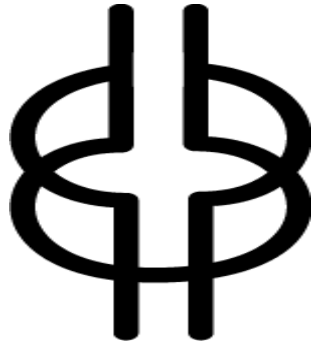


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Impact of School Feeding Programme on Access to Basic Education: The Case of South Tongu District of the Volta Region, Ghana

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Abstract

The study examined the influence of the school feeding programme on access to basic education in the South Tongu District in the Volta Region, Ghana. Mixed method research approach was employed to conduct the study. Stratified random sampling and purposive sampling procedures were used to select 213 respondents for the study. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect the data for the study. Data gathered through questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies while interview data analysis was done using the thematic approach. The results of the study showed that the school feeding programme has a significant influence on increased enrolment, attendance and retention of pupils in the South Tongu District. However, the implementation of the programme has put pressure on teaching and learning resources as well as increased teacher-pupil ratio. The study therefore, recommended that the government, implementation ministries and agencies should increase the existing human, physical and financial resources for the school feeding programme to be sustained.

Key words: School feeding programme, Enrolment, Attendance, Retention, and Education

Introduction

Education is appreciated as a source of economic growth and development owing to the enormous expansion in the number of

applications for its products and services worldwide (Ahmed & Arends-Kuenning, 2003). Countries belonging to the United Nations have given considerable attention to programmes in educational institutions that aimed at improving the health and nutritional status of learners especially at the basic school level. One of these programmes implemented is the in-school feeding programme. The school feeding concept originated from the activities of the European charitable donors in the 1700s. The concept was later adopted by the United States of America and the United Kingdom in the 1930s as a social safety net to improve the health outcomes of children (Gokah, 2008).

Successive governments in Ghana have instituted programmes and policies to make education, affordable and accessible to all children of school going age especially at the basic level and to improve educational outcomes. Examples included the free education in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana, the supply of free textbooks and stationery to basic school pupils and the capitation grant to reduce the financial burden on parents towards their children's education (Osei-Fosu, 2011). Having implemented these policies over the years, several questions still remain unresolved. The Government of Ghana introduced the National School Feeding Programme (NSFP) in the 2005/2006 academic year where each pupil under the scheme was covered by a feeding grant of GH¢ 0.30 a day in pursuance of the universal primary education by 2015 and the Millennium Development Goals on education (Nsawah, 2008). These interventions led to substantial progress in expanding enrolment and increasing years of schooling as well as participation in primary education.

Despite these favourable progress reports, access to quality basic education by children of school going age remains a hurdle. A 2002 study by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group reported that more than seventy percent (70%) of such children live in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Many children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, especially, those in rural areas are usually unable to progress beyond the first few years of schooling, a situation the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (2002) attributed to their disadvantaged economic circumstances.

Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) also observed that the quality of schooling in developing countries is often very low due to class repetition and high drop out at an early age, teacher absenteeism from

classrooms, and the fact that many children learn much less than the learning objectives set in the official curricula. In tandem with the foregoing arguments, UNESCO asserted that while many national governments recognise universal primary school attendance as contained in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), enrolment rates continue to be low in many developing countries (UNESCO, 2007). Research suggests that there is a correlation between nutritional and health status and school attendance and academic performance of children. Weak health and poor nutrition among school-age children reduce their cognitive development either through physiological changes or by reducing their ability to participate in learning experiences. Consequently, nutrition-based development programmes such as school feeding during their formative years is a critical contribution to fighting malnutrition while at the same time improving their ability to learn (Buhl, 2009).

In order to improve enrolment, the Government of Ghana has eliminated primary school fees and established programmes such as school feeding basically to provide solutions to some of these problems (Osei-Fosu, 2011). Statistics indicate that the average number of pupil enrolment in GSFP schools increased by 18% between 2005 and 2011. The programme has helped to improve attendance and reduced drop-out rates. However, the allocation of fifty (50) pesewas per child is inadequate as it has not kept pace with the economic situation in the country. This allocation, coupled with the need to pre-finance meals has become a problem to caterers, who often resort to credit facilities at high interest rates. This in many cases, has led to reduction in the quality and quantity of meals served to pupils (GSFP, 2014).

