



CONTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES (SFPs) IN ENHANCING PUPILS' SCHOOLING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MONDULI DISTRICT, TANZANIA

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Abstract:

This study was conducted to explore the contribution of School Feeding Programme (SFP) in enhancing pupils' schooling in Monduli District in Tanzania. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) estimates that 923 million children, most of them being from the developing countries are chronically hungry (FAO, 2008). This implies that it will be difficult to reach Millenium Development Goals (MDG's) target of eliminating hunger and poverty. There is no doubt that 'hungry children cannot learn' because they cannot concentrate, they are susceptible to diseases and malnourishment. The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate how SFPs contribute to pupils' schooling, particularly in Monduli district. In the context of this study, pupils' schooling was considered in terms of their enrolment, retention and their active participation at school. The study employed a qualitative research design using semi structured interview and observation as a data collection tools. The study involved primary schools which practiced SFPs within Monduli district. The study was guided by one objective; how SFP has enhanced pupils' retention in primary schools in Monduli district. Findings revealed that SFPs has contributed greatly in enhancing pupils' schooling in Monduli district. This has been evidenced by the increase in pupils' enrolment and the time they are kept at school. According to the study, SFP has led pupils' to be active in the learning process. The study concluded that it is important for these kinds of programmes to adopt cost sharing strategies between the school and parents because the government alone cannot effectively and efficiently afford managing running of the programme. The study recommends the government to strengthen SFPs in other districts within the country so that equitably children can be bound to schooling only not wandering around in search for food during school hours.

Keywords: school feeding programme, pupils' schooling

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1. Introduction

The ambition of all countries under the United Nations (UN) was to address the challenges emanating from advancing globalization. This resulted in the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000. In the formulation of the MDGs, attention was paid to hunger and poverty as stated in the MDG number 1: "To eradicate extreme hunger and poverty". SFPs are said to contribute to achieving this first MDG encouraging families to invest in children's education, send their children to school and retain them there (Chepwonky et al, 2013). SFPs have received particular attention and increasingly become a policy measure which has been adopted in both developed and developing countries (Jomaa et al, 2013; WFP, 2013). In low income countries, poor health such as chronic protein energy malnutrition, iron-deficiency anemia contributes extensively to poor educational outcomes (Thomlison, 2007). According to UNESCO (2002), it was emphasized that at least 113 million children do not attend school and most of them come from developing countries where the problem of hunger is particularly severe. UNESCO further argues that hungry children are easily agitated and have problems to be engaged in their school work thus hunger must be tackled explicitly, directly and immediately. Failure to do so will affect efforts towards attaining the MDGs (WFP, 2004). While this may not be an issue, the issue is whether or not these school children get food in such situations (while at school) and if at all the school feeding enhances their schooling especially retaining them at the school compound.

Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa where poverty remains endemic and widespread. According to World Food Programme, recent estimates by the World Bank (WB) indicate that over half of the population of 31 million is classified as poor, out of this, 61 percent are located in the rural areas (WFP, 2002). The situation is worsened by the fact that over 40 percent of the rural population live in chronically food deficit regions where food shortages are a frequent occurrence due to poor rainfall patterns, limited access to credit and extension services. Tanzania is among the developing countries where SFPs have been implemented. The programme started as a pilot study in dry prone areas such as Dodoma, Tabora, and Arusha, particularly in some selected districts. Monduli is one of those districts where SFP was implemented. This study therefore sought to explore how SFP enhanced pupils' schooling in primary schools within Monduli district.

2. Statement of the problem

The principal aim of SFP is to provide meals or snacks in order to alleviate short term hunger through enabling children to learn (Nyakundi, 2017). Hunger and malnutrition are common in most developing countries, including Tanzania. Most households are food insecure and children in those households usually go to school on empty stomachs (Del Rosso, 1990). Buttenheim et al (2011) explain a potential impact of targeting children through SFP as to increase their educational achievement so as to improve

their potential future productivity and earnings. Children affected by hunger and malnutrition as well as ill-health do not have the same potential to do well in school in comparison with well-nourished and healthy children (Aila, 2012). Evidence shows that high absenteeism, lack of concentration in class and early drop outs are a result of short term hunger. All these lead to a conclusion that hunger in the long run poses major impacts on pupils' learning including diminishing cognitive abilities and reduced school performance. Therefore, SFP enhances school attendance by lowering the opportunity costs of attending school and providing additional motivation to engage in formal education which in turn leads to more time spent in school and more time spent towards learning (Buttenheim et al, 2011). Moreover, school feeding is a tool which effectively attracts millions of poor children worldwide to attend school in both developed and developing countries (WFP, 2004; UNESCO, 2010).

