy Removal On Class Attendance And Participation Of Undergraduates In Public Tertiary Institutions In Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the impacts of fuel subsidy removal on class attendance and participation of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. Two specific purposes, two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 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. 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 0.88 and 0.91 respectively. However, the overall reliability of UAAQ was 0.92. Three hundred and twenty-nine (329) copies of the instruments 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. Findings revealed that the removal of fuel subsidy had a significant negative impact on class attendance and participation of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State. It was recommended among others things that government should provide targeted financial aid programmes, enhanced academic support services and increased mental health resources to ensure that students can effectively navigate the challenges posed by fuel subsidy removal and participate actively in school activities.

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I. Introduction

Governments all over the world in one way or the other provide support to their citizens. The support can come in the form of subsidy. Etymologically, the word subsidy is derived from the Latin word “subsidiium”, which means to support (Steenblik, n.d). The support could come in the form of government transfer to producers which may help in reducing prices for their products; as a grant which may enable consumers to increase their purchasing power or reduce costs for both consumers and producers by providing direct or indirect support. The government absorb some cost on essential products to make them affordable for consumers and to encourage producers stay in business. The World Trade Organization in Mehtiyev and Magda (2021) defined a subsidy as a financial contribution by a government, or agent of a government, that confers a benefit on its recipients. In the most general terms, a subsidy can be defined as any government assistance that allows consumers to purchase goods and services at prices lower than those offered by a perfectly competitive market sector, or raises producers' incomes beyond those that would be earned without this intervention (Schwartz & Clements, 2020). This study conceives subsidy as a sacrifice made by the government for the well-being of its citizens. It is the direct or indirect way the government explore to help bring down cost to encourage the production and availability of certain goods or services considered essential for the well-being of its people.

One important subsidy in Nigeria is the fuel subsidy. Fuel subsidy is a policy of the government to keep down fuel prices to enable consumers to purchase the product. Ovaga and Okechukwu (2022) elucidated that it is a government discount on the market price of fossil fuel to make consumers pay less than the prevailing market price of fuel. Oil plays a crucial role in the Nigerian economy, contributing largely to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It appears reasonable that citizens of the country would be able to purchase what they produce in abundance at an affordable price. Therefore, fuel subsidy gives consumers opportunity to pay below the market price per litre of the petroleum product (Ozili & Obiora, 2023). According to the Private Wealth Services (2023), fuel subsidies began in the 1970s and became imperative, specifically in response to the 1973 oil price shock, as a measure to cushion the impacts of rising global oil prices on the Nigerian populace by keeping fuel prices low. It was 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.

Fuel subsidy policy in Nigeria has brought about a lot of controversies due to its impacts on the economy, government finances, and social welfare. Some have argued that subsidy is important and should stay while others have called for its removal. For instance, the World Bank in Ori et al. (2023) advocated that fuel subsidy can be an effective tool to protect the poor from rising energy costs thereby improving their welfare. Furthermore, Zinami (2024) averred that subsidy has served as a welfare policy that has helped the economic life of Nigerians by making life a bit affordable for the average citizen. Contrarily, Adenikinju (2013) posited that fuel subsidies were not well-targeted and that they had little impacts on poverty reduction. In the same vein, Olatunbosun (2024) argued against it noting that the cost of maintaining subsidy in Nigeria, kept increasing to reflect crude oil prices in the global market. Furthermore, the Private Wealth Services (2023), citing the Debt Management Office, maintained that the country's public debt stock increased as the government had to borrow N1trn to finance fuel subsidy in the year 2022. The huge burden made the government incapacitated to provide quality education, infrastructure, defence, health, tourism, entertainment among other sectors needing attention. More so, the Private Wealth Services (2023) elucidated that in June 2022, the Managing Director of Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) informed that the daily consumption of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) increased to over 103 million litres per day and that at least 58 million litres were being smuggled out of Nigeria. This indicates that smugglers and other West African countries benefit more from fuel subsidy than Nigerians, suggesting that fuel subsidies should be removed.

The government of Nigeria, being aware of the huge burden in maintaining fuel subsidy policy have made series of attempts in the past to remove subsidy. According to Zinami (2024), the first attempt at removal of petrol subsidy was in 1986 during Ibrahim Babangida's administration, when he announced a partial removal of oil subsidies, as a step towards the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme advocated by the International Monetary Fund. The removal led to rise in petrol prices from 20 kobo to 39 kobo per litre. The decision was strongly opposed by workers, students and civil society groups who embarked on massive demonstrations across the country. Furthermore, in January 1, 2012, President Goodluck Jonathan attempted the removal of subsidy, there was another massive demonstration which later contributed to his second tenure presidential ambition failure. President Buhari also advocated for the removal of fuel subsidy. Finally, President Ahmed Bola Tinubu, on his inaugural speech as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria announced the removal of fuel subsidy in the country on 29 May, 2023. Fuel subsidy removal appear to be a reform aimed at deregulating the petroleum industry and allowing citizens to fully pay the price for the consumption of fuel without government intervention.

