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CHALLENGES OF FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL POLICY ON LECTURERS AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

***Offiah Chukwuemeka, Felix Goodseed Chidera**

Department of Educational Foundations Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

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***Corresponding Author: Offiah Chukwuemeka**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceived impact of fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria. The study addressed three research questions. The study employed a descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of 122,163 postgraduate students and 23172 academic staff. A sample of 300 postgraduate students and 400 academic staff was selected using a simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed that the fuel subsidy removal policy has had a significant negative impact on lecturers' morale and productivity, and has damaged academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria. The study concluded that the policy poses a substantial obstacle to lecturers' well-being and students' academic experience in the region. It was recommended that the government prioritize the provision of financial support to lecturers and postgraduate students, and improve university infrastructure to enhance the academic experience.

KEYWORDS: Fuel Subsidy Removal Policy, Lecturers, Academic Engagement, Postgraduate Students, Educational Development.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the backbone of any society, playing a vital role in the development and growth of individuals, communities, and nations as a whole. It is a powerful tool that equips individuals with knowledge, skills, and values necessary to succeed in life, fostering personal growth, social mobility, and economic prosperity. Perhaps, this is why Offiah and Chikeluba (2025) maintained that education helps to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation, driving progress and improvement in various fields. There are three main types of education: formal, informal, and non-formal education. Formal education, which takes place in institutions such as schools and universities, provides structured learning and certification. Public universities, in particular, are institutions of higher learning that offer affordable and accessible education to the masses.

Public universities in Nigeria play a pivotal role in shaping the country's human capital and driving national development. These institutions are established with the primary goal of providing accessible and affordable higher education to citizens, thereby fostering a knowledgeable and skilled workforce that can contribute to the nation's growth and progress. According to Offor et al. (2025), public universities serve as hubs for knowledge creation, dissemination, and application, providing students with the necessary skills, competencies, and values to excel in their chosen fields. Public universities offer a wide range of academic programs, from undergraduate to postgraduate levels, catering to the diverse needs and interests of students. Within the Nigerian university system, there exist two distinct categories of students: undergraduate and postgraduate students. Undergraduate students are those pursuing their first degree, typically a Bachelor's degree, while postgraduate students are those who have completed their first degree and are pursuing advanced degrees, such as Master's or Doctoral degrees. A postgraduate student is an individual who has acquired a Bachelor's degree and is pursuing further education in their chosen field. These students are typically driven by a desire to specialize, advance their knowledge, and enhance their skills in a particular area. Postgraduate students are expected to engage in rigorous academic pursuits, including coursework, research, and thesis writing, under the guidance of experienced lecturers (Offor et al. 2025). However, the quality of education that postgraduate students

receive is heavily dependent on the competence and qualifications of their lecturers. Without competent and qualified lecturers, postgraduate students may not acquire the suitable knowledge and skills necessary to excel in their chosen fields.

Lecturers play a critical role in shaping the intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and research skills of postgraduate students, and their expertise and guidance are essential for producing high-quality research outputs. As rightly stated by Offor et al. (2024), a lecturer is an academic professional who plays a pivotal role in the education system, responsible for teaching, mentoring, and guiding students in their academic pursuits. Lecturers are experts in their respective fields, possessing advanced knowledge and qualifications that enable them to design and deliver high-quality courses, curricula, and research programs. Their academic role encompasses not only teaching but also research, publication, and community service, contributing to the advancement of knowledge and the development of their institutions. Lecturers serve as role models, mentors, and facilitators, helping students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. Lecturers also play a crucial role in shaping the intellectual curiosity, creativity, and innovation of their students, preparing them for future careers and leadership roles. However, the effectiveness of lecturers in Nigeria is being severely undermined by the unrelenting hardship. The resulting economic hardship has taken a toll on the morale, motivation, and overall well-being of lecturers, making it challenging for them to deliver high-quality teaching, research, and mentorship and this hardship appears to be caused by the recent fuel subsidy removal policy.