Influence of school feeding on attendance, enrolment and retention

Empirical evidence suggests that school feeding has a positive influence on school participation and attendance in areas where initial indicators of school participation and attendance are low. For example, Ahmed and Billah (1994) in a study found that school-based food distribution in Bangladesh increased enrolment by 20% as against 2% decline in non-participating schools. Similarly, the World Food Programme (1996) recorded 76% increase in enrolment while attendance increased by 95% after introducing a school feeding programme in Pakistan. To enjoy this benefit, girls were given one or

two tins of oil for not missing school for 20 days or more per month. In Burkina Faso, SFP schools reported 5% increase in girls' enrolment (Kazianga, Del Walque & Alderman 2009), while in Ghana, Osei-Fosu, (2011) reported that the school feeding programme had a high positive and significant effect on school enrolment, attendance and retention. However, Adelman, Gilligan and Lehrer (2007) in a study did not find any evidence that school feeding has increased primary school attendance rates for all school-age children in Bolivia.

Influence of school feeding on academic performance

Poor health and nutrition are known to affect children's ability to learn (Pollit 1990; Simeon & Grantham-McGregor 1989). It is therefore, important to include health and nutrition inputs as strategies to improve academic performance. Studies in Chile, the United Kingdom, and the United States between 1978 and 1995 revealed that brain functioning is sensitive to short-term variations in the availability of nutrient supplies (Pollit, 1995). Similarly, Moore and Kunze (1994) in a study reported that the success rate in national examinations were high in schools that had school feeding programmes than those schools without feeding programmes. They argued that providing children with daily breakfast or a meal at school could improve their scholastic achievement through several mechanisms such as increasing the time spent in school, improving certain cognitive functions and attention to tasks, and perhaps indirectly improving nutritional status. However, in contrast, Simeon and Grantham-McGregor (1989) in a study reported that in Jamaica learning outcomes deteriorated in less well-organized schools following the introduction of a school breakfast programme.

Influence of school feeding programme on teaching and learning

Availability and effective management of resources greatly influence effective teaching and learning. Research has proved that schools without adequate teachers and teaching and learning materials would not be effective (Mantey, 2012). While the school feeding programme has been hailed for its prowess to increase enrolment and retention, further measures to preserve the quality of education for beneficiaries have not been critically taken into consideration. Studies have shown that, there was a deficit of 20,000 teachers in Ghana which had resulted in almost 15,000 classrooms being empty, with most

classes merged for teachers to handle (Mantey, 2012). This led to the hiring of unqualified teachers to fill the gap. This can adversely affect the quality of basic school education and academic performance of children in the country. Uduku (2011) in a study submitted that there were inadequate teaching and learning materials in basic schools in Ghana and South Africa in the face of growing pupils' population. Similarly, Ampratwum et al, (2012) in their research on education resources management in public primary schools in Ghana reported that textbooks were insufficient and as a result pupils were compelled to share textbooks during lessons in the classroom and for homework. The literature implies that with the increase in school enrolment as a result of the implementation of the school feeding programme, there is the likelihood that pressure will be put on the limited education resources if supplies do not commensurate with the level of enrolment.

Perception of community members about the school feeding programme

Although several studies have assessed the quantitative outcomes of school feeding programmes, studies on the perceptions and expectations of a feeding programme using qualitative data are rare (Masset & Gelli, 2013). They argued that most of the studies were focused on nutritional outcomes rather than the perceptions of the people involved in the intervention. They noted that the reluctance of stakeholders to talk to investigators about problems that exist within new school feeding programmes could be blamed for the situation. Research has also shown that stakeholders hold varied perceptions about the school feeding programme. While some stakeholders held the programme in high esteem because their livelihoods depended on the success of the programme (Williams, McIntyre, Dayle & Raine, 2003), other community members expected more involvement in order to improve the outcomes of the school feeding intervention (Pappas et al., 2008). In another study, community members requested for the need to hire qualified cooks, increased use of locally produced foods and the attachment of school farms to existing school feeding programmes (Quaye, Essegbey, Frempong, & Ruivenkamp, 2010). Community participation is therefore critical to the sustainability of school feeding programmes. When stakeholders have a sense of ownership in a programme, they are more likely to advocate for the programme during

difficult times (Quaye et al., 2010). Fowler (2012) in a study found that stakeholders perceived the school feeding programme to have contributed to improved disposable income of beneficiaries, reduced truancy and improved behaviour both at school and at home.