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria comes with enormous negative implications. For instance, the removal has led to increased fuel prices, inflation, and adverse effects on the welfare of the average Nigerian. As Ozili and Obiora (2023) noted, the recent negative implications of removal of the fuel subsidy includes high inflation, decrease in economic growth, increase in poverty, increase in prices of petroleum products, and loss of jobs in the informal sector which contributed to economic hardship. The hardship has grossly affected many parents, and their children in schools.

Among the citizens in Nigeria who feel the impacts of fuel subsidy removal are the undergraduates. Undergraduates are students in tertiary institutions. They are still in school working towards getting a certificate or bachelor degree as the case may be. They often engage in various academic activities to promote learning, develop motivation, leadership, collaboration, and the upgrading of the overall system of education (Davis, 2021). Some of the academic activities include, studying, debates, class attendance, class participation, group discussions, assignments, projects writing, reports, competitions, events, quizzes, presentations, sports, field-work, seminars and workshops. The Ashoka Business School (2021) referred to above activities as educational in nature and would be considered as core mission of the institutions which enable students to acquire new skills, new knowledge, career ideas, and innovative opportunities. In this study, particular attention is given to class attendance, and classroom participation as academic activities engaged by the students.

Class attendance is a practice which requires students to show up, or being physically present in a classroom, or virtually present in online classes, or other school events requiring their presence.

Class attendance refers to the notion of students arriving in the classroom to attend the lecture using a variety of ways, including biometric systems (using student identity cards or fingerprints) and physical presence which is documented in registers or software applications (Geupta, 2022). Students' attendance in school events might strongly be linked to their success. Heather (2022) noted that attendance is the primary indicator of a student's engagement level with their course of study, and it would serve as a first-level indicator for students' retention, well-being, or academic progression. In addition, students who attend classes and interact with the educators would usually try to improve their behaviour, decisions, and future goals by identifying with the professor and modelling their roles (Fasihi et al. in Shahrabad et al., 2022). Furthermore, Ancheta et al. (2021) posited that students who attend classes on a regular basis would be more likely to achieve higher grades than those students who have poor attendance. In other words, students who are regular in class would be more likely to perform better in examination. It is of crucial importance that when students attend class they should as well participate actively for a better learning outcome.

Classroom participation refers to students' active involvement in class activities such as asking questions, making comments, and joining discussions to enhance learning outcomes. Heyman and Sailors in Cerutti (2016) defined class participation as a type of active learning in which students openly discuss relevant course material. Participating actively in classroom involve asking questions, giving opinion, responding to opinion, discussion, making comment and seeking help (Royal University of Bhutan, 2019). It involves a combination of coming to class and paying attention while there (Bekkering, 2020). Effective classroom participation would require both student actions and teacher strategies in creating an interactive environment that foster discussions and increase engagement. Classroom participation, by requiring students to process and reflect on learning material, fosters critical thinking, communication skills, and greater confidence and academic achievement. Class attendance and participation are critical determinants of academic success. These two are the first behaviours affected academic success before Gross Points Average (GPA) drops. Some studies have linked attendance and participation to academic performance generally. The link between subsidy removal, attendance and participation has not been empirically established. This has created a gap in literature and it is on this background that the current study is inspired to investigate the impacts of fuel subsidy removal on class attendance and participation in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State.

Statement of the Problem

Class attendance and participation are critical determinants of academic success. Regular attendance ensures students receive direct instruction, while participation through questions, discussions, and group work enhances comprehension and retention. However, the increase in transport fare following subsidy removal has increased financial burdens for students whose allowances and sponsorship remained unchanged. Observation by the researcher indicates that some undergraduates now skip lectures, arrive late, or attend classes only on days they have tests, in order to reduce transport expenditure. The request for makeup tests is on the increase. In addition, financial stress and fatigue from long commutes may reduce students' willingness to engage in class discussions and activities.

