Analysing The Impacts of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Work Productivity of Staff in Higher Institutions in Yobe State

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Abstract

The removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria has exerted an immense impact on the socio-economic status and work productivity of public servants. This paper analyses the impacts of fuel subsidy removal on the work productivity of staff in higher institutions in Yobe State. With the use of qualitative method, the study ascertains how high cost of transportation, increase in cost of living, and depreciation of disposable income have affected staff attendance and general work performance. Data were sourced from academic and non-academic staff via the instrument of structured interviews in selected higher institutions across Yobe State. The findings of the study indicate that the policy has caused significant financial challenges, which is manifested in ways like inconsistent attendance, high stress levels, and drastic reduction in efficiency on the job. Further findings reveal inadequate institutional support for mitigating the impact of subsidy removal line with the major findings, the study argues that the institution, state or federal government should have intervened with institutional incentives such as transportation support to mitigate the effects of the policy, together with a long term policy plans to cushion the socioeconomic challenges faced by these staff. This study adds to the wider discourse on the socio-economic effects of subsidy removal and recommends pragmatic measures for policymakers and the government.

Keywords: Fuel subsidy removal, staff productivity, higher institutions, Yobe State, economic policy, transportation costs, institutional support.

Introduction

Fuel subsidies have been a cornerstone of Nigeria's economic policy for decades, designed to make petroleum products affordable for citizens and mitigate the impact of global oil price fluctuations. As an oil-rich nation, Nigeria has relied heavily on fuel subsidies to stabilize domestic fuel prices, despite its limited refining capacity and dependence on imported petroleum products. However, the subsidy regime has faced widespread criticism for being unsustainable, prone to corruption, and a significant drain on government revenue. In recent years, the Nigerian government has taken steps to remove fuel subsidies, a move justified as a necessary economic reform to reduce fiscal burdens, promote market efficiency, and redirect funds to critical sectors such as education, health, and infrastructure. While the policy aims to achieve long-term economic benefits, its immediate consequences have been profound, particularly for low- and middle-income earners, including staff in public institutions.

The removal of fuel subsidies has led to a sharp increase in the price of petroleum products, triggering a ripple effect on the cost of transportation, goods, and services. This has placed significant financial strain on households and individuals, particularly those in regions with limited economic opportunities, such as Yobe State in north eastern Nigeria. Yobe State is home to several higher institutions, including universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, which play a vital role in providing quality education and driving socio-economic development in the region. Staff in these institutions, both academic and non-academic, are essential to achieving institutional goals and maintaining educational standards. However, the economic challenges caused by fuel subsidy removal have raised concerns about its impact on staff productivity, which is a critical determinant of the success and reputation of higher institutions.

Staff productivity in higher education encompasses teaching, research, administrative support, and community service. It is influenced by factors such as financial stability, job satisfaction, and the work environment. The sudden increase in transportation costs and the rising cost of living resulting from fuel subsidy removal have the potential to undermine staff morale, reduce efficiency, and disrupt institutional operations. In Yobe State, where higher institutions already face challenges such as limited infrastructure, insecurity, and economic constraints, the additional burden of subsidy removal could further exacerbate these issues.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to analyze the impact of fuel subsidy removal on the work productivity of staff in higher institutions in Yobe State. The study aims to achieve the following objectives: (1) to examine the effects of increased transportation costs on staff attendance and punctuality, (2) to assess the impact of rising living costs on staff morale and job performance, (3) to explore means in which staff mitigate the impacts of fuel subsidy removal. By providing insights into the socio-economic implications of this policy, the study aims to inform policymakers, institutional administrators, and stakeholders on strategies to sustain productivity and ensure the continued delivery of quality education in Yobe State's higher institutions.

Theoretical and conceptual Perspectives

Subsidy policies are a fundamental tool used by governments to influence economic activity, stabilize prices, and provide support to vulnerable populations. These policies can take various forms, including direct financial assistance, tax exemptions, or price controls on essential goods and services. While subsidies serve short-term economic and social objectives, their long-term implications can be complex and, in some cases, counterproductive.

