

To Assess the Impact of School Feeding Program on the Academic Performance of Learners: A Case Study of Selected School in Kabwe District, Zambia

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of school feeding programs on learners' academic performance in selected primary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. A mixed-method approach was used, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. From a target population of 800, a sample of 150 participants was selected, including administrators, teachers, students, and community members from five schools. Stratified random sampling ensured balanced representation of all groups. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, allowing both statistical analysis and exploration of participants' experiences. Quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Findings from previous studies indicate a positive link between school feeding programs and improved academic outcomes, mainly due to better nutrition enhancing concentration and cognitive performance. This study contributes to understanding how such programs influence education in Kabwe District and provides insights to guide policy and improve school feeding initiatives in Zambia.

Keywords: School Feeding Programs, Academic Performance, Nutrition, Primary Education, Mixed-Method Research, Learner Achievement, Cognitive Development, Educational Policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of nutrition in the academic performance of learners has been widely recognized, with numerous studies linking adequate nutrition to enhanced cognitive abilities, concentration, and overall academic achievement. In many developing countries, including Zambia, the government and other organizations have implemented school feeding programs to address food insecurity and malnutrition, which can impede students' learning abilities. The implementation of such programs in schools is believed to improve students' health, increase school attendance, and enhance academic outcomes. However, despite the widespread adoption of school feeding programs in various parts of Zambia, there remains limited empirical evidence on their direct impact on the academic performance of learners, particularly in rural areas like parts of Kabwe District.

Background of the Study

Many children in developing countries suffer from poor health and nutrition, which negatively affects their education. Studies show that malnutrition limits cognitive development, concentration, and overall academic performance. School Feeding Programs (SFPs) help address short-term hunger, improve enrolment, attendance, and learning outcomes.

In Zambia, many learners attend school hungry, making it difficult to focus. The government, with support from the World Food Programme, introduced SFPs to provide meals and improve learners' health and education. The Home-Grown School Feeding Programme

further supports local food sourcing. In Kabwe District, SFPs were introduced to address low enrolment, poor attendance, and weak academic performance.

This study focused on five primary schools in Chindwin Zone and used a mixed-method approach to examine how school feeding programs influence academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the implementation of SFPs, there is limited research in Kabwe District on their actual impact on academic performance. Available data shows mixed results, with some learners in the program performing lower than non-participants. Challenges such as poor food quality, delayed supplies, lack of clean water, and inadequate infrastructure affect program effectiveness. This study therefore assessed the impact of SFPs on learners' academic performance.

Research Objectives

General Objective: To assess the impact of the school feeding program on learners' academic performance in selected schools in Kabwe District.

Specific Objectives

1. To evaluate the effect of SFP on academic performance.
2. To assess its impact on school attendance.
3. To examine stakeholder perceptions of the program.
4. To investigate how program quality and consistency affect performance.

Research Questions

1. How does SFP influence academic performance?
2. What is its impact on attendance rates?
3. What are stakeholders' perceptions of its effectiveness?
4. How does program quality relate to academic performance?

Purpose of the Study

To assess the impact of the school feeding program on pupils' academic performance in selected primary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia.

Significance of the Study

The study provides insights for policymakers, educators, and communities on the effectiveness of SFPs. It contributes evidence to improve educational strategies, promote nutrition awareness, and support informed decision-making. The findings may also enhance program implementation and benefit learners' academic outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature on the School Feeding Programme (SFP) at global, regional, and national levels, including its effects on enrolment, attendance, retention, and academic performance, as well as the theoretical framework.

School Feeding Programme on Pupils' Enrolment in Schools

Global Level: Education supports development, but many children in developing countries remain out of school due to poverty. SFPs reduce education costs and encourage enrolment

by providing meals. Studies show that school feeding increases enrolment, attendance, and retention, as seen in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Regional Level: In Sub-Saharan Africa, SFPs have significantly increased enrolment. Studies show improvements of up to 30%, especially among girls when take-home rations are included. Countries like Tanzania, Malawi, and Ghana reported notable increases in enrolment and reduced dropout rates.

National Level: In countries like Kenya, SFPs have improved enrolment despite ongoing challenges such as poverty and inequality. Research shows that school meals reduce the cost burden on families and encourage children, especially from poor households, to attend school.