Despite these observations, there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which fuel subsidy removal has affected class attendance and participation of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State. Without documented data, institutional authorities and policy makers cannot determine whether current classroom interaction and attendance patterns are being undermined by economic factors, nor can they design appropriate interventions such as counselling and psychological supports, transport or alternative learning modes. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate the impacts of fuel subsidy removal on class attendance and participation 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 class attendance and participation of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically the study examined the relationship between:

1. Subsidy removal impacts and class attendance of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria.
2. Subsidy removal impacts and class participation 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 class attendance of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria?

2. What is the relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class participation 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 class attendance of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State

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

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 approach was used to determine the sample size from each of the institutions under study, and simple random technique was used to select the required sample. 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 0.88 and 0.91 respectively. 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 not used for analysis. 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

Table 1: Summary of index of relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class attendance 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		
				-0.905**	0.819
Attendance	329	-70796.626	-215.843		

Table 1 shows that the calculated Pearson correlation coefficient r is -0.905. This indicates a very strong negative relationship between subsidy removal and attendance of undergraduates. This further means that the higher the fuel subsidy removal impacts, the lower the attendance of undergraduates. Additionally, the correlation coefficient r square (r^2) value is calculated to be 0.82. This implies that approximately 82% of subsidy removal has negative impacts on attendance of undergraduates. In other words, fuel subsidy removal has negative impacts on attendance of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State by 82%.

Table 2: Summary of index of relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class participation 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		
				-0.881**	0.777
Participation	329	-68307.264	-208.254		

Table 2 indicates that the calculated Pearson correlation coefficient r is -0.881, indicating a very strong negative relationship between subsidy removal and class participation of undergraduates. This means that the higher the fuel subsidy removal impacts, the lower the class participation. More so, the correlation coefficient r square (r^2) value is calculated to be 0.777. This implies that approximately 78% of subsidy removal has negative impacts on class participation. In other words, fuel subsidy removal has negative impacts on class participation of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State by 78%.

Table 3: Test of significance of relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class attendance 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
0.905	0.819	0.819	0.024	-0.905	38.503	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 not greater than the alpha level, null hypothesis two is rejected. Furthermore, the calculated-t value of 38.503 is greater than the critical-t value of 1.96. This confirms that null hypothesis two is rejected. The researcher rejects the null hypothesis and maintain that the relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class attendance of undergraduates is statistically significant. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class attendance of undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Cross River State.

Table 4: Test of significance of relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class participation 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
0.881	0.777	0.776	0.026	-0.881	33.718	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. Furthermore, the calculated-t value of 33.718 is greater than the critical-t value of 1.96. This confirms that null hypothesis three is rejected. The researcher rejects the null hypothesis and concludes that the relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class participation of undergraduates is statistically significant. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class participation of undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Cross River State.

IV. Discussion

Results in Table 1 indicated a very strong negative relationship between subsidy removal and attendance of undergraduates. It also showed that approximately 82% of undergraduates' attendance is related to subsidy removal. In other words, fuel subsidy removal has negative impacts on attendance of undergraduates by 82%. This means that as the impact of fuel subsidy increase, class attendance will begin to decrease. The finding amplifies that economically triggered condition like the removal of fuel subsidy can contribute to students not attending class. The finding aligns with Muibi et al. (2025) that subsidy removal could have effect on class attendance and significantly influence students' academic achievement. When the government removes fuel subsidies, the consequences extend far beyond just the gas station. It affects almost every aspect of daily life, and for university students, the impact can be swift and severe. The cost of everything rises including bus fares, rent and textbooks. For students commuting to campus, each journey takes a bigger bite out of their finances. For many, this is more than a minor inconvenience, it poses a genuine threat to their education. Some students begin missing classes because the daily commute becomes unaffordable. Involvement in group assignments, seminars, or workshops begin to decrease not because of lack of interest, but simply because attending classes become too costly. Grades may decline. More students drop out entirely. Money becomes so scarce that many students often decide between buying food and attending lectures.

Findings in Table 3 further suggested that there is a significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class attendance of undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Cross River State. The relation is inverse such that as the cost associated with subsidy removal goes, up class attendance decreases. The finding is in line with Akinteye (2024) that there is a significant correlation between fuel subsidy removal and decreased academic achievement, increased absenteeism, and heightened financial difficulties. Fuel subsidy removal could cause an increment in the cost of goods and services practically in transport cost, making it difficult for most students to attend classes regularly as they supposed to. This aligns with Jolaiya and Akinmulegun (2025) that fuel subsidy removal had significant negative effect on the transport sector performance. The finding also confirms Bamisaye et al. (2024) that the rising cost of transportation may reduce the students' financial capacities to keep a regular class attendance. Higher transportation costs often trigger increases in the price of other essentials items, food, housing and studying materials. This agrees with Udang and Akor (2025) that there was a strong positive correlation between transportation costs and students' ability to attend classes regularly, as well as between the rising cost of living and students' financial struggles. Students from more affluent families may have to cut back, but those from low-income backgrounds face a starker dilemma: persevere under strain or drop out. The consequence is that fewer students from disadvantaged backgrounds may complete their degrees, and the university community loses valuable diversity and fresh viewpoints.