Coady et al, (2018) argue that subsidies can provide immediate economic relief, particularly in times of crisis, by lowering costs for consumers and businesses. For instance, fuel and food subsidies help mitigate inflationary pressures and ensure access to essential commodities for low-income households. However, if not properly managed, subsidies may lead to persistent fiscal deficits, economic inefficiencies, and resource misallocation. Over time, they can distort market mechanisms, leading to overconsumption, reduced incentives for efficiency, and dependency on government support.

The removal of subsidies is often justified on economic grounds, as it allows markets to function more efficiently and reduces fiscal burdens. The World Bank (2020) highlights that subsidy removal can lead to significant economic restructuring, encouraging more sustainable practices in energy consumption and production. However, the immediate consequence of subsidy removal is often a sharp increase in prices, which disproportionately affects low-income populations. This creates a political and social dilemma where governments must balance economic rationality with social stability.

Several economic theories provide insight into the dynamics of subsidy policies and their consequences:

Rent-Seeking Theory: Krueger (1974) argues that subsidies can lead to rent-seeking behavior, where interest groups exert political influence to maintain or expand subsidies for their own benefit. This results in inefficiencies, as resources are diverted toward lobbying rather than productive economic activities. Tullock (1967) argued that the social cost of rent-seeking is not just the misallocation of resources but also the resources expended by firms in securing rents—such as time, money, and political capital. These expenditures represent a deadweight loss to the economy, as they could have been used more productively elsewhere.

Buchanan, Tullock, and Tollison (1980) further expanded on this idea, suggesting that the institutional structure of political systems can influence the extent of rent-seeking. In political environments where transparency is low and interest group influence is high, rent-seeking is more likely to flourish, particularly in developing countries where regulatory capture is prevalent.

In extreme cases, rent-seeking can lead to "regulatory capture"—a situation in which public regulatory agencies are dominated by the industries or interests they are supposed to regulate (Stigler, 1971). In such contexts, public policy becomes skewed in favour of elites, which further marginalizes less influential segments of society and erodes trust in institutions. Therefore, while subsidies can be an important policy tool, their implementation must be carefully managed to avoid unintended consequences. Mechanisms such as sunset clauses, transparent allocation criteria, and periodic policy evaluations are essential to limit rent-seeking and ensure subsidies serve their intended purpose.

Public Choice Theory: Buchanan and Tullock (1962) suggest that government intervention, including subsidies, is often driven by political motives rather than economic efficiency. Policymakers may sustain subsidies to secure electoral support, even when such policies are economically unsustainable. Downs (1957) argued that politicians are rational actors who seek to maximize votes. As a result, they may favor short-term, visible policies like subsidies over long-term structural reforms, especially when the benefits of the subsidies are concentrated (e.g., in a specific sector or region), while the costs are diffused across the general population. This misalignment can lead to policies that are economically inefficient but politically expedient. Bureaucracies, too, are not immune. Niskanen (1971) suggested that bureaucrats aim to maximize their agency's budget and influence, often supporting subsidies that expand their administrative reach. Subsidy programs can thus become bloated and resistant to reform, as both politicians and bureaucrats benefit from their continuation.

Public choice theory also helps explain why inefficient subsidies persist. Olson (1965) emphasized the role of collective action problems: small, well-organized groups (such as industry lobbies) are more capable of influencing policy than large, diffuse groups (such as taxpayers or consumers). This results in what is known as "concentrated benefits and dispersed costs"—a classic scenario where subsidies are maintained for the benefit of a few, despite broad social costs.

Furthermore, once established, subsidies can become politically entrenched. Vested interests invest in maintaining them through lobbying, campaign financing, or political bargaining. Over time, this can lead to "path dependency," where reversing or reforming subsidies becomes politically costly, even in the face of evidence that they are inefficient or inequitable

Market Failure Perspective: Some economists argue that subsidies are justified when addressing market failures, such as externalities and public goods. For example, renewable energy subsidies help correct market distortions caused by the negative environmental impacts of fossil fuels. However, if subsidies persist beyond their intended purpose, they can create new inefficiencies and hinder competitive market dynamics.