School Feeding Programme on Pupils' Attendance in Schools

Global Level: Globally, SFPs improve school attendance by reducing hunger and motivating learners to attend regularly. Studies in Bangladesh, Jamaica, and Pakistan show increased attendance and reduced dropout rates due to feeding programs.

Regional Level: In developing regions, SFPs improve attendance by addressing hunger, improving nutrition, and reducing illness. Better nutrition enhances concentration and encourages consistent school participation.

National Level: Studies in Kenya show that SFPs significantly improve attendance and participation. Learners in schools with feeding programs attend more regularly and show better learning outcomes.

School Feeding Programme on Pupils' Retention in Schools

Global Level: High dropout rates in developing countries are linked to poverty and hunger. SFPs improve retention by encouraging regular attendance. Studies in Bangladesh show reduced dropout rates where feeding programs are implemented.

Regional Level: In Africa, SFPs have improved retention by motivating parents to keep children in school. Countries like Ghana and Malawi reported reduced dropout rates and improved completion levels.

National Level: In Kenya, SFPs have positively influenced retention, enrolment, and participation. However, challenges such as overcrowding and resource constraints remain.

Local Statistical Scenario

Prevalence and Reach in Zambia: SFPs are widely implemented in Zambia, benefiting over 1.5 million learners. The Home-Grown School Feeding Programme supports local agriculture and improves access to nutritious meals.

Impact on Academic Performance: Studies show that SFPs improve concentration, attendance, and academic performance. Learners receiving meals perform better in subjects like Mathematics and English.

Nutritional Deficiencies and Educational Outcomes: High levels of malnutrition in Zambia affect learning. SFPs help improve nutrition, leading to better cognitive development and academic outcomes.

Challenges in Implementation: Challenges include inconsistent funding, poor infrastructure, inadequate food storage, and limited monitoring. These issues affect the effectiveness of SFPs.

Theoretical Framework Review: This study is based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. The theory explains that basic needs, such as food, must be met before higher-level learning can occur.

SFPs address learners' physiological needs by providing meals, which improves concentration, health, and academic performance. When basic needs are satisfied, learners are more motivated and able to achieve better educational outcomes.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the study, including research design, sampling, data collection, analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Research Design: The study used a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the impact of school feeding programs through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, improving validity and reliability.

Universe: The study focused on schools in Chindwin Zone, Kabwe District implementing school feeding programs. Five schools were selected, involving administrators, teachers, students, and community members.

Sampling Procedure: Both probability and non-probability sampling were used. Stratified random sampling selected students and teachers, while purposive sampling selected administrators and community members with relevant experience.

Sample Size

A total of 150 respondents participated:

- 10 administrators
- 50 teachers
- 50 students
- 40 community members

The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula.

Sampling Area

The study was conducted in five selected schools in Chindwin Zone, Kabwe District, chosen for their participation in school feeding programs and diverse backgrounds.

Method of Data Collection

Data was collected using questionnaires (quantitative) and interviews and focus group discussions (qualitative). Observations were also used to assess program implementation.

Tools of Data Collection

- Questionnaires (closed-ended and Likert scale)
- Interview guides
- Focus group discussion guides
- Observation checklists

Tools for Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel (frequencies, percentages, graphs, correlations).

Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights.

Limitations of the Study

- Limited generalizability (only five schools)
- Response bias
- Data collection challenges
- Financial and time constraints

These were addressed through data triangulation and ensuring anonymity.

Ethical Considerations

The study ensured confidentiality, voluntary participation, and use of data for research purposes only. Permission was obtained from relevant authorities before conducting the research.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the School Feeding Programme has a positive impact on learners' academic performance in selected primary schools in Chindwin Zone. It improves attendance, enhances concentration, and reduces absenteeism, especially among vulnerable learners. Improved attendance was identified as a key factor contributing to better academic outcomes. The programme is widely viewed as effective by administrators, teachers, learners, and community members, showing strong stakeholder support. However, academic performance is influenced by multiple factors such as teaching quality, learning materials, parental support, and school infrastructure, not just school feeding alone. The study also found that limited food variety and poor meal quality can reduce the programme's effectiveness. Monotonous meals may lower learners' appetite and nutritional benefits. Overall, the School Feeding Programme is an important intervention for improving education access and performance, but it requires continuous improvement in quality, consistency, and integration with other educational support strategies.

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