Over the years, Tanzania has expressed concern for the health and nutritional status for primary school children due to the fact that there is a direct relationship between hunger and pupils' schooling. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MOEVT) is working together with the United Nations World Food Programme (UN-WFP) to eradicate child hunger through Food for Education (FFE) programme, which aims at improving the quality of education which seems to be unsatisfactory. Monduli is among the districts where SFP is implemented. The district is mainly inhabited by pastoralist societies who have their unique ways of life according to their culture. Their lives are mainly characterized by uncertain mobility from one place to another in search of greener pastures for their animals. These family movements force children to drop out of school. That is why the government involved the district authority in SFPs implementation so as to minimize the problem. Despite these government efforts, there are still problems of truancy and low primary school enrolment among the school-aged children. This study therefore sought to examine the contribution of SFPs in enhancing pupils' schooling in Monduli district in Arusha region, Tanzania.

2.1 The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the contribution of SFP in enhancing pupils' schooling in Monduli district. Consistent with this objective, specifically the study dealt with; how has SFP increased pupils' enrolment and how has SFP enhanced retention rate of pupils.

3. Literature review

3.1 History of School Feeding Programme (SFP) in Tanzania

A school feeding programme is a specific school based health service which can be part of country's school health programme and often large amount of resources are invested on it (SABER Country Report, 2014). According to this report, SFPs are critical constituents of most education systems given that children's health and nutrition form part and parcel of their school attendance and ability to learn. SFPs have their origin in

the 1930s when milk schemes were introduced in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) with the explicit aim of improving the growth of children (Thomlinson, 2007). According to Thomlinson, in the UK, a programme that subsidized milk for school children was initiated in 1934 and milk was provided free from 1944 onwards. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, this benefit was withdrawn from all except for those children considered to be particularly needy. SFPs were soon introduced in South Africa which started a programme to supply free milk to white and colored schools in the early 1940s (Thomlinson, 2007). Since then, SFPs have broadened to include the provision of fortified biscuits, nutrient supplementation or full meals. In Tanzania, SFPs were established in the year 1956. Available information shows that during the late 1970s most of these activities had been abandoned. In the years 1981/82 Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre (TFNC) established community supportive project on SFPs which were launched in Dodoma and Singida regions respectively. Currently the SFPs are active in several regions in Tanzania (URT, 2013). According to the URT, WFP's assistance to school feeding started with the approval of a 2 years' pilot project known as "Support to Primary Education in Drought-Prone and Pastoral Areas" in June, 1999, which targeted the drought prone areas of Dodoma, Singida and Arusha regions that are also characterized by low enrolment and low attendance rates. The project implementation commenced in January 2000 and by the end of 2001 when it was due to terminate, the project was expected to have benefited 150,000 school children. The objectives of the programme were to increase enrolment and attendance in primary schools, reducing dropout, improving learning capacity of students at assisted schools by alleviating short- term hunger and enable boarding schools that experience food shortages to function at full capacity throughout the whole year (URT 2013). According to WFP (2004), day to day operations in accordance with SFPs are delegated to school committees comprising mainly of teachers and parents. The committees are responsible for the construction of kitchens and stores, soliciting funds for hiring cooks and guards as well as the collection of firewood and water in areas where access is limited. School committees have joint responsibility with the head teachers for managing and reporting on the utilization of goods received. The head teachers are charged with the roles of establishing dialogue with parents and local communities so as to determine the means of managing the feeding activities. In strengthening the capacity of the district authorities and the school committees to effectively carry out their different mandates, the SFP is left under the school committee, teachers and supervisors from the WFP.