Challenges of the school feeding programme

Empirical evidence suggests that school feeding programmes in various parts of the world have faced numerous challenges, in spite of its growing benefits. The school feeding programme has been cited to increase the cost of schooling by requiring that beneficiary communities provide fuel for cooking as well as other items such as vegetables (Masset & Gelli, 2013). According to Tomlinson (2007), in South Africa, the school feeding programme was criticised for its poor management, poor coverage, inconsistencies and high-cost. Tomlinson further argued that an increase in enrolment meant that teacher-pupil ratio would subsequently increase, thereby putting pressure on teachers as well as learning materials.

From the foregoing review, it has been observed that since the implementation of the Ghana school feeding programme in 2005, beneficiary communities have raised various concerns about the inefficiencies in its implementation as a social intervention programme. It has also been observed from the literature that, although, previous researchers have assessed the impact of the school feeding programme, the majority of studies by researchers such as (Osei-Fosu, 2011; Mantey, 2012; Polit, 1995) have employed only quantitative method and relied extensively on secondary sources of data. However, it appears limited studies have been done on the impact of the school feeding programme within the Ghanaian context by using both quantitative and qualitative research design. Also, it appears that research so far has not been fully devoted to explore the influence of the school feeding programme on enrolment, attendance and retention of pupils in the South Tongu District of the Volta Region in Ghana. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How has the school feeding programme affected primary school enrolment, attendance and retention in the South Tongu District?
2. How has the school feeding programme affected pupils' academic performance?

3. How do communities in the South Tongu District perceive the school feeding programme?
4. What factors impede the implementation of the school feeding programme in the South Tongu District?

Methodology

Research Design and Sample

Mixed method research approach was adopted for the study. The study also adopted the cross sectional and descriptive study designs. In mixed method approach, the researchers employed quantitative methods to assess magnitude and frequency of constructs and qualitative methods to explore meaning and understanding of constructs (Creswel, 2014). The rationale for using the mixed method research approach for the study was to obtain a variety of information in order to achieve a higher degree of validity and reliability of data and overcome the deficiencies of a single method studies. The mixed method approach, was therefore, applied in this study by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from the selected sample through questionnaires and interviews on the influence of school feeding programme on access, enrolment and retention of pupils and analysing the responses. The study was also cross sectional and descriptive because data were gathered at a particular point in time from teachers, headteachers, pupils and School Management Committee members. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), descriptive and cross-sectional studies gather data at a particular point in time when there is an intention of describing the nature of existing conditions.

The target population of the study consisted of schools and communities in the South Tongu District in the Volta Region of Ghana where the GSFP is being implemented. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used to draw the sample for the study. On the probability side, stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques were adopted while purposive sampling was used for the non-probability technique. Stratified random sampling was used to select 15 schools out of 48 schools under the school feeding programme in the district. The schools were grouped into 5 layers based on circuits and simple random sampling was used to select 3 schools from each layer. Purposive sampling technique which is normally employed when dealing with a sample that has persons with special

knowledge or characteristics (Creswell, 2014) was used to select 60 pupils out of which 18 were in primary four; 21 were in primary five and 21 were in primary six for the focused group discussion. The use of primary 4, 5 and 6 pupils was based on the reason that these pupils were in the upper primary category and they were matured and have spent three or more academic years in the school and were therefore well informed on issues of school feeding programme. Again, (four) 4 School Management Committee (SMC) members were selected by the use of purposive sampling procedure because these people were Unit Committee members and they were directly incharge of community development. They were also chosen based on their leadership role in the implementation of the SFP and were believed to be better informed about issues regarding school feeding programme in their communities. In all, the unit of analysis was made of 60 pupils, 149 teachers and 4 SMC members. Therefore, the total sample for the study was 213.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires and interviews were used to solicit information from the participants. Semi-structured questionnaire which involved both closed-ended and open-ended questions were used to solicit information from teachers and headteachers of the sampled schools. The closed-ended items took the form of a four-point Likert scale with such responses as strongly agree to strongly disagree. The open-ended items provided opportunities for respondents to express other views that were not captured in the structured items. The main issues that were covered in the questionnaire were influence of SFP on enrolment, attendance and retention of pupils; influence of SFP on pupils academic performance and challenges in the implementation of SFP. Also, semi-structured interview guides were prepared and used to collect data from School Management Committee members and pupils. This method enabled the researchers to probe further where necessary. The interview questions were prepared based on the same themes as the questionnaire.