Given the potential negative consequences of prolonged subsidies, policymakers must carefully design and implement subsidy programs with clear exit strategies. Strategies such as targeted cash transfers, phased reductions, and complementary social policies can mitigate the adverse effects of subsidy removal. Additionally, transparency and accountability measures are crucial in preventing rent-seeking and ensuring that subsidies achieve their intended objectives.

While subsidies play a critical role in economic stabilization and social welfare, their long-term sustainability requires careful management. The balance between economic rationality and social equity remains a key challenge for policymakers, making subsidy reform a complex undertaking.

Empirical Review

Several studies have examined the socio-economic impacts of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria. Akinleye and Okodua (2017) found that the removal of fuel subsidies led to significant increases in transportation costs, inflation, and household expenditure, particularly in urban areas. These effects were most pronounced among middle and lower-income households, who faced higher living costs as a result in the 2012 and 2013.

Similarly, Okonkwo and Eze (2019) highlighted the adverse effects on small businesses and low-income earners, noting that the policy exacerbated poverty levels in the short term. Their study emphasized that the rising cost of fuel translated into higher production and operational costs for small enterprises, reducing profitability and employment opportunities. This, in turn, strained the economic resilience of vulnerable populations.

On the other hand, Adeleke (2020) argued that fuel subsidy removal could yield long-term benefits if accompanied by effective social safety nets. His study suggested that reducing subsidies would alleviate government debt, freeing up resources for investment in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Additionally, Adeleke posited that subsidy removal could attract foreign direct investment by fostering a more market-driven economy.

Other research has explored potential mitigation strategies to cushion the negative impacts of subsidy removal. Studies by Yusuf and Adeyemi (2021) proposed targeted cash transfers and public transportation improvements as essential measures to support low-income groups. Similarly, the World Bank (2022) recommended gradual subsidy reductions combined with transparent government spending to enhance public trust and economic stability.

Overall, the literature suggests that while fuel subsidy removal presents immediate socio-economic challenges, it has the potential to contribute to long-term economic sustainability if managed with well-structured policies and support systems.

Impact of Economic Policies on Public Sector Productivity

Economic policies, particularly those affecting disposable income and cost of living, have a direct impact on public sector productivity. According to Okafor (2018), policies that increase the financial burden on workers, such as subsidy removal, can lead to decreased morale, absenteeism, and reduced efficiency. These factors collectively weaken institutional performance and service delivery in the public sector.

In the context of higher education, staff productivity is closely tied to financial stability and job satisfaction (Ofoegbu, 2019). When economic policies undermine these factors, they can disrupt institutional operations and compromise the quality of education. Faculty and administrative staff facing financial stress may experience reduced motivation, leading to lower research output, diminished teaching effectiveness, and administrative inefficiencies(Ofoegbu, 2019).

Furthermore, research by Adeyemi and Aluko (2020) suggests that well-structured economic policies that prioritize wage adjustments, professional development, and job security can enhance public sector productivity. Policies that improve working conditions and provide economic relief can help sustain workforce motivation and efficiency, ultimately fostering institutional growth and improved public service outcomes.

Given these findings, policymakers must consider the broader implications of economic decisions on public sector productivity. Implementing complementary measures, such as wage reviews, performance incentives, and targeted subsidies, can help mitigate the negative effects of economic challenges and ensure sustained productivity in the public sector.

Specific Challenges Faced by Higher Institutions in Nigeria

Higher institutions in Nigeria face numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and brain drain (Okebukola, 2020). These issues have long hindered the development and global competitiveness of the nation's tertiary education system. Many institutions struggle with insufficient budgetary allocations, leading to delays in salary payments, lack of research funding, and deteriorating campus facilities.

