



Effects of School Feeding Programme on the Academic Performance of Learners: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Kapiri Mposhi District of Central Province, Zambia

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ABSTRACT:

School feeding programme refers to targeted social safety nets that provide both educational and health benefits to the most vulnerable children, thereby increasing enrollment rates, reducing absenteeism and improving food security at the household level. Hence, this study assessed the effects of the School Feeding Programme on the academic performance of learners in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mposhi district of Central Province in Zambia. The study employed both the qualitative and quantitative methods and a descriptive survey design that sampled officials from World Food Program, the District Planning Officer, Head teachers, Teachers and Learners. The study used interview guides, questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as primary research instruments. Frequency tables, graphs, figures and pie-charts were used to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data. Data was then analyzed by the use of softwares; Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 16). The findings indicated that the SFP positively influenced learners' cognitive abilities, attention span, and overall well-being, leading to improved academic achievements. The program's consistency and integration with school curricula further contributed to reduced absenteeism and enhanced classroom engagement. Stakeholders are recommended to strengthen collaboration between the Ministry of Education and local authorities, implement nutritional education initiatives, engage communities, enhance monitoring practices, and provide adequate funding for sustained success. These recommendations aim to optimize the SFP's effect on learners' academic performance and foster a conducive learning environment in Kapiri Mposhi district of Central Province, Zambia.

Keywords: *Academic Performance, Effect, Feeding, Hunger, Learners, School Feeding Programme.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Many children in less developed countries suffer from poor health and nutrition. The United Nations estimates that one third of preschool age children in less developed countries – a total of 180 million children under age 5–experience growth stunting relative to international norms, while hundreds of millions more suffer from tropical diseases, including malaria and intestinal parasites (WFP, 2016). To the extent that poor health and nutrition among children has a negative impact on their education, programs or policies that increase children's health status will also improve their education outcomes. Proper Nutrition is essential for growth, development, health and one's well-being. Good Nutrition facilitates the development of a child in all dimensions and has considerable long-lasting effects on the child's life. Recent studies in the field of nutrition reaffirm the importance of nutrition as a prerequisite for good cognitive development in children (Sibanda, 2016). Good nutrition is also essential for country's general development as children's, good health eventually translates into good performance thus resulting into brilliant leaders who will be productive economically, socially and in all other areas as "Health is wealth". Globally, Malnutrition affects one in three people and each of its major forms out-do most other diseases. There is increasing proof, with resulting international concern that the high level of nutritional deprivation combined with heavy burden of diseases in pre-school children have negative consequences for their long term overall development.

School Feeding is the distribution of food to Basic day-school children. "It is an intervention that can prevent short-term hunger and improve school enrolment, attendance and performance. Many Zambian children go without a meal, they walk long distances to go to school and when they arrive, they are hungry and restless Sitali, 2018). Hence, they find it difficult to concentrate on learning. Many other children cannot enroll at all, forced to work, look for food or help with family chores. School becomes less of a priority. Even when they do enroll, many are entirely absent; reducing their learning capacity and academic performance. Phiri & Chishala (2017) says that the SFP was conceptualized to provide pupils in public Secondary schools, particularly those in the poorest areas of the country, with meals every day as it was thought that such an intervention would address the nutrition and health problems of school age children. Experience showed that a properly designed and effectively implemented the SFP alleviated short term hunger in malnourished or otherwise well-nourished school children, increased school enrolment, improved attendance as well as concentration of students, addressed micronutrients deficiencies and improved learning (Del Rosso, 2019).

WFP (2015) states that school feeding is a tool which today commendably enables hundreds of millions of poor children worldwide to attend school both in developed and developing countries alike. The programme has positive direct and indirect benefits relating to a number of other development goals, namely gender equity, poverty and hunger reduction, partnerships and cooperation, HIV/AIDS care and prevention, and improvements in health and other social indicators. In 2017, an evaluation was undertaken. The WFP and Zambian Government merged in the provision of food through the SFP. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) advocated for the buying of food within Zambia and not from other countries. So, the issue of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) emerged in 2018. The Home Grown School Feeding Programme was taken up by the Zambian Government and the WFP began to provide technical assistance.