In establishing face validity, the questionnaires were first given out to five colleague senior lecturers at the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana for their assessment and comments on the items. Their inputs in terms of comments helped to improve the quality of the items. The questionnaires were pre-tested in

the Central Tongu district because of its proximity to the South Tongu district and also because it was not part of the study area. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to establish the internal consistency of the items and this yielded high reliability of .87 which is an indication of high quality items (Field, 2005). Also, when the semi-structured interviews schedules were administered in the interview sessions, it was realised that interviewees provided similar responses, which implied that the questions were good.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the South Tongu District Education Directorate as well as the heads of the basic schools sampled for the study. The researchers arranged a session for all the participants selected for the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants. The data collection was done by the researchers with the help of four field assistants who were trained on the procedures involved in the administration and collection of questionnaires as well as how to conduct interviews. The questionnaires were first administered to the teachers and headteachers of the sampled schools. This was followed by one-on-one interviews of School Management Committee members while for pupils, focus group discussions were conducted due to their large number.

Ethical Considerations

With regard to ethical measures, the researchers obtained a written permission from the South Tongu District Education Directorate. Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The participants were informed and asked to sign a consent form. Participation in the study was voluntary and confidentiality was maintained during data collection. Names of individuals were not used and numbers were assigned to participants.

Data Analysis

The retrieved questionnaires were coded and data cleaning was conducted to examine the questionnaires for duplications and missing values. Data from closed-ended items in the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 19.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics in the form of percentages and frequencies were determined and presented in tables.

On the other hand, the thematic data analysis approach was employed to analyse the data gathered from open-ended items in the questionnaires as well as the qualitative data gathered through interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), in using the thematic data analysis strategy, the tool for analysis is for researchers to identify, organize, describe and report on themes within the data set. In using the thematic approach, we first transcribed and grouped all the interviews into the various themes formulated based on the research questions to help in creating familiarity of the data. Responses to the items on each research question were grouped and paraphrased looking for patterns and relationships. In some instances, the verbatim comments of participants were reported to explain general observations about the influence of school feeding programme on access to education in the South Tongu district.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are presented and discussed in line with the research questions.

Research Question 1: How has the school feeding programme affected primary school enrolment, attendance and retention of pupils in the South Tongu District?

Three items were used to solicit the views of respondents on whether enrolment and retention of pupils in the South Tongu District had increased, static or decreased. The results are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Effects of the SFP on Enrolment and Retention of Pupils

Statement	Increased	Static	Decreased
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
How would you describe the enrolment of pupils since the SFP started in your school?	133 (89.3)	12 (8.0)	4 (2.7)
How would you describe the attendance of pupils since the SFP started?	136 (91.3)	13 (8.7)	0(0)
How would you describe the SFP influence on pupils staying in school throughout the academic year?	113 (75.8)	27 (18.1)	9 (6.1)

(N = 149)

From Table 1, 89.3% of the respondents who were teachers and headteachers attributed increased enrolment to the introduction of the SFP, with 8.0% indicating static enrolment. This implies that majority of the respondents attributed the increased in enrolment to the introduction of SFP. Respondents gave varied reasons such as affordable education, parental responsibility and community appreciation of education among others as being the reasons for the increased in enrolment. With regard to attendance, 91.3% of the respondents indicated that attendance of pupils has increased since the SFP started in the South Tongu district. The findings of the current study that the school feeding programme has contributed to increase in school enrolment and attendance are in consonance with earlier studies by Ahmed and Billah (1994), Adelman et al., (2008) and Kazianga et al., (2009) who respectively concluded that there existed a nexus between school feeding programme and increased enrolment. Specifically, Adelman et al., (2008) reported that there is a strong association between participation in a school meal programme and school attendance. Meanwhile, Ahmed and Billah (1994) concluded that school-based food distribution in Bangladesh increased enrolment by 20% as against 2% decline in non-participating schools. According to Kazianga et. el, (2009), school feeding programme had a strong positive and significant influence on school enrolment, attendance and retention. The result of the current study gives the impression that serving food or meal in schools especially in rural areas will increase school attendance and retention of pupils.