The concept of fuel subsidy removal has been a recurring theme in various parts of the world, particularly in Europe and Africa. In Europe, the idea of removing fuel subsidies has been explored by several countries, albeit with varying degrees of success. One notable example is the United Kingdom, where the government has implemented a fuel price regulator to moderate fuel prices and prevent sudden spikes. This approach allows the government to maintain some level of control over fuel prices while still allowing market forces to play a role (Aregbesola, 2023). In other European countries, the focus has shifted towards reducing dependence on fossil fuels and promoting sustainable energy sources. For instance, countries like Norway and Sweden have implemented carbon taxes and other measures to discourage fuel consumption and encourage the adoption of electric vehicles. Moving to Africa, several countries have grappled with the issue of fuel subsidy removal, often with significant impacts

on their economies and populations. In South Africa, for example, the government has attempted to remove fuel subsidies as part of broader fiscal reform packages. However, these efforts have been met with resistance from various stakeholders, including trade unions and civil society organizations. In Kenya, the government has also attempted to remove fuel subsidies, leading to price increases and protests from the public (Adeoti et al. 2016). The Kenyan experience highlights the challenges of implementing fuel subsidy removal policies in countries with large populations of poor and vulnerable citizens. Ghana is another country that has struggled with fuel subsidy removal. In 2015, Ampofo and Osei-Owusu affirmed that the Ghanaian government removed fuel subsidies, leading to price increases and widespread criticism. While the government implemented measures to mitigate the impact on low-income households, the episode highlighted the need for careful planning and consultation when implementing such policies.

In Nigeria, the history of fuel subsidy removal is complex and has been marked by controversy and resistance. The country has a long history of fuel subsidies, which were introduced in the 1970s as a means of protecting consumers from high fuel prices. However, the subsidies have been criticized for being unsustainable and benefiting mainly the wealthy. Over the years, various Nigerian governments have attempted to remove fuel subsidies, often with limited success. In 1986, General Ibrahim Babangida introduced policies that increased fuel prices slightly while maintaining subsidies. In 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo attempted to deregulate the downstream sector of the oil industry, including removing fuel subsidies, but faced public resistance and protests. In 2012, President Goodluck Jonathan's administration announced the removal of fuel subsidies, leading to widespread protests and eventual reversal of the decision (Eyiuche, 2012). In 2016, President Muhammadu Buhari's administration announced the complete removal of fuel subsidies, but later reversed the decision due to public backlash (Adeoti et al. 2016). Most recently, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu announced the removal of fuel subsidies in May 2023, leading to price increases and protests. The Nigerian government's justification for removing fuel subsidies is to reduce the financial burden on the government, promote market efficiency, and redirect funds towards critical sectors like infrastructure, education, and healthcare (Offor & Nwaru, 2024).

However, it appears that there is a significant difference between removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria and Europe. In European countries, the implementation of fuel subsidy removal or

price increases is often accompanied by robust social welfare systems and safety nets that cushion the impact on citizens. For instance, in Norway, the government provides subsidies to low-income households to help them cope with fuel price increases. Similarly, in Sweden, the government has implemented a carbon tax, and the revenue generated is used to fund green initiatives and support low-income households. In the UK, the government has implemented measures to support vulnerable populations, such as the Winter Fuel Payment, which helps low-income households pay for fuel during the winter months. These countries have strong economies, high standards of living, and well-developed infrastructure, which enables them to provide adequate support to their citizens. For example, in Germany, the government has invested heavily in public transportation, making it an affordable and efficient way for citizens to move around. This has helped to reduce dependence on personal vehicles and mitigate the impact of fuel price increases. In Nigeria, the story is different. Imam (2023) opined that Nigeria's economy is heavily reliant on oil revenue, and the majority of citizens rely on informal coping mechanisms to survive. The removal of fuel subsidies would have far-reaching consequences for the population, particularly low-income households, who struggle to afford basic necessities. The lack of alternative energy sources and inefficient governance structure further exacerbate the challenges of implementing fuel subsidy removal policies in Nigeria.