The removal of fuel subsidies adds another layer of difficulty, particularly for staff who rely on public transportation or face rising costs of essential goods. Increased transportation costs can lead to higher absenteeism among both students and faculty, further affecting the quality of education and institutional efficiency. The financial burden on university staff, coupled with stagnant wages, may result in decreased morale, lower productivity, and increased agitation for better working conditions.

In Yobe State, where higher institutions are already grappling with insecurity and limited resources, the additional financial strain from subsidy removal could further hinder staff productivity and institutional performance (Yusuf, 2021). The region's vulnerability to insurgency and economic hardship makes it particularly susceptible to disruptions in academic activities. Limited access to funding exacerbates these issues, restricting infrastructural improvements and reducing the ability to attract and retain qualified educators.

Moreover, according to Yusuf (2021) that the lack of government intervention in mitigating these challenges has led to a decline in research output and educational standards.

Gaps in Existing Literature

While existing studies have explored the general socio-economic impacts of fuel subsidy removal, there is limited research on its specific effects on public sector productivity, particularly in higher education. Most studies focus on urban areas, leaving a gap in understanding how the policy affects regions like Yobe State, which face unique socio-economic challenges. Additionally, there is a lack of empirical evidence on the coping mechanisms adopted by staff in higher institutions and the role of institutional support systems in mitigating the effects of subsidy removal.

Methodology

Research Design: this research adopts a qualitative methodology.

Population Area and Sample Size: the population of the study are staff of higher institutions in Yobe State. There are thirteen higher institutions in Yobe State. Three federal higher institutions, eight state higher institutions and two private higher institutions. Convenient and Judgmental sampling technique is used in this work. This is because of the difficulty and constraints on the side of the researchers to access the areas and the universal impact of the removal of fuel subsidy on staff of higher institution across Yobe State. Therefore, staff of Federal University Gashua, Yobe State University Damaturu and Federal College of Education (Technical) Potiskum which represent the three senatorial districts of the State as the sample size which are nine (9) in numbers.

Data Collection method: the research deployed a structured interview. Nine (9) staff were interviewed, three from each of the selected higher institutions, via both virtual and physical means. Though, purposive and convenient sampling technique is used, in the course of the interviews the data reached a saturated point. This therefore, compensate for the seemingly under representativeness of the population sample.

Data Analysis Technique: Thematic analysis is used in the analyses of the information sourced from the interview proceeds. Tables containing the samples of views of respondent are used where necessary.

Results and Discussion

The data gotten from the field work are analysed based on the themes of the research objectives

Commuting Challenges faced by Staff of Higher Institutions Due to Fuel Subsidy Removal

The removal of fuel subsidies has led to an increase in fuel prices, which in turn has significantly impacted transportation costs for staff in higher institutions in Yobe State. This theme examines the specific commuting challenges faced by university and college staff.

Table 1: Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Commuting Challenges

Challenges	Description	Examples from Staff Responses
Increased Transport Costs	Staff now spend a higher percentage of their income on commuting	My transport fare has tripled. What used to cost me ₦500 daily is now ₦1,500, making it hard to save." – Lecturer, Federal Univesity, Gashua
Longer Travel Times	Public transport has become less efficient due to reduced availability of vehicles.	I now leave home two hours earlier because buses are fewer, and the queues are longer." – Administrator, Yobe State University, Damaturu
Dependence on Alternative Transport	Many staff now rely on motorcycles, bicycles, or carpooling to reduce costs	"I have resorted to sharing rides with colleagues, but this is not always convenient." – Lecturer, Federal College of Education, Potiskum
Increased Work Absenteeism	Some staff miss work occasionally due to transport costs or stress.	I had to skip work twice this month because I couldn't afford transportation." – Non-academic staff, Yobe State University, Damaturu
Reduced Productivity and Morale	Stress from commuting affects staff focus and motivation	By the time I get to work, I am already exhausted. This affects my teaching quality." – Senior Lecturer, Yobe State University, Gashua

Source: Field work, 2025

The removal of fuel subsidies has had significant socio-economic consequences across Nigeria, particularly in Yobe State. One of the most affected groups is the staff of higher institutions, who now face increased transport costs, longer travel times, absenteeism, and reduced productivity. According to Adebayo (2023), fuel subsidy removal has directly resulted in higher inflation, particularly affecting the cost of transportation. This surge in commuting expenses has made it difficult for staff to travel to work consistently, leading to an increase in absenteeism and a decline in overall institutional efficiency (Usman & Ibrahim, 2022).