3.2 Importance of SFPs in pupils' schooling

SFPs have been seen as an appropriate measure to achieve the first millennium development goal: "*to eradicate poverty and hunger all over the world*". Many countries worldwide have established SFPs in order to align with this objective. Lawson (2012) identified two types of SFPs as onsite school feeding and take home rations. According to him, on site school feeding involves a child that has attended school in that particular day while take home rations need a child who has attended school in specified number of days. The onsite SFP is the focus of the current study. Lawson (2012) further explains

that for SFPs to function properly, its efficiency is viewed in two aspects; the quantity and quality of food provided. According to him, quantity of food involves the amount of food that a child is given while quality encompasses nutritious values of the provided food. SFPs are among the interventions that can help to curb some of nutritious and health problems of most school-aged children as well as motivating parents to send their children to school and see that they attend regularly (Del Rosso, 1999). They also help to protect household's investment in education by reducing some costs of schooling from parents and ensure students regular attendance in schools (Paruzollo, 2009). SFPs have been successful in attracting and retaining more children at school; it has also greatly contributed to increasing the children's attention span and their learning potential (Lambers, 2008). In countries where school attendance is low, the assurance of at least one nutritious meal a day enhances enrolment and encourages regular attendance (WFP, 2010). Kisa (2014) reiterated that, SFPs have also a direct impact on gender equity and educational attainment which leads to development of the country and humans in general.

3.3 Relationship between SFPs and pupils' schooling

SFPs are mostly targeted to populations that are food insecure; reside in high concentration areas, low social economic status or those which face poor attendance and enrolment (Lawson, 2012). Espejo (2009) gave an example of rural schools (which are characterized by poor attendance and enrolment) that the introduction of SFPs led to higher attendance rates in those schools which engaged in SFPs than those schools which did not. Dheressa (2011) observes that SFPs have been found to improve class attendance because children are supposed to receive meals only when they attend school. Thus, this helps to retain pupils as it will be difficult for pupils to escape from school before the food is served.

Various studies on relationship between SFPs and pupils' retention have been conducted. A study by Alderman et al (2008) for instance, indicated three elements of nutrition which have an influence in class attendance. Particularly, these are; (i) SFPs meals that are provided help in alleviating short term hunger of school children during school hours; (ii) provide a child with meals when he/she would not have otherwise have had one and (iii) replacing meals that would have been received after school with one during school hours (Ahmed, 2004). These aspects of food provision permit a child to concentrate and learn more. Vermeersch and Kremers (2005) did a study on SFPs in developing countries and found out that there was an increase of 30% pupils' participation in schools after the inception of SFPs. Similarly, a study that was conducted in Honduras indicated that the programme has had significant impact on increasing school enrolment, keeping children in school longer and reducing drop-out rates (Lambers, 2008). Apart from SFPs' success in attracting and retaining more children at school, it has also greatly contributed to increasing the children's attention span and their learning potential. Respectively, between 2005 and 2007, the number of children enrolled in school feeding schools increased by 40 percent and attendance rate of those who are enrolled has also significantly increased by 97 percent. Thus, children,

who otherwise may have stayed at home to work, have been given the opportunity to learn (Lambers, 2008). Another study in Sao Tome and Principe, informed that majority of children are from poor households and must walk long distances to reach school, often on empty stomach. According to teachers' feedback, school meals significantly improved school attendance, increase enrolment and provide motivation for children to go to school and stay there. The drop-out rates have decreased while parents' willingness to send their kids to school has increased (Lambers, 2008). WFP (2009) conducted follow up studies in Ethiopia and found that the average number of children enrolled in schools increased by 7 percent from 2006-2007, the average attendance rates of WFP-assisted schools was 91.5 percent in 2007, which was above WFP's goal of 90 percent. The drop-out rate is lower in schools that have SFP than the average in schools nationwide. The average drop-out rate nationwide is 11.25 percent for girls and 12.26 percent for boys, as compared to the rates of 9 percent for girls and 11 percent for boys in WFP-assisted schools (WFP, 2009) Similarly, in Uganda, the evidence gathered from WFP monitoring suggests that SFPs are having a powerful impact in terms of improving general attendance rates. In evaluation of WFP's SFPs conducted in 2006, it was discovered that the introduction of the school meal had contributed towards an increase in the overall attendance rates in WFP-assisted schools from 83 percent in 2005 to 96 percent in 2006 (WFP, 2009).