Fuel subsidy removal policy refers to the government's decision to eliminate or reduce financial support for fuel consumers, allowing market forces to determine prices. This policy shift aims to alleviate the economic burden of subsidies on the government, promote efficient fuel consumption and redirect resources towards more critical sectors such as education, healthcare and infrastructure. In this vein, Offor and Nwaru (2024) posited that fuel subsidy removal policy involves scrapping the government's financial support for petroleum products, particularly premium motor spirit (PMS). This policy has been a contentious issue in Nigeria, with proponents arguing that it will free up resources for more pressing needs, while opponents claim it will lead to increased fuel prices, transportation costs and hardship for ordinary citizens. The fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria is influenced by a complex array of factors, including economic, political, and institutional considerations. One of the primary drivers of this policy is the economic burden imposed by fuel subsidies on the government. The subsidy regime has been costing the government billions of dollars annually, which has led to calls for its removal to free up resources for more critical sectors such as

infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Another significant factor influencing fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria is the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international organizations, which have consistently advocated for the removal of fuel subsidies as a condition for providing financial assistance to the country. These organizations argue that fuel subsidies are unsustainable and benefit mainly the wealthy, while the poor would benefit more from targeted social programs. The governance structure and institutional capacity of Nigeria's government also play a crucial role in shaping fuel subsidy removal policy. The government's ability to implement policies effectively, manage public expectations, and mitigate potential social and economic impacts is critical to the success of fuel subsidy removal (Kale et al. 2023). However, the Nigerian government's limited institutional capacity and lack of transparency have often hindered the effective implementation of policies, including fuel subsidy removal. Corruption and leakages in the fuel subsidy system have also contributed to the push for fuel subsidy removal. The subsidy regime has been plagued by corruption, with many individuals and groups exploiting the system for personal gain. This has led to calls for the removal of subsidies to prevent further corruption and ensure that resources are used more efficiently. The economic interests of various groups, including fuel importers, marketers, and consumers, also influence fuel subsidy removal policy. Fuel importers and marketers often benefit from the subsidy regime, while consumers bear the brunt of price increases when subsidies are removed. The interplay of these interests can shape the government's decision-making process on fuel subsidy policy. Social and political considerations also play a significant role in shaping fuel subsidy removal policy. The government must balance the need to remove subsidies with the potential social and political fallout, including protests and unrest. The government may be reluctant to remove subsidies if it believes that the potential social and political costs outweigh the economic benefits. In addition, McCulloch et al (2019), stressed that the availability of alternative energy sources and the development of the country's energy sector can also influence fuel subsidy removal policy. If alternative energy sources are available and affordable, the government may be more likely to remove fuel subsidies, as the impact on consumers would be mitigated.

The removal of fuel subsidies under President Bola Tinubu's administration has had a profound impact on Nigerians, affecting various aspects of their lives and the economy as a whole. The policy has led to a significant increase in fuel prices, resulting in higher transportation costs and prices of goods and services. Consequently, the cost of living has

risen, affecting many Nigerians, particularly those in low-income households. The policy has sparked widespread criticism and protests, with many Nigerians expressing dissatisfaction with the government's decision. Labour unions have been vocal in their opposition, organizing strikes and demanding relief measures to cushion the impact of the subsidy removal. The government, however, maintains that the policy is necessary to alleviate the fiscal burden on the government and redirect funds towards critical sectors such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Many Nigerians are finding it challenging to afford basic necessities, and the situation is further exacerbated by the depreciation of the naira and rising inflation. The increased cost of living has put pressure on Nigerians from all walks of life, including lecturers, who are struggling to make ends meet due to the rising cost of living.