The study further used six items measured on a 4-point Likert scale to elicit the views of respondents on the influence of school feeding programme on increased enrolment, attendance and retention of pupils. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: SFP Increased Enrolment, Attendance and Retention of Pupils

Statement	Strongly Agree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Strongly Disagree F (%)
The enrolment of pupils increased with the introduction of the SFP	64 (42.9)	79 (53.0)	5 (3.4)	1 (0.7)
The attendance of pupils has increased due to the SFP.	64 (43.0)	77 (51.7)	7 (4.7)	1 (0.7)
Nutritious food served will entice more pupils to attend school.	63 (42.3)	73 (49.0)	9 (6.0)	4 (2.7)
SFP does not influence pupils' retention in school throughout the academic year.	11 (7.4)	44 (29.5)	72 (48.3)	22 (14.8)
Pupils are likely to stay in school since they eat in school together.	51 (34.2)	85 (57.1)	13 (8.7)	0 (0)
Highly nutritious food served will encourage pupils to stay in school.	36 (24.1)	99 (66.4)	12 (8.1)	2 (1.3)

(N = 149)

As shown in Table 2, 53% of the respondents agreed and 42.9% strongly agreed with the statement that enrolment of pupils increased following the introduction of the school feeding programme. On the issue of the influence of school feeding programme on increase in enrolment, the result of the current study gives credence to the study by Afridi (2007) which established significant influence of school feeding programme on school enrolment and attendance in India. The implication of the present study is that majority of the respondents in the study area believed that the SFP has contributed to school enrolment and attendance, hence, there is the need to sustain the programme which is consistent with the perspectives of Osei-Fosu (2011) who reported that school feeding programme has a strong positive and significant effect on school enrolment, attendance and retention of pupils. As Table 2 shows, 49% of the respondents strongly

agreed and 42% agreed with the statement that nutritious meals served helped to entice more pupils to attend school regularly while only 6% disagreed with the statement. According to Arsenault et al., (2009), the number of days absent from school was 23% lower in public primary schools in Bogotá, Colombia that received nutritious mid-morning snack than those that did not receive mid-morning snack which also underscores the results revealed in a study conducted in 32 African countries where the World Food Programme operated school feeding programmes in primary schools. The results indicated that in the first year of the intervention, average enrolment and attendance increased by twenty-two 22% for boys and twenty-eight 28% for girls (Gelli, Meir & Espejo (2007). With regard to pupils staying in school, Table 2 shows that 57.1% of the respondents agreed and 34.2% strongly agreed while only 8.7% disagreed with the statement that pupils are likely to stay in school since they eat together. The implication is that, majority of the respondents in the study area were of the view that pupils are likely to stay in school as a result of the introduction of the school feeding programme.

Research Question 2: How has the school feeding programme affected pupils academic performance in the South Tongu District?

Nine items measured on a 4-point Likert scale were used to elicit information from respondents. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Impact of SFP on Pupils Academic Performance

Statement	Strongly Agree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Strongly Disagree F (%)
The performance of pupils increased with the starting of the SFP.	25 (16.8)	75 (50.3)	43 (28.9)	6 (4.0)
The concentration of pupils in class has increased with the introduction of the SFP.	24 (16.1)	82 (55)	37 (24.8)	6 (4.1)
The performance of pupils in schools with SFP is better than the performance of pupils in schools without SFP	40 (26.8)	85 (57.0)	18 (12.0)	6 (4.2)
The SFP has created equal opportunities in schools	17 (11.4)	85 (57.0)	43 (28.9)	4 (2.7)

Pupils' academic performance is improving due to the SFP.	18 (12.1)	86 (57.7)	41 (27.5)	4 (2.7)
School feeding has influence pupils' studies in school	19 (12.7)	98 (65.8)	27 (18.1)	5 (3.4)
Pupils would concentrate on their books better due to the SFP	25 (16.8)	101 (67.8)	20 (13.4)	3 (2.0)
Pupils' participation in school activities has improved with SFP.	20 (13.4)	86 (57.7)	35 (23.5)	8 (5.4)

(N = 149)

As shown in Table 3, 50.3% of the respondents agreed and 16.8% strongly agreed with the statement that the academic performance of pupils increased with the starting of the SFP. However, 24.8% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. It can also be seen from Table 3 that 55% of the respondents were of the view that pupils' concentration in class had increased following the introduction of the SFP. In support of these findings, one participant who was a class five pupil asserted that:

“When I eat, I become alert and able to concentrate. And when I eat, I become happy and able to focus on classroom activities”.