3.4 Theoretical orientation

The current study is in line with Maslow's theory of motivation (1954) which identified patterns that make human motivation to move through. The patterns are physiological (basic needs such as food, clothes and shelter), safety (wellbeing and security), social (belongingness, love), self-esteem (respect and status) and self-actualization (intellectual needs, fulfilling potential and achieving targets). In this theory, Maslow suggests that the physiological needs must first be met before an individual aspires for other higher needs. In this case therefore, for human body to function properly, physical requirements such as food comes first. Consistent with this study therefore, pupils must be provided with enough food while at school so that learning can take place effectively as it has been observed that attendance and school performance are greatly influenced by SFP (Pediatre, 2001).

4. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design where the researcher used semi structured interviews and focus group discussion to collect data. The sample of the study included two Ward Education Officers (WEOs), two (2) head teachers, two (2) parents and ten (10) pupils from two (2) selected primary schools in Monduli district. The WEOs were included in the study by virtue of their offices as they are overseers in the SFPs. Schools we randomly selected while head teachers and pupils were purposely selected because the researcher believed that they would produce relevant information for the study. Head teachers were also selected by virtue of their positions that they

would provide useful information on the influence of SFP on pupils' educational progress. Parents were also included because they are responsible for sending their children to school. Interviews were conducted with WEOs, head teachers and parents while focus group discussion was conducted with pupils. Criterion for selecting parents was that he/she should have a child in schools with SFP. On the other hand, the researcher involved pupils from standard six and seven believing that they would have enough experience on SFPs.

5. Study findings

5.1 Contribution of SFPs in increasing pupils' enrolment in Monduli district

The first research question aimed at gathering views from WEOs, head teachers and parents on the contribution of SFPs in increasing pupils' enrolment and the trend of pupils' enrolment after the implementation of SFPs. From the interviews which were conducted with WEOs, head teachers and parents, it was revealed that SFPs have increased primary school enrolment to a great extent. From an interview, the head teacher of one primary school said:

"I really thank the government for this initiative. Prior to implementation of this programme, school enrolment was a mess. But now, the programme has really changed my school in terms of enrolment. There has been a rampant increase in pupils' enrolment since the introduction of SFP".

Another head teacher explained;

"You know most family situations in these places are poor in terms of economy thus even family caring in terms of basic needs is problematic. SFP has motivated more children to come to school. With the introduction of SFP more and more young children accompany their elder brothers and sisters to school because of the two meals offered in school".

In an interview with one WEO, he agreed that SFPs have really led to an increase in enrolment in primary schools in Monduli as he contends;

"We have observed a big difference in enrolment in most primary schools in which SFP is being implemented. The enrolment has increased from 65-70 percent before SFP was introduced to 80-85 after the implementation of SFP. We have also observed that those who ended up with few years of schooling are now very few. Most of them complete schooling."

He further added that:

"SFPs have encouraged parents to send their children to school compared with before the introduction of SFPs. Before SFP was introduced, nutritious status of children was

worse because pupils were not able to walk long distances to school. Even those who were able to reach school were not able to concentrate in class as they became tired and felt sleepy due to hunger. Before SFP was implemented in the district, you will find children fast asleep in class because they were so hungry and tired. Many of them have to walk up to 12 kilometres just to get to school on empty stomachs! Can you imagine?"

An additional question sought to explore on any available evidence to prove that SFP had been a success in increasing enrolment in primary schools within the area of study. Most teachers agreed that enrolment had increased since the introduction of SFP in their schools as the classes were flooded with large numbers of pupils than before. One head teacher explained;

"In my school, the number of pupils enrolled had increased from 96 pupils in 2004 which is equivalent to 73.8 percent, to 124 pupils in 2009 which is equivalent to 94.6 percent. For sure, I thank the government for such an initiative because many children are now being sent to school by their parents compared to previous years".