Findings in Table 2 indicated a very strong negative relationship between subsidy removal and class participation of undergraduates. This means that the higher the fuel subsidy removal impacts, the lower the class

participation. Approximately, 78% of subsidy removal could negatively impacts on class participation. In other words, fuel subsidy removal has negative impacts on class participation of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions. The finding supports Offor and Ego (2024) that fuel subsidy removal has negative effects like lack of interest and participation in learning by students. Fuel subsidies removal has ripple effects through every segment of society particularly students' participation in classes. The connection between fuel subsidies removal and students' participation is complex, involving financial concerns, social factors, and individual situations. Worry and anxiety mount as students struggle to cover rising costs of things or other new expenses. Their focus shifts from academics to financial concerns, and their participation in class suffers. Normally, teachers depend on active participation and dialogue to keep lessons dynamic and ensure everyone is involved. With fewer students present or engaged, the entire learning environment loses its vitality. The classroom atmosphere declines as well.

Some students are skipping classes to save money. Increased transportation costs add to their financial burdens which they may wish to cut. This could lead to social isolation, and make it harder for students and teachers to connect and the whole educational experience suffers. This agrees with Faruk (2025) that the removal of petroleum subsidy increased transportation cost, reduces students' participation in extra-curriculum activities and indirectly affect students' academic performance. Consistent disconnect from class could lead to a drop in participation. Some are missing not just lectures, but also group projects and extracurricular activities. Group discussions, joint projects, and the free exchange of ideas, all fall short when many students of the class are absent or disengaged. Students who miss classes may feel isolated from friends and lose out on the collaborative and social learning that is vital for academic growth. The spirit of collaboration and peer support are essential to active learning and when these begin to break down it leaves everyone at a disadvantage position. This aligns with Bekkering (2021) that there is a statistically significant relationship between class participation and score on the final examination.

Findings in Table 4 revealed that there is a significant relationship between subsidy removal impacts and class participation of undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Cross River State. Obviously, removal of fuel subsidies creates substantial barriers for students trying to attend and participate in class. When students feel restricted by policies that make life harder, their motivation to participate in school diminishes. Removal of fuel subsidies has reshape the environment for students financially, psychologically, and socially. Constantly worrying about finances is draining. Stress and anxiety accumulate, making it harder to focus or summon the motivation for class participation and group projects. When financial instability becomes a daily challenge, motivation diminishes. Their struggles to meet the harsh economic realities can erode their quality of life and makes activity participation, both inside and outside the classroom, much more difficult. The outcome is that attendance declines, participation wanes, and academic achievement suffers. Psychological theories of engagement stress that students need stability and a sense of well-being to participate fully. Without that foundation, fewer students raise their hands, fewer voices are heard, and more slip quietly into the background.

V. Conclusion

This study concludes that the removal of fuel subsidy in May 29, 2023 had a significant negative impact on class attendance and participation of undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State. The resultant increase in transport fares and cost of living compelled many students to reduce the frequency of class attendance, arrive late, or skip lectures entirely to minimize expenses. Similarly, financial stress and commuting fatigue have reduced students' level of engagement in class activities, including asking questions, contributing to discussion and participating in group work.

Findings establish that economic shocks directly affect classroom behaviour before they reflect in final grades. Therefore, the decline in attendance and participation observed during post-subsidy removal represents an early warning of potential drops in academic performance if unaddressed. Without targeted institutional and governmental interventions, such as subsidized students transport, extended digital learning options and welfare and psychological support, the quality of classroom interaction and overall learning outcomes in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State will continue to deteriorate. In essence, while fuel subsidy removal serves a macroeconomic objective, its micro-level effect on undergraduates' daily access to lectures and active learning must be mitigated to protect the integrity of public tertiary institutions in Cross River State.

VI. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Government should introduce free transportation system for all staff and students in tertiary institutions staying far away from campus to reduce the high cost of transportation and encourage attendance.
2. Government should provide targeted financial aid programmes, enhanced academic support services and increased mental health resources to ensure that students can effectively navigate the challenges posed by fuel subsidy removal and participate actively in school activities.

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