Since 2017, the Government of the Republic of Zambia has been in the driving seat in the implementation of the SFP. The programme's food basket comprises maize, beans and vegetable oil. The maize was provided by the Government, through the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) while beans and vegetable oil was provided by WFP. In Central Province, the Ministry of General Education, in conjunction with the WFP, adopted the SFP for the first time in 2018 and catered for all public schools in Kabwe and Mkushi districts. In 2013 the Government and WFP had to cut food supplies from the two districts since school enrollment, attendance and academic performance improved. Realizing that Kapiri Mposhi district had low school enrolment, attendance, high dropout and low academic performance in public examinations as compared to other districts in the province, the districts was placed on the SFP. Del Rosso (2019) posits that the SFP is one of the strategies of education development incorporated in the Government's Education Sector Development Programmes. The strategies are meant to address inequalities and expand access to educational opportunities of disadvantaged children, particularly orphans and vulnerable school learners. The Ministry of Education, through Health and Nutrition Project recommended some intervention in other hunger - prone areas, among which was Kapiri-Mposhi District. The programme started in 2016 with 15 schools and with 5, 378 pupils. A total of 26 000 school going children benefit from this programme. Through this programme, children who attend classes are provided with meals in order to encourage them to continue attending school and enhance their concentration and academic performance.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread implementation of the school feeding program in various educational settings, there is a lack of comprehensive research specifically in Kapiri Mposhi district that assesses whether the program has a discernible impact on learners' academic achievements. According to the data collected from the Kapiri Mposhi district education department, an analysis of the academic performance of students participating in the school feeding program compared to those who do not reveals significant differences in their performance metrics. The descriptive statistics show that students in the school feeding program have an average grade point average (GPA) of 2.5, while non-participating students have an average GPA of 3.2. Furthermore, the data indicates that only 40% of students in the program achieve passing grades, compared to 60% of non-participating students (Phiri and Chisala, 2017). Despite the SFP being in place, there seem to be quite a number of challenges that are faced. According to Sitali (2018), he narrates that there is lack of clean water provision, delay in ration delivery, poor- quality food, lack of necessary infrastructure for the programme and lack of training in sanitation and hygiene for cooks hence, making it difficult for most schools to effectively utilize this programme. Therefore, this research aimed to examine the effects of the school feeding programme on the academic performance of learners in the selected secondary schools in Kapiri Mposhi district.

1.3. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the school feeding programme on the academic performance of learners at the selected secondary schools in Kapiri Mposhi district of Central Province, Zambia.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify the effects of the school feeding programme on the academic performance of learners in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mposhi district.
- Evaluate how the school feeding programme impact on the academic performance of learners in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mposhi district.
- Establish the recommended ways of the School Feeding Programme in improving academic performance of learners in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mposhi district.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study anchored on Abraham Maslow's pyramid hierarchy of needs. A need is a physiological or psychological deficiency that a person feels the compulsion to satisfy. This need can create tensions that can influence a person's work attitudes and behaviors (Mullin, 2015). Maslow's hierarchical needs theory proposes that humans are motivated by multiple needs and these needs exist in five main levels which are as follows:

(i) **Physiological needs** - These include homeostasis (the body's automatic efforts to retain normal functioning), such as satisfaction of hunger and thirst, the need for oxygen and maintenance of temperature regulation.

(ii) **Safety needs** - These include safety and security, freedom from pain or threat of physical attack, protection from danger or deprivation, the need for predictability and orderliness, protection from elements of security, order, law, stability and freedom from fear.

(iii) **Love and belongingness needs** – This includes the need for friendship, intimacy, affection and love from work group, family, friends, and romantic relationships.

(iv) **Esteem needs** – These include the need for achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, self-respect, and respect from others.