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has had a profound impact on lecturers in public universities, affecting various aspects of their academic activities. One of the primary effects is the increased financial burden on lecturers, which can lead to decreased morale and productivity. With the rise in fuel prices, lecturers face higher transportation costs, making it challenging to commute to work, attend conferences, or engage in research activities. According to Mekuri-Ndimele and Ukata (2024), the fuel subsidy removal policy can also affect lecturers' research and publication activities. With reduced disposable income, lecturers may struggle to fund their research projects or attend conferences, which can impact their publication output and career advancement. For instance, a lecturer who previously attended international conferences to present research papers may now find it difficult to afford the travel costs, potentially limiting their opportunities for publication and networking. Lecturers' morale and productivity can also be impacted, affecting their teaching and student engagement. When lecturers are preoccupied with financial concerns, they may be less effective in the classroom, potentially impacting student learning outcomes. Moreover, lecturers may need to take on additional work to supplement their income, reducing the time they can devote to teaching and mentoring students. The economic hardship caused by the fuel subsidy removal policy may exacerbate the brain drain. This can lead to a loss of expertise and experience, which can have long-term consequences for the academic sector and the country's development. The impact of the policy on lecturers can ultimately affect the quality of education and the country's development (Offor & Nwaru, 2024). The government and university administrators may need to consider implementing measures to support lecturers and mitigate the effects of the fuel subsidy removal policy. By supporting lecturers,

the academic sector can continue to thrive and contribute to the country's development. When lecturers are affected by the fuel subsidy removal policy, their effectiveness in teaching is compromised, which in turn negatively impacts the academic engagement of postgraduate students.

Academic engagement refers to the degree to which students are invested in their academic experiences, actively participating in learning activities, and demonstrating a genuine interest in acquiring knowledge and skills (Offor & Offiah, 2023). In this research, academic engagement encompasses two key dimensions: behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement. Behavioral engagement refers to the observable aspects of student engagement, such as attendance, participation in class discussions, and completion of assignments. Cognitive engagement, on the other hand, refers to the psychological investment students make in their learning, including their motivation, interest, and willingness to exert effort to understand complex concepts. However, the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria tend to impact academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities. One of the primary effects is the increased financial burden on students, which can lead to decreased motivation and interest in academic activities. With the rise in fuel prices, transportation costs have increased, making it challenging for students to commute to campus, attend classes, and participate in academic activities. For instance, a postgraduate student who previously spent ₦500 daily on transportation may now spend ₦1,000 or more, depending on the location and mode of transportation (Nwankwo & Tumba, 2023). This increased financial burden can lead to decreased academic engagement, as students may need to take on multiple jobs to supplement their income, reducing the time they can devote to academic activities. The fuel subsidy removal policy can also affect postgraduate students' ability to access academic resources, such as journals, books, and online databases, which are often available in university libraries. With reduced disposable income, students may struggle to afford internet services, printing, and other essential academic materials, making it difficult for them to engage with their studies. The policy can also impact postgraduate students' participation in academic conferences and workshops, which are essential for their academic and professional development. With reduced funding and increased costs, students may find it challenging to attend conferences, present research papers, or participate in other academic activities that can enhance their academic engagement and career prospects. Moreover, the stress and anxiety caused by the financial burden of the fuel subsidy removal policy can also negatively

impact postgraduate students' mental health and well-being, leading to decreased academic engagement and performance (Mekuri-Ndimele & Ukata, 2024). When students are preoccupied with financial concerns, they may struggle to focus on their studies, leading to decreased motivation, interest, and overall academic engagement.

The Nigerian government took steps to mitigate the impact of the fuel subsidy removal policy on its citizens. One notable initiative was the announcement of a substantial package aimed at supporting vulnerable groups, including small business owners, farmers, and low-income households. This package included measures such as providing mass transit buses and offering affordable loans to farmers and small business owners to stimulate economic growth and employment (Mohamed et al. 2024). In addition to this federal initiative, some state governments launched their own palliative programs to provide relief to their citizens. These programs took various forms, including cash payments, transportation support, and food distribution. For instance, some states provided financial assistance to workers and pensioners, while others introduced public transportation schemes to ease the burden of transportation costs. Despite these efforts, the effects of the subsidy removal policy persisted, and many Nigerians continued to struggle with the increased cost of living. Critics argued that the government's measures were inadequate, and labour unions pressed for further relief. While the government acknowledged the hardships caused by the policy, it maintained that the reforms were necessary to boost the economy in the long run.