Another participant who was a class four pupil stated that:

“When I eat, I am able to concentrate on learning and perform better but my mind stays on the food when I am hungry and I lose concentration”.

A School Management Committee member during the interview had this to say:

“The pupils can focus and concentrate in class when they have eaten. When children are hungry, they have divided attention in the classroom. A well-fed child is well focused”.

The World Food Programme and its development partners have been promoting school feeding in its different modalities as effective interventions that alleviate hunger and improve cognitive and educational abilities and learning outcomes of children. According to Jomma, MacDonnell and Probat (2011), school feeding had a significant impact on increased educational outcomes of school

children in Bangladesh. Feeding programmes have been shown to improve cognitive, health and well-being of students because certain minerals and vitamins are necessary for brain development and function (Masset & Gelli, 2013).

The outcome of this study corroborates the findings reported by Pollit (1995) and other studies conducted in Chile, the United Kingdom, and the United States that brain functioning is sensitive to short-term variations in the availability of nutrient supplies, particularly for undernourished children for whom omitting breakfast alters brain function and limits their speed and accuracy of information retrieval in working memory. This is also underscored by Moore and Kunze (1994) who found in a study that the success rate on a national examination for sixth-grade pupils in Burkina Faso was higher for schools that had school feeding programmes than those schools without feeding programmes. A class six pupil who was a participant in the focus group discussions reported as follows:

“These days, I perform better because I no longer think of food in class. I’m able to concentrate”.

It has been accentuated that nutritional and health status are potential influences on a child’s learning and how well a child performs in school and that weak health and poor nutrition among school-age children diminish their cognitive development either through physiological changes or by reducing their ability to participate in learning experiences (Pollitt, 1995). Temporary hunger, particularly common in children who are not fed before going to school can have adverse effect on learning. Hungry children have more difficulty concentrating and performing complex tasks in the classroom (Buhl, 2009). According to Gunderson (2012), school feeding programmes are now being implemented around the world to improve educational outcomes by reducing short-term hunger during the school day. The outcome of this study gives the impression that children who are well-nourished will exhibit better classroom behaviour, specifically, better concentration and participation in classroom activities which will in turn result in better learning outcomes (Kazianga, et al., (2009). If children in the community are able to learn, they can improve their literacy level in the South Tongu district and reduce the cycle of

poverty and this will uplift the community thereby making it a better place to live.

Research Question 3: How do communities in the South Tongu District perceive the school feeding programme?

This research question sought to explore the views of community members about the school feeding programme in the South Tongu district. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using School Management Committee members. The results from the interviews revealed that the school feeding programme is a good social intervention programme and it is beneficial to the communities. This is because the implementation of the programme has helped to alleviate poverty in the communities by reducing the heavy burden of responsibility on parents towards their wards. This was evident when a School Management Committee member during the interview indicated that:

“The programme has reduced poverty and increased enrolment because a lot of pupils now come to school, so, at least, it’s helping to reduce the burden on parents”.

Another School Management Committee member had this to say:

“Even parents who were previously not able to give their wards money for feeding in school now send their wards to school because they know the children will be fed in school”.

This is in line with the works of Fowler (2012) that stakeholders were of the view that the school feeding programme made it possible for families to have more disposable income. The outcome of the current study is also in line with the findings reported by Anderson, Moreen, Petersen and Tobey (2005) who reported that due to the positive perceptions of the school feeding programme and the benefits to the various communities, the communities were much involved by building kitchens and store rooms, volunteering, providing security, monitoring and oversight responsibilities.

Research Question 4: What factors impede the implementation of the school feeding programme in the South Tongu District?

Research participants were asked to share their views on the challenges of the SFP in the study area. The study participants identified factors such as untrained cooking staff, delay in serving meals to pupils, lack of portable water for cooking in some of the villages, lack of dining areas as well as lack of hygienic place for cooking. A class five pupil reported as follows:

“We do not have a good place to eat. When we finish eating, there is no water to wash our hands”.