Similar response was given by one Ward Executive Officer (WEO) who also revealed that there was an increase in enrolment since SFPs were introduced in the district, as he stipulated;

"There are several indicators which prove that SFP has increased enrolment in primary schools. For example, classes are now flooded with large number of pupils as compared to previous years when SFP was not yet introduced. Enrolment in those schools where SFP is implemented rose to 85 percent as compared to 78 percent to those schools without SFP. You know, the presence of midday meal in primary school in this district is a motivation for pupils to come to school because pastoralists' societies have no timetable for midday meals".

However, some head teachers had different opinions on the issue of SFPs in minimizing absenteeism. According to them, though there was an increase in enrolment, to some extent absenteeism has not been minimized; as one head teacher stipulated;

"I agree that SFP has impacted positively on pupils' enrolment but it is not very true that truancy has been minimized because some pupils do not attend class hours but they appear during lunch hours and disappear after meals. It is difficult to deal with such a problem because most of these pupils disappear in the forests. For those who are sometimes caught they are punished for such behaviour and follow up is made afterwards to see if the pupil continues to attend classes".

Moreover, the researcher found out that most parents are more aware and are being sensitized enough to send their children to primary schools because they are fed in school in the morning and in the afternoon; hence there is no longer an excuse for not sending children to school. As such, parents became aware of the importance of SFPs as they as well help them in terms of budgeting the home meal, as one parent explained:

"I was always aggressive in sending my children to school as I did not see the importance of sending them to school instead of engaging them in agriculture so that we can produce enough food for the family. I thought that it was better for them to stay at home and help me with some house chores. But SFP has made me aware that if I send my children to school I will benefit by educating my them as well as help me in terms of a family budget, because the children are having food at school therefore there is no need of cooking in the afternoon".

5.2 SFPs contribution in enhancing students' retention and active participation

From a focus group discussion with pupils, findings revealed that school children generally benefited from school meals though they claimed that food rationing is not enough. Pupils mentioned that the menu is always the same which is not a good thing. Most children declared that they sometimes come to school without even having breakfast at home because of various reasons. Some said that it was due to lack of food at home which is caused by household food insecurity, while for some it was due to lack of time to eat as they are in a hurry to leave for school. This further emphasized the importance of adopting and implementing SFPs for children. The researcher discovered that SFPs had a great contribution in improving pupils' retention and active participation in the class. The pupils revealed that with the introduction of SFP in their schools, they were able to concentrate in their lessons as compared to the time when SFPs were not there. One pupil stated:

"I was always not listening to the teacher when she was teaching because I was always hungry. I hardly eat home in the morning. Because our home is too far, I cannot go back home in the afternoon. Even if I go there we normally do not eat in the afternoons. So it was hard for me to concentrate when the teacher was teaching, but now my concentration span has increased due to availability of food at our school".

Another pupil added:

"Earlier we used to learn up to 12:30 in the afternoon without even getting breakfast or lunch, and when we reach home there was no or little food to eat. So most of us opted for staying in the forests to search for wild fruits to eat. But after the introduction of SFP many pupils attend school because we are now sure that we will get something to eat. We normally get porridge in the morning and in the afternoon we get lunch".

Some responses revealed that SFPs had improved pupils' concentration span and performance as one pupil explained;

"I used to walk a very long distance from home to school on empty stomach and when I reach school I was always very tired and I could not concentrate when the teacher was teaching. With presence of food at school, the distance has somehow been reduced as when I reach school I have something to fill my stomach with hence entering in class with a bright mind. Thus SFP has made me able to concentrate in class".

Further, another pupil added;

"Walking long distance always made me feel tired and hungry, so I could not study very well and always had low marks for every subject. But after SFP has been introduced in my school I don't feel so hungry and tired anymore, now I feel encouraged to come to school, even if it's still a long way to walk"

Another pupil said that the programme had acted as a relief to most parents since most pupils who were absent from school because they were not given money to buy food could attend school regularly.

