

The Effect of School Feeding Program on Learner's School Attendance in Baringo County, Kenya

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to establish the effect of school feeding programme on attendance of learners in primary school education. The study adopted an exploratory approach using a descriptive survey design to obtain information that will be used to describe the existing phenomena. The study was done in 10 primary schools in Mogotio Division. The unit of analysis constituted of 70 respondents (Head teacher/ Heads of school feeding program, Teachers, parent representatives and pupils). Purposive random sampling was used in this case whereby all the 70 respondents were picked to fill the questionnaire. The study concludes feeding programs enhance attendance levels in the centres largely. There were cases of children who miss school because of the feeding program in place and that children miss school because of sickness, family affairs, lack of school uniform and food at home, poor performances that make them shy away, lack of parental support and guidance as well as poor characteristics developed by students.

Keywords: School Feeding Program, Learner's attendance.

INTRODUCTION

Research by Bennett [1] showed that children who are nutritionally fit are more likely to have the energy, stamina and self-esteem that enhance their ability to learn.

Many factors have contributed to poor nutrition such as poverty, big families, broken families, and lack of feeding program among others. Poor nutrition and health among schoolchildren contributes to the inefficiency of the educational system. The irregular school attendance of malnourished and unhealthy children is one of the key factors in poor performance. Even temporary hunger, common in children who are not fed before going to school, can have an adverse effect on learning. Children left hungry have more difficulty concentrating and performing complex tasks, even if otherwise well nourished. Research and program experience shows that improving nutrition and health can lead to better performance, fewer repeated grades and reduced drop out [2].

Throughout the world, governments have used food subsidies to improve the welfare of needy populations. In Kenya, a nutrition survey conducted in 1968 recommended the launch of School Feeding Programme to be uniform all over the country, regardless of food habits [3]. This was affected in 1973 whereby 84g of beans, 28g of maize with 7 g of supro (barley flour, yeast and dried skimmed milk) were served to each pupil during lunch break. Kerlinge [4] reported that the government financed the School milk and feeding programmes, which were launched in 1978.

It spent Ksh. 35 million for milk programme, which grew to Ksh.609, 051,320 by 1987/1988 fiscal year. In the same fiscal year, Ksh.49, 326,960 was spent on the Feeding Programme for primary school.

Levinge [5] posted on its website, that during the July 2000 G-8 summit in Okinawa, the American Government committed resources worth US\$ 300 million to establish School feeding programmes in developing countries, particularly those that had made commitment to providing universal education for their children. This is one of the goals of the Dakar World Education Forum of April 2000. This is because even where education is free costs such as uniform and shoes, which are still shouldered by parents, are in sharp competition with costs for food, health and other non-schooling basic needs for the meagre domestic resources. For the food insecure child, going to school takes a second priority. A hungry child cannot concentrate. Hungry children are unlikely to stay in school, however free it may be.

The Kenyan Government, in 2003 re-introduced free primary education as a way of encouraging parents to send their children to school. The enthusiasm that greeted this policy has faded particularly in arid regions because of the stark reality of hunger back at home [6]. The World Food

Programme indicated that it could not always ensure that it will have the resources to provide consistent food supplies for the children it feeds worldwide [7].

Past Studies on School Feeding Programmes

A community's educational and economic status is closely linked to its health status. Poor nutrition and health among schoolchildren contribute to the inefficiency of the education system. Children in poor health start school later in life or not at all. Even missing meals or food for a short duration, common among children who are not fed before going to school, can have adverse effects on learning. The Koech Report [8] reported that some schools in ASAL regions with SFP attracted more pupils. Further, such schools delayed opening because food supplies had not yet arrived. In Jamaica, providing breakfast to primary school pupils significantly increased their attendance and arithmetic scores. The study found that children who benefited most were those who were wasted, stunted or previously malnourished [9]. Before the start of a school breakfast programme in disadvantaged primary school pupils in the US, children scored significantly lower on achievement tests than their counterparts who had breakfast. Once in the programme however the test scores of the children participating in the programme improved significantly than those of non-participants.

The attendance of participating children also improved [10]. Studies in Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo of the determinants of achievement found that a school meal was related to children performance on year-end tests. In Benin, children in schools with canteens scored 5 points higher on second-class tests than did children in schools without canteens [11]. King [12] asserts that in the Dominican Republic up to 25% of children dropped out of school during a period without SFP and the effect was greatest in rural areas and for girls. In North Eastern Brazil, the school achievement of malnourished children was 20% behind that of children with normal nutrition status. Those with poor vision due to nutrients deficiencies were 27% behind. Both groups of impaired students experienced below average school promotion and similar average dropout rates [13].

Influence of SFPs of Pupils' Attendance

In Bangladesh, a program of school-based food distribution increased attendance rates by 20% versus a 2% decline in non-participating schools [14]. Successful schools begin by engaging pupils and making sure, they come to school regularly. Attendance in FFE assisted

schools was found to be 12 points higher than in non-assisted schools (70 per cent compared to 58 per cent respectively). Dropout rates were also found to be 9 points lower in FFE assisted schools than in non-assisted schools (6 per cent compared to 15 per cent respectively). That may seem obvious. What is less obvious is that the consequences of low attendance are serious for all children and for the community, not just the students who miss school. The attendance rate tells you the average percentage of students attending school each day in the given year.