The implication of this finding is that the lack of permanent dwelling place means that the pupils probably learn and handle food in dusty and un-hygienic environment. The results of the study also revealed that the SFP was not regular in the study area. Participants identified lack of funds had led to shortage of food items, irregularity in the preparation of food, inadequate cooking facilities, sub-standard quality of the meals and inadequate cooking staff in the study area. The participants believed that inadequate funding and delay in releasing funds have consequently resulted in delay in paying the caterers. A school Management Committee member had this to say:

“When enrolment increased, it takes time for the change in enrolment to be detected and this affects the programme because funding for the increased enrolment does not come as soon as enrolment increased”.

Another participant said:

“Funds are not available so the number of cooks to employ that can serve the pupils quickly has been limited. This affects the contact hours for teaching and learning”.

Another participant reported as follows:

“The school feeding programme in the district is actually on-and-off. For instance, this week the pupils have not been served with food”

According to Kedze, (2013), salaries of caterers contracted for the Ghana School Feeding Programme had been in arrears over a six-month period which is also consistent with what was reported by Bonney (2013) that about five thousand caterers under the Ghana School Feeding Programme had not been paid for the last six months.

It should be noted that the lack of funds compelled some caterers to feed the beneficiaries twice a week instead of five times in a week (GSFP, 2011).

The study participants have also identified issues of mismanagement and corruption in the form of stealing of food stuff as well as improper selection of caterers as some of the factors that impede the implementation of the SFP in the study area. A School Management Committee member had this to say:

“Mismanagement including corrupting and stealing of food stuffs are slowly binging the school feeding programme to its knees in the South Tongu district”.

According to Tomlinson (2007), although the school feeding programme contributed to an increase in enrolment and attendance, enhanced participation of beneficiaries in the classroom and generated jobs in the communities, it has come under criticism for its poor management, poor coverage, inconsistencies and high-cost.

Finally, participants have identified lack of monitoring and supervision of the SFP as one of the factors that impede its implementation in the study area. According to WFP (2010) and GSFP (2011), there had been serious concerns about lack of monitoring and supervision of the SFP. A participant who is a School Management Committee member indicated that:

“Local managers of the SFP who perform monitoring and evaluation practices to support the execution of the programme are over-burdened with other responsibilities. Therefore, there is no proper monitoring of the SFP in the district”.

Gokah (2008) has underscored the lack of basic logistics to effectively monitor the operation of the school feeding programme in Ghana. It should be noted that regional coordinators and monitors need basic logistics such as means of transport as well as office equipment to enable them report effectively on their activities, yet the inadequacy of these logistics make their work difficult (GSFP, 2014). This corroborates what was reported by Bonney (2013) that in some jurisdiction, only the District Chief Executive and a couple of persons were actually working during the review process of the Ghana School Feeding Programme.

Conclusions and Recommendations

School feeding programme is an intervention used by policy makers and non-governmental organizations as social safety net in developing nations to aid several policy areas such as school attendance, retention of pupils as well as poverty reduction. School feeding is believed to be effective because of its ability to target a specific population such as vulnerable-school-aged children. This study examined the influence of school feeding programme on access to basic education in the South Tongu District in the Volta Region. Based on the findings of this study, one might be tempted to state unequivocally that school feeding has a direct critical influence on increased enrolment, attendance and retention of pupils in the study area. A likely reason for this is that throughout the length and breadth of the globe and particularly in developing countries where school feeding programmes are being implemented, school enrolment, attendance and retention rates are particularly high among pupils (Jomaa, et al., 2011). The study has also shown that the challenges facing the implementation of the SFP in the South Tongu District are diverse. The sustainability of the SFP as currently implemented seems uncertain largely due to inadequate financial allocation.

On the basis of the findings of this study, it can be concluded that although, the school feeding programme is still facing some challenges due to its complex nature that requires financial and institutional capacity to run, it is still an important programme to improve access and participation in basic education as well as pupils' learning in the South Tongu District. Therefore, the resources, the technical know-how, the systems, the number of staff as well as the infrastructure required should not be underestimated by ministries involved and stakeholders in its implementation. The study therefore recommends that the government, the implementation ministries and agencies should increase the existing human, physical and financial resources. Adequate sensitization and involvement of all stakeholders at all levels is important for ownership of the SFP in the study area. This is because school feeding models embrace multi-sectoral coordination since SFP starts from production to utilization, hence the need to involve as many stakeholders as possible.

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