(v) **Self-Actualization needs** – These include the need to realize personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, there are certain minimum requirements that are essential for human needs to facilitate standards of living. Abraham Maslow's motivation theory has made a major contribution to teaching and learning in schools. Rather than reduce behaviour to a response in the environment, Maslow adopts a holistic approach to education and learning.

In the context of the School Feeding Programme, Smithson (2022) & Johnson (2021) argued that providing regular meals to learners addresses the foundational physiological needs. By ensuring that students have access to nutritious meals, the program helps satisfy their basic hunger and nutritional requirements. When these physiological needs are met, learners are better positioned to focus on their academic pursuits and higher-level needs. The SFP has the potential to foster a conducive learning environment. Scholars argue that when students' physiological needs, such as hunger and nutrition, are met through the program, it can lead to improved well-being and reduced distractions related to hunger or malnutrition. By addressing these fundamental needs, the SFP can enhance students' overall physical and mental health, providing a solid foundation for academic success.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in its potential to have contributed valuable insights and suggestions for various stakeholders, including policymakers, educators and communities. This study aimed to provide empirical evidence on the effects of the school feeding programme on the academic performance of learners in selected secondary schools of Kapiri Mposhi district, with the goal of informing policy and program improvement. By assessing the impact of the program, it is hoped that the findings of this study would contribute to educational enhancement by guiding strategies to support learners' academic success. Additionally, the study's findings would foster community engagement and support for the program, raise awareness about the importance of nutrition in education and facilitate evidence-based decision-making in educational policies and practices. Furthermore, by addressing the knowledge gap specific to the district, the study might have had implications beyond the region and contributed to the existing literature on school feeding programs. Overall, the study had the potential to improve the effectiveness of the SFP, benefiting the academic performance and educational outcomes of learners in Kapiri Mposhi district of Zambia.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Design

The study adopted a mixed methods approach which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptive design was considered appropriate as it allowed for more flexible strategies of data collection in order to answer the research questions. The study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative aspects of research. It was aimed at collecting information from respondents on the effects of the school feeding programme on the academic performance of learners at the selected secondary schools in Kapiri Mposhi district of Central Province, Zambia.

2.2. Research Site

The research was conducted in Kapiri Mposhi district of Central Province in Zambia at some selected Secondary schools from which respondents were also sampled.

2.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised of officials from world food programme, the district planning officer, head teachers, teachers and learners at the selected schools. The target population was 3000. The sample size involved a total of 300 respondents which included two (2) officials from WFP, one (1) district Planning Officer and three (3) head teachers, one from each selected school. Fifteen (15) teachers, five from each selected school. Two hundred-seventy-nine (279) learners, ninety-three (93) from each selected school. The study engaged both purposive and simple random sampling on different participants from the selected secondary schools.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed qualitatively as the semi-structured interview schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the semi-structured interview schedules as well as focused group discussions. The data

gathered was analyzed according to the themes of the study and the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the questionnaires was analyzed manually by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 16) to come up with frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

2.5. Ethical Issues

Permission from Rockview University and the District Education Board for Kapiri Mposhi district was sought in carrying out this study. Interviews were not conducted on one-to-one basis; instead, participants were grouped and identified using their titles. An informed consent was sought before collecting information from the informants and guaranteed them with security of the information they provided. Furthermore, the main objective of gathering such information was made clear to the respondents. The researchers avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this research, the researchers were fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researchers for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1. Identify the Effects of SFP

The findings in table 1, chart 1 and figure 1 below indicated that the World Food Programme (WFP) officials believed that the SFP enhanced the academic performance of pupils. Out of the 2 WFP officials surveyed, all of them responded positively with a "Yes," indicating their belief that the SFP had a positive impact on learners' academic performance. None of the officials surveyed responded with a "No," suggesting unanimous agreement among the WFP officials regarding the positive influence of the SFP on pupils' educational achievements. These results suggested a strong level of confidence among the officials in the effectiveness of the program in contributing to improved academic outcomes for the students it served. Additionally, the Head Teachers, Teachers, the District Planning Officer and the learners gave different views pertaining to the SFP and several significant effects of the Programme on the academic performance of learners in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mponshi district were identified.