The attendance rate is important because students are more likely to succeed in academics when they attend school consistently. It is difficult for the teacher and the class to build their skills and progress if a large number of students are frequently absent. In addition to falling behind in academics, students who are not in school on a regular basis are more likely to get into trouble with the law and cause problems in their communities. A 2008 study conducted by the Rodel Community Scholars at Arizona State University that tracked students from kindergarten through high school found that dropout patterns were linked with poor attendance, beginning in kindergarten. According to the National Centre for Student Engagement, schools are most effective in achieving high attendance rates when parents, school leaders and community members work together to focus on reducing absences and truancy, and keeping kids in schools [15].

As a child learns to read and acquires basic math skills, it is important that he practice those new skills daily. Regular attendance promotes new learning. Regular school attendance is crucial to the development and education of children. There is a large impact on the student, the school and the community when a student does not attend school regularly. Because of this impact, in most states there are laws requiring a child to attend school until he is eighteen. Students who are not in class are more likely to commit crimes, costing the community time and money. Students learn to become good citizens through lessons at school and mentoring by adults. Combining an in-school snack with micronutrient fortification (iron, iodine, and vitamin A precursor) in primary schools in South Africa resulted in a fall in (diarrhea-related) absenteeism from 79 days to 52 days, an increase in attendance of approximately 15 percent [16].

STUDY FINDINGS

Influence of Feeding Programmes on School Attendance

Table-1: Whether there are Cases of Children who Miss School

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	59	96.7
No	2	3.3
Total	N=61	100.0

The study was to establish whether there are children who miss school. The results obtained indicated that 97% of the total respondents said that there were cases of children who miss school while 3%

that there were no cases of children who miss school respectively. This information is also presented in the figure below;

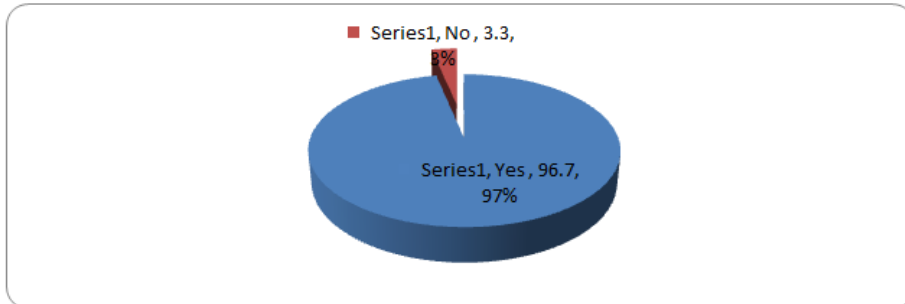


Fig-1: Cases of Children who Miss School

Reasons Why Most Children Miss School

On the question on reasons why most children miss school, most of the respondents said that children miss school because of sickness, family affairs, lack of

school uniform and food at home, poor performances that make them shy away, lack of parental support and guidance as well as poor characteristics developed by students.

Table-2: Rating on Attendance Level in the School

	Frequency	Percentage
Very Good	30	49.2
Good	24	39.3
Fairly Good	4	6.6
Not Good at all	3	4.9
Total	N=61	100.0

The study sought to establish the respondents rating on attendance level in the schools. According to the results as indicated in the table above, majority of the respondents were of the view that attendance was

very good as presented by 49%, good (39%), fairly good (7%) and not good at all as shown by 5% respectively. The information is also as shown in the figure below;

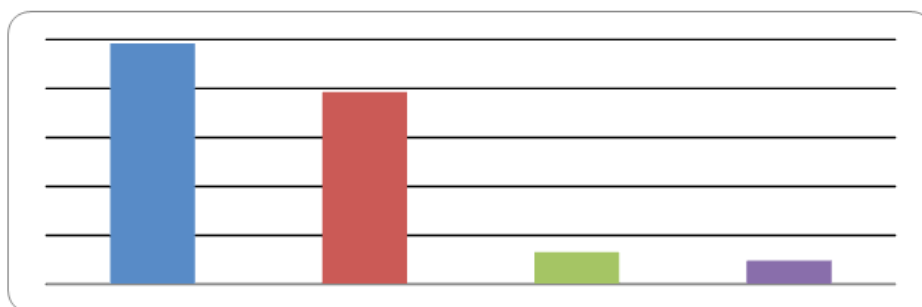


Fig-2: Rating on Attendance Level in the School

Table-3: Extent to which Feeding Program Enhance Retention in the Centre

	Frequency	Percentage
Very great extent	36	59.0
Great extent	24	39.3
Little extent	1	1.6
Total	N=61	100.0

The researcher was to find out from the respondents sampled the extent to which feeding

programs enhanced retention in the center. According to the results presented in the table above, the study found

out that feeding programs enhance retention in the centres to a very great extent (59%), great extent (39%), and little extent presented by 2% respectively.

CONCLUSION

The results obtained indicated that 97% of the total respondents said that there were cases of children who miss school. The study established that children miss school because of sickness, family affairs, lack of school uniform and food at home, poor performances that make them shy away, lack of parental support and guidance as well as poor characteristics developed by students. Majority of the respondents were of the view that attendance was very good as presented by 49% and that feeding programs enhance attendance levels in the centres to a very great extent (59%). The study concludes that feeding programs enhance attendance levels in the centres largely. There were also cases of children who miss school because of the feeding program in place and that children miss school because of sickness, family affairs, lack of school uniform and food at home, poor performances that make them shy away, lack of parental support and guidance as well as poor characteristics developed by students.

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