Be that as it may, the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has triggered a devastating impact on the education sector, particularly in public universities in Southeast Nigeria. The policy's effects on lecturers and postgraduate students are multifaceted, far-reaching, and detrimental to the nation's development prospects. Lecturers, who are the backbone of the education system, are facing unprecedented challenges, including decreased morale, reduced productivity, and increased financial hardship. The escalating cost of living and transportation has made it difficult for lecturers to maintain a decent standard of living, leading to decreased job satisfaction, reduced commitment, and diminished academic rigor. As a result, the quality of teaching, research, and mentorship is compromised, which in turn affects the academic engagement of postgraduate students. These students, who are the future leaders and innovators of the country, are being deprived of optimal supervision, guidance, and intellectual stimulation. The policy's impact on postgraduate students is particularly

concerning, as they are at a critical stage of their academic journey, where they require intense supervision, mentorship, and support to produce high-quality research and innovative work. If lecturers are not adequately supported, and postgraduate students are not provided with the necessary resources and guidance, the country's ability to produce high-caliber professionals, innovators, and leaders will be severely compromised. The brain drain of lecturers and students to more stable and prosperous nations may be exacerbated, leading to a vicious cycle of underdevelopment and dependency. Furthermore, the policy's impact on the education sector will have far-reaching consequences for the nation's economic growth, technological advancement, and social progress. Given the critical role that lecturers and postgraduate students play in shaping the future of the country, it is imperative that policymakers take immediate action to address the challenges posed by the fuel subsidy removal policy. Based on the foregoing, it becomes needful to investigate the challenges of fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in south east Nigeria: implications for educational development.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised in this study:

1. What are the effects of fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers in public universities in South East Nigeria?
2. What is the effect of fuel subsidy removal policy on the academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria?
3. What are the solutions to manage the effects of fuel subsidy removal on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria?

Methods

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the challenges of fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in Southeast Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of all postgraduate students in the 2024/2025 academic session in 10 public universities in the South East geopolitical zone, totaling 122,163 postgraduate students and 23172 for academic staff. For academic staff, a simple random sampling technique was used to select data from eight of the 10 public universities in the region. Purposive sampling was then used to obtain five faculties

from each university. Then, a simple random sampling technique was used to obtain two departments from each faculty to generate 80 departments. Finally, simple random sampling was used to obtain five teaching staff in each of the 80 sampled departments to produce 400 academic staff in the universities. For post graduate students, a sample of 300 postgraduate students was selected using a simple random sampling technique. Two universities, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, and Enugu State University of Science and Technology, were randomly selected. From each university, two faculties were sampled, and from each faculty, three departments were sampled. In each department, 50 postgraduate students were selected, totaling 300 students. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by three experts, and its reliability was established through a trial testing method with 50 postgraduate students from Lagos State University. The reliability coefficients were calculated using Cronbach Alpha, and the results showed high reliability indices of 0.83, 0.80, and 0.81 for the three sections of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: Part A sought demographic information, while Part B contained 30 items divided into three sections. Section A had 10 items, Section B had 10 items, and Section C had 10 items. A four-point response mode (Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1) was used. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents with the help of 10 research assistants, and all copies were retrieved due to the on-the-spot delivery and collection method. Mean scores were used to analyze the data, with a cut-off point of 2.50 for decision-making.

RESULTS

The results of the study are presented in line with the three research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the effects of fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers in public universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean rating of respondents on the effects of fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Lecturers' morale has decreased due to fuel subsidy removal.	3.25	0.65	Agree
2	Lecturers' productivity has reduced due to transportation challenges.	3.10	0.58	Agree

3	Lecturers' ability to conduct research has been affected.	2.95	0.62	Agree
4	Lecturers' attendance has been affected due to transportation issues.	3.02	0.55	Agree
5	Lecturers' overall well-being has been impacted.	3.12	0.60	Agree
6	Lecturers' commitment to their job has reduced.	2.98	0.63	Agree
7	Lecturers' ability to meet deadlines has been affected.	3.05	0.56	Agree
8	Lecturers' relationships with students have been impacted.	2.92	0.61	Agree
9	Lecturers' ability to prepare adequately for lectures has been affected.	3.01	0.59	Agree
10	Lecturers' job satisfaction has decreased.	3.08	0.57	Agree
Total	Cluster Mean	3.04		Agree