Table 1: Identify the Effects of SFP

Respondents	Effects	Percentage
Head teachers	High School Enrollment Levels	15%
Teachers	Good Class Attendance	30%
DPO	Quality Education	10%
Learners	Alleviating Hunger	45%
Total		100%

Figure 1: Identify the Effects of SFP

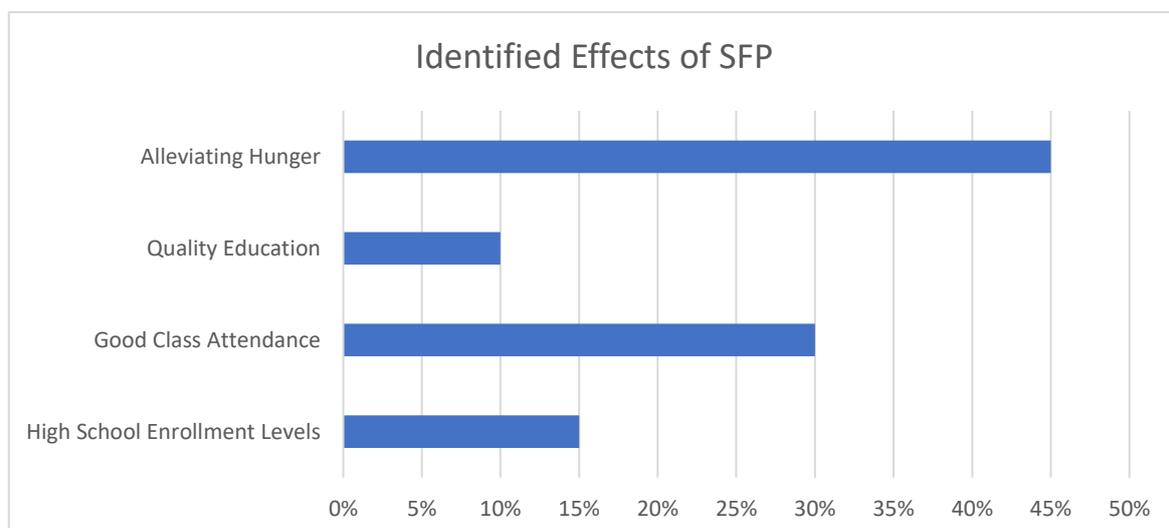
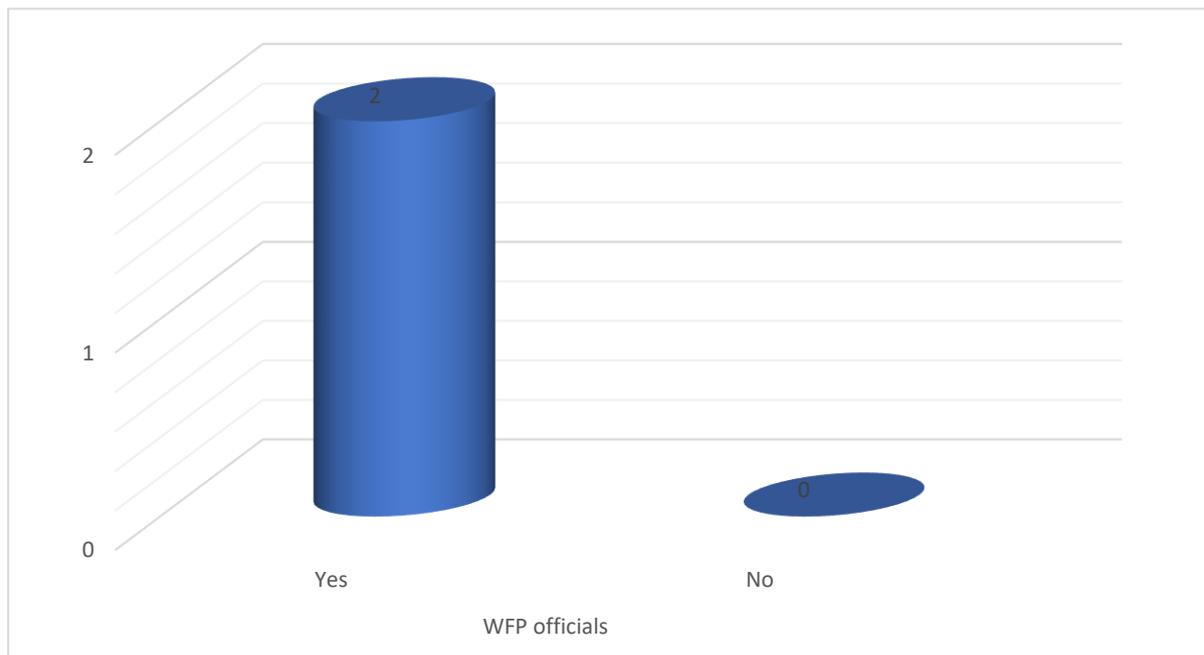