Longer travel times due to increased transport fares have also contributed to workplace fatigue and reduced efficiency. Employees who previously relied on affordable public transportation now have to seek alternative, often less convenient, commuting options, which further exacerbate delays and job dissatisfaction (Olawale, 2021). Additionally, decreased disposable income among staff has led to financial stress, potentially affecting their mental health and job performance (Eze & Mohammed, 2023).

To mitigate these challenges, both the government and higher institutions should consider strategic interventions. The provision of staff shuttle services would help reduce commuting costs and ensure timely arrival at work. Similar strategies have been successfully implemented in other regions, like Kano, Ogun and Oyo States where institutional shuttle services improved productivity by 15% (Abubakar & Salisu, 2022). Another viable approach is the introduction of remote work policies, especially for administrative staff, to decrease the need for daily commuting. Research by Adeyemi and Yusuf (2023) suggests that hybrid work models in educational institutions can maintain efficiency while reducing staff transport burdens. Furthermore, transport allowances or stipends could be allocated to staff to help cushion the financial impact of high transportation costs (Kalu, 2021).

In conclusion, while the removal of fuel subsidies has increased financial strain on staff in higher institutions in Yobe State, several policy measures can alleviate its negative effects. Shuttle services, remote work options, and transport allowances are practical solutions that can enhance staff welfare and maintain institutional productivity.

Table Two: Effects of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Staff Punctuality and Attendance

Challenges	Description	Examples from Staff Responses
Increased Transportation Costs	The rise in fuel prices has led to higher commuting expenses, causing financial strain on staff	"The removal of fuel subsidy has influenced staff welfare in higher institutions... Removal of fuel subsidy brings untold hardship to the teaching and non-teaching staff in tertiary institutions." Staff in Bursary Unit, Federal University Gashua,
Absenteeism	Financial difficulties due to increased commuting costs have led to reduced attendance among academic staff.	Financial strain from subsidy removal could lead to reduced academic productivity... Financial pressures lead to increased absenteeism, affecting staff productivity." Lecturer,Yobe State University, Damaturu
Decline in Productivity	The stress and financial burden associated with higher transportation costs have negatively impacted staff productivity.	Academic staff productivity is in decline due to higher transportation expenses... Staff productivity suffers as they handle increased commuting costs." Admin Staff,College of Education, Potiskum
Financial Strain	Increased fuel expenses have led to financial challenges for academic staff, affecting their overall well-being and professional engagement.	"Fuel subsidy removal increases financial strain on academic staff... Academic staffface challenges in managing their personal budgets due to fuel subsidy removal." Prof, at Federal University Gashau
Impact on Research Efficiency	The financial burden from increased travel costs has affected the research efficiency of academic staff.	"Increased travel costs from subsidy removal affect research efficiency... Financial stress affects staff focus, reducing their teaching effectiveness significantly."A senior Lecturer, Yobe State University
Disruption of Work Routines	Higher commuting costs have disrupted staff work routines, leading to reduced productivity.	"Increased travel expenses from subsidy removal disrupt staff work routines and productivity... Financial instability often results in lower academic staff engagement and productivity." Non Academic Staff, College of Education, Potiskum

Source: Field work, 2025

These findings highlight the significant challenges faced by staff in higher institutions in Yobe State due to the removal of fuel subsidies, affecting their punctuality, attendance, and overall productivity.The removal of fuel subsidies has led to increased transportation costs, affecting the punctuality, attendance, and overall efficiency of staff in higher institutions.