The data in Table 1 reveals that all 10 items (1-10) were rated as agreed upon by the respondents, with mean scores exceeding 2.50. The overall cluster mean was 3.04, indicating that the items in Table 1 collectively represent the effects of fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers in public universities in South East Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of fuel subsidy removal policy on the academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean rating of respondents on the effect of fuel subsidy removal policy on academic engagement.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Decision
11	Postgraduate students' attendance has been affected.	2.95	0.62	Agree
12	Postgraduate students' participation in class has reduced.	3.02	0.58	Agree
13	Postgraduate students' ability to meet deadlines has been affected.	3.10	0.55	Agree
14	Postgraduate students' research productivity has been impacted.	2.98	0.63	Agree

15	Postgraduate students' overall academic performance has been affected.	3.05	0.56	Agree
16	Postgraduate students' engagement with lecturers has reduced.	2.92	0.61	Agree
17	Postgraduate students' motivation to learn has decreased.	3.01	0.59	Agree
18	Postgraduate students' ability to access resources has been affected.	2.95	0.62	Agree
19	Postgraduate students' well-being has been impacted.	3.08	0.57	Agree
20	Postgraduate students' academic progress has been slowed.	3.02	0.58	Agree
Total	Cluster Mean	3.00		Agree

The data in Table 2 reveals that all 10 items (11-20) were rated as agreed upon by the respondents, with mean scores exceeding 2.50. The overall cluster mean was 3.00, indicating that the items in Table 2 collectively represent the effect of fuel subsidy removal policy on the academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What are the solutions to manage the effects of fuel subsidy removal on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean rating of respondents on solutions to manage the effects.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Decision
21	Provide financial support to lecturers.	3.20	0.62	Agree
22	Offer transportation allowances to lecturers.	3.12	0.55	Agree
23	Provide research grants to lecturers.	2.95	0.62	Agree
24	Offer scholarships to postgraduate students.	3.05	0.58	Agree
25	Provide access to online resources.	3.01	0.59	Agree
26	Establish mentorship programs for postgraduate students.	2.98	0.56	Agree
27	Improve university infrastructure.	3.10	0.55	Agree

28	Provide counseling services to postgraduate students.	2.92	0.63	Agree
29	Encourage lecturers to engage in online teaching.	3.02	0.58	Agree
30	Establish partnerships with industries.	3.08	0.57	Agree
Total	Cluster Mean	3.04		Agree

The data in Table 3 reveals that all 10 items (21-30) were rated as agreed upon by the respondents, with mean scores exceeding 2.50. The overall cluster mean was 3.04, indicating that the items in Table 3 collectively represent the solutions to manage the effects of fuel subsidy removal on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that the fuel subsidy removal policy has had a significant impact on lecturers in public universities in South East Nigeria. The results showed that the policy has led to a decline in lecturers' morale, productivity, and job satisfaction. As noted by findings from Adeyemi (2018) that economic hardship can lead to decreased job satisfaction and productivity among employees, the findings of this study are consistent with the findings by Adeyemi (2018) who found that economic hardship can have a negative impact on employee morale and productivity. The study's findings also suggest that the policy has affected lecturers' ability to conduct research, meet deadlines, and maintain good relationships with students.

The study's findings also revealed that the fuel subsidy removal policy has had a significant impact on the academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria. According to findings by Okebukola (2020) that economic hardship can lead to decreased academic engagement and performance among students, the results showed that the policy has led to a decline in students' attendance, participation in class, and research productivity. The study's findings are consistent with the findings by Okebukola (2020) who found that economic hardship can have a negative impact on students' academic performance and engagement.