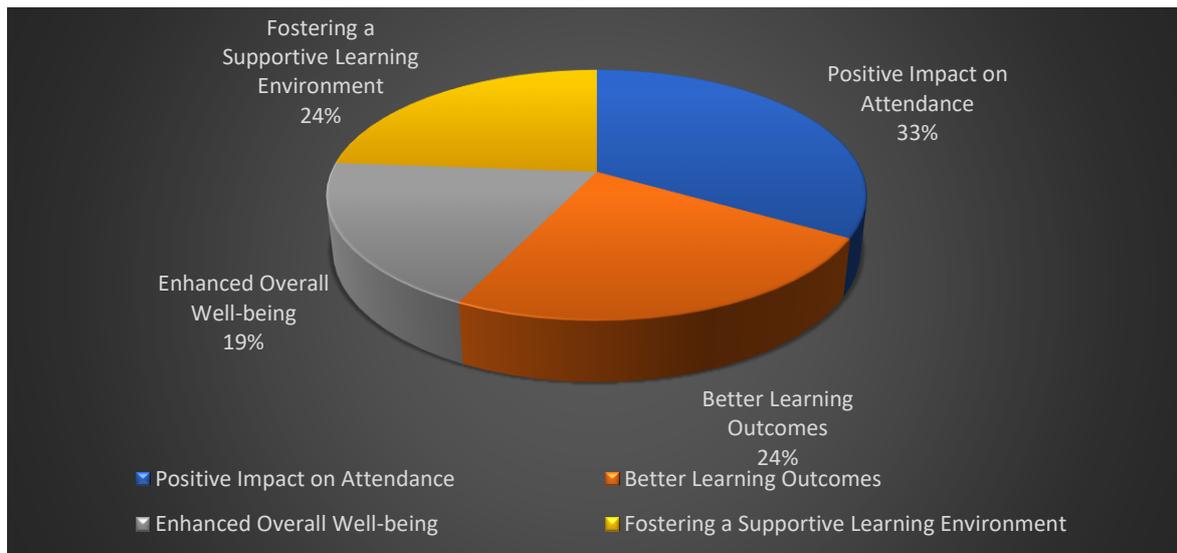
Figure 2: School Feeding Programme Enhances Academic Performance of Learners

According to the findings, the provision of nutritious meals through the program positively influenced students' cognitive abilities. Nutritious meals enriched with essential nutrients played a vital role in improving students' concentration, memory retention, and overall cognitive functioning. As a result, students were better equipped to engage in classroom activities, comprehend complex concepts, and perform well in their academic assessments. Regarding the provision of nutritious meals, previous research has highlighted the crucial role of adequate nutrition in supporting cognitive development and academic achievements (Adelman et al., 2016). Proper nutrition has been linked to improved attention, memory, and problem-solving abilities, all of which contribute to better academic performance. This study's findings reinforce the importance of nutritious meals in the School Feeding Programme, as they have shown a positive impact on learners' cognitive abilities, corroborating earlier research in this area.