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has had a significant impact on the punctuality and attendance of staff in higher institutions. The increase in transportation costs has placed a financial strain on employees, making daily commuting more expensive and leading to delays, absenteeism, and reduced productivity (Adebayo, 2023). As transportation costs continue to rise, many staff members struggle to afford regular commuting expenses, leading to a decline in attendance rates (Usman & Ibrahim, 2022).

Longer travel times, due to increased fares and reduced transport availability, have exacerbated lateness among staff. According to Olawale (2021), delays in getting to work have become a growing challenge in urban and rural areas alike, further affecting institutional efficiency. Additionally, financial stress from high commuting costs negatively affects staff motivation, leading to increased fatigue and lower job satisfaction (Eze & Mohammed, 2023).

To mitigate these challenges, institutions and government bodies should consider implementing policies that support staff mobility. One effective measure is the provision of staff shuttle services, which can help reduce transport costs and improve punctuality. Abubakar and Salisu (2022) report that staff shuttle services have been successful in improving punctuality and productivity in institutions that have adopted them. Furthermore, hybrid work models, where administrative staff can work remotely on certain days, can alleviate the burden of daily commuting (Adeyemi & Yusuf, 2023). Transport allowances can also serve as a financial cushion, helping employees manage rising commuting costs (Kalu, 2021).

In conclusion, the removal of fuel subsidies has had a direct impact on staff attendance and punctuality in higher institutions, largely due to the increased cost of transportation. However, practical interventions such as shuttle services, remote work policies, and transport allowances can help address these challenges and sustain institutional efficiency.

Work efficiency and improvement as a result of fuel subsidy removal

As a result of the removal of Fuel subsidy there are ways in which the impacts can be mitigated. The removal of fuel subsidies has led to increased transportation costs, affecting the punctuality, attendance, and overall efficiency of staff in higher institutions. To mitigate these challenges and enhance work efficiency, several strategies can be implemented.

Institutions can provide transportation allowances or organize shuttle services to alleviate commuting challenges. This approach has been recommended to offset increased commuting expenses and improve punctuality (Personal Communication, January, 2025). This aligns with the work of Adeleke (2020) that the need for institutions to provide an alternative to reduce the cost of living in the aspects of shuttling.

In addition, promoting work and flexible scheduling is another possible solution to the removal of fuel subsidy as many staff confirmed about absenteeism and truancy, therefore the need to adopt remote work and flexible scheduling. Adopting remote work policies and flexible schedules can reduce the need for daily commuting, thereby minimizing transportation-related stress and costs. This flexibility can lead to improved job satisfaction and productivity.

Furthermore, offering financial incentives will make a great impact on the general income managements. Providing financial incentives, such as bonuses or subsidies, can help staff cope with increased living expenses resulting from fuel subsidy removal. This support can enhance motivation and job performance (Personal Communication, January, 2025). This is in line with works of Akinleye and Okodua (2017) that the fuel subsidy removal had a negative impacts on the household of many Nigerians, so there is a need to provide financial incentives by the government, Non Government Organisation and other concern organisations owing to the urgency and need of Staff to perform adequately in their duties.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed the impacts of fuel subsidy removal on the performances of staff in higher institutions, Yobe State. It looked at the fuel subsidy policy removal and how it affected the commuting and mobility of staff of these higher institutions. It also analysed how fuel subsidy affected the punctuality and attendance of staff and further delved into the exploration on how work efficiency can be improved as a result of the fuel subsidy removal. The study finds out that there is inconsistency in attendance by staff due to the challenges of commuting, that there is a drastic reduction in job performance and that there are inadequate measures taken by the government and the stakeholders to cushion the effects of fuel subsidy removal.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on the major findings:

1. That the government (both Federal and State) should intervene by providing an institutional system such as transportation incentives to ease the commuting challenges faced by these staff.
2. That a long term policy plan should have been put in place before the removal of fuel subsidy. This is for future measure.

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