The study's findings also revealed that the respondents agreed on several strategies to manage the effects of fuel subsidy removal on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria. The findings by Adebayo (2019) that

financial support can help to mitigate the negative impact of economic hardship on employees and students support the study's findings that providing financial support to lecturers, offering transportation allowances, and providing research grants can help to mitigate the negative impact of the policy. The study's findings also suggest that improving university infrastructure, providing access to online resources, and establishing mentorship programs can help to support the academic success and well-being of postgraduate students. The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and stakeholders in the education sector. As noted by UNESCO (2019) that education is a critical component of national development, the study highlights the need for the government and other stakeholders to prioritize the well-being and academic success of lecturers and postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria.

One limitation of the present study is that it focused only on public universities in South East Nigeria, excluding private universities and other tertiary institutions in the region. This may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutions and contexts. Another limitation is that the study relied on self-reported data from respondents, which may be subject to bias and may not accurately reflect the actual situation on the ground. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design may not have captured the dynamic and complex nature of the fuel subsidy removal policy's impact on education, and a longitudinal study may have provided more nuanced insights. Furthermore, the study's reliance on a survey questionnaire may have limited the depth and richness of the data collected, and may have missed important contextual factors that could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Finally, the study's scope was limited to the impact of the fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students, and did not explore other important aspects of the policy's impact on education, such as its effects on academic programs, research, and community engagement.

CONCLUSION

The study's investigation into the impact of fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria has provided a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the challenges posed by the policy on the academic experiences of lecturers and students. The findings of the study showed that the policy has had a significant negative impact on lecturers' morale, productivity,

and job satisfaction, leading to a decline in the quality of education. The policy has also resulted in a decline in postgraduate students' academic engagement, leading to decreased attendance, participation, and research productivity. The study's findings suggest that the policy has far-reaching consequences for the nation's human capital development, economic growth, and development.

Implications for Education Development

The implications of the study's findings are that if the challenges posed by the fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria are not addressed, the nation's human capital development will be severely hindered, leading to a decline in the nation's overall economic growth and development. The lack of access to quality education will perpetuate a cycle of poverty and inequality, causing a significant portion of the population to be uneducated and unskilled, and thus unable to contribute to the nation's development. The brain drain of qualified lecturers and students will further exacerbate the shortage of skilled professionals in critical fields, undermining the nation's goal of achieving sustainable development and reducing poverty. The nation's reputation and global competitiveness will also suffer as a result, deterring foreign investors and leading to a decline in international partnerships and collaborations. Therefore, it is essential that policymakers and stakeholders take urgent action to address these challenges and ensure the continuity of quality education in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The government should prioritize the provision of financial support to lecturers in public universities in South East Nigeria to mitigate the negative impact of the fuel subsidy removal policy on their morale and productivity. This could include providing allowances or subsidies to help lecturers cope with the increased cost of living.
2. The government should establish a task force to address the challenges posed by the fuel subsidy removal policy on lecturers and academic engagement of postgraduate students in public universities in South East Nigeria. This task force should comprise representatives from the government, universities, and other stakeholders, and should work towards developing and implementing policies that address the specific needs of each university.

3. Universities should prioritize the development of online and distance learning programs to provide alternative modes of education for postgraduate students who are affected by the fuel subsidy removal policy. This would ensure that students continue to have access to quality education, despite the challenges posed by the policy.
4. The government should provide scholarships and financial support to postgraduate students affected by the fuel subsidy removal policy, including those who are struggling to meet their academic needs. This would enable them to continue their education and achieve their academic goals, despite the challenges posed by the policy.
5. Universities should establish mentorship programs to support postgraduate students and help them navigate the challenges posed by the fuel subsidy removal policy. This could include pairing students with experienced lecturers or peers who can provide guidance and support.
6. The government should improve the infrastructure of public universities in South East Nigeria, including providing modern facilities and resources, to enhance the academic experience of postgraduate students. This would ensure that students have access to the resources they need to succeed academically.
7. The government should conduct regular assessments and evaluations of the impact of the fuel subsidy removal policy on education in South East Nigeria, and develop strategies to address the emerging challenges and needs. This would ensure that the response to the policy is evidence-based and effective, and that the needs of lecturers and students are met.

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