The School Feeding Programme contributed to improved attendance rates among learners. Regular and consistent access to meals at school served as an incentive for learners to attend classes regularly. Reduced absenteeism ensured that learners had more learning opportunities and reduced gaps in their academic progress. The connection between school feeding and attendance rates has been widely explored in the literature. A study conducted by Agripina (2016) revealed that access to regular meals at school incentivizes students to attend classes more regularly, reducing absenteeism rates. Consistent attendance, in turn, allows students to fully engage in the learning process and perform better academically. This study's findings align with previous research by demonstrating that the School Feeding Programme positively influences attendance rates, corroborating the importance of this aspect in enhancing students' academic performance.

3.1.2. Effects of SFP on Academic Performance of Learners

The findings indicated in the figure below were based on a total of 21 respondents, representing a diverse group of educational stakeholders. Among the participants were 3 head teachers, 15 teachers, 2 World Food Programme (WFP) officials and the District Planning officer. 33% (7) of the respondents acknowledged a positive impact on attendance as a result of the School Feeding Programme. 24% (5) of the participants noted better learning outcomes associated with the program. Furthermore, 19% (4) of the respondents highlighted the program's contribution to enhancing the overall well-being of learners. Additionally, 24% (5) of the participants emphasized the program's role in fostering a supportive learning environment. Overall, the findings underscore the positive effects of the School Feeding Programme on various dimensions of learners' academic experiences. The program's impact on attendance, learning outcomes, well-being, and the learning environment suggests its potential to contribute to improved educational outcomes among learners.

Chart 1: Effects of SFP on Academic Performance of Learners

The study established that the program's impact extended beyond academic achievements and positively affected students' overall well-being. By addressing hunger and malnutrition, the School Feeding Programme enhanced students' physical health and emotional well-being. This, in turn, created a conducive learning environment and boosted students' motivation to excel academically. The positive impact of school feeding on students' overall well-being has been extensively discussed in previous studies. A study by Ahmed (2016) highlighted that proper nutrition not only supports physical health but also affects students' emotional well-being, leading to increased motivation and a conducive learning environment. The findings of this study resonate with earlier research, indicating that the School Feeding Programme contributes to students' overall well-being, thus reinforcing the broader significance of school feeding initiatives.

The findings indicated that the positive effects of the School Feeding Programme were more pronounced in schools that implemented the program with higher levels of adherence and regularity. Schools that ensured consistent meal provision and monitored the program's impact reported more substantial improvements in students' academic performance compared to those with inconsistent implementation. The findings highlight the significant and positive effects of the School Feeding Programme on the academic performance of learners in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mponshi district. These positive effects are in agreement with Chima (2020). The program's provision of nutritious meals improved cognitive abilities, boosted attendance rates, and positively impacted students' overall well-being. These findings underscore the importance of sustained and well-implemented School Feeding Programmes as a valuable investment in enhancing students' educational outcomes and overall development.

3.2. Evaluation of the SFP

The study evaluated the effect of the School Feeding Programme on the academic performance of learners in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mponshi district. The purpose was to assess and evaluate how the SFP affected the academic performance of learners in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mponshi district. It was aimed to understand the potential influence of the program on students' educational outcomes, including factors such as grades, learning outcomes, attendance, and overall academic achievements. By examining this impact, the study sought to gain insights into the effectiveness and significance of the SFP in contributing to improved academic performance among the learners in the specified schools. The findings are presented below.

Table 2: Perceptions of School Feeding Programme's Effect on Academic Performance

Response	Frequency	Percentage
The School Feeding Programme has significantly enhanced students' concentration, cognitive abilities, and overall academic performance in the classroom.	6	29%
I believe there is a positive correlation between school meals and attendance rates, motivating students to attend