However, some pupils were not satisfied with the quantity of food given to them. They said that although the food is nutritious it was not enough, and therefore there was a need to increase the quantity of food given to them.

5.3 Discussion of study findings

As it has been observed from the findings that there has been a notable increase in students' enrolment due to inception of SFP within the district. This is also supported by Del Rosso (1999), Lambers (2008) and Dheressa (2011) who contend that the feeding programme is credited with helping to maintain high enrolment and attendance rates and encourage community participation in education. However, the researcher was of the opinion that though some of the responses indicated that the increase was mainly due to SFPs, to some extent it was also the contribution of Primary Education Development Program (PEDP) which was being implemented at the same time in which one of its objectives was to increase pupils' enrolment. Although the findings implied that SFPs had impacted positively in increasing enrolment of pupils, who at times of economic crisis are usually the first to be withdrawn from school in order to assist with sibling care and generate income, it was also found out that girls were most likely not to attend school particularly in the Maasai land, and the SFPs had helped and continues to help in merging the educational gap between boys and girls. It was also noted that whilst school meals were an incentive for school attendance, it should be born in mind that some of the difficulties that were encountered especially in rural areas were more infrastructural within the area of study. Porter and Blaufuss (2007) for example, have shown how bad roads, inadequate or expensive transport and the chores

that many children have to perform each day before they go to school, commonly prevented children from attending school particularly in rural areas.

Despite the fact that SFP had succeeded in increasing enrolment, findings of this study showed that the aspect of absenteeism has not been fully minimized. This implies that some strong measures need to be taken by the government or by the respective heads of school and the community at large, in order to alleviate the aforementioned shortcoming. On the drop-out cases, some respondents claimed there was still a belief that a Maasai girl should not necessarily be educated, insisting on early marriages to the girls hence most of them are dropping out of school and others do not complete the school cycle so that they get married. This had been supported by Moore (1994) who maintains that girls from poor families are more likely to miss out schools than boys. He added that poor families often expect girls to help in the household chores. SFPs helped girls to attend school and realize their full potential in the society at large. This implies that the Maasai need to be educated on seeing the value of education to girls, and therefore the need to send them to school and be willing to contribute to the programme. The researcher also discovered that to most pastoralist societies, school attendance had not been well maintained as they are always moving from one place to another in search for pasture. In that case, a Maasai woman is not willing to leave her small children behind while moving to another place. This in some way had led to persistence of poor attendance in class which also amounted to poor performance and drop - out in most primary schools within the district.

Generally, findings of the study indicated that with the implementation of SFPs, children do not eat lunch at home which saves parents' money and time; children get more nutritious food, become stronger, less sick and grow better. They have more energy to play after school. They are enthusiastic to go to school and they perform better in class. Findings also indicated a rise in both, pupils' enrolment and attendance in school, hence good performance due to SFP.

6. Conclusion and recommendation

Based on the study findings, it can be concluded that SFPs have proven a great success in increasing pupils' enrolment and ensuring their regular attendance. However, truancy of some pupils persisted as many of them were withdrawn from school to work particularly during the dry season. Enrolling children in schools appeared to some parents a kind of "robbery" of their labour force as children were needed for herding livestock and hunting. Although pupils' enrolment was increased, it was not a result of SFPs alone, but also a role played by PEDP.

However, the programme has had challenges during its implementation. The key challenges were such as lack of adequate infrastructure to implement the programme, non-delivery of the food and other related products, delays in the delivery of food and other related products, and some meals provided were regarded as not healthy and tasty.

In response to these study findings, the study recommends that the programme can make communities which had been self-sufficient dependent on international aid to be independent and cooperating in producing food for schools. School feeding should be the job of the government not humanitarian agencies. The work of aid organizations is supposedly temporally therefore the need to act on a different approach.

WFPs handed over SFPs to host governments, but for the disadvantaged governments, that is unlikely to happen any time soon. Therefore, there is a need to urge communities take more responsibility for the programme. There is also a need of recognizing the distinct nature of culture in recommending educational policies for school children. This could allow for the adaptation of the curriculum to the Maasai culture and occupational needs so that in any possible ways, classes are organized around their work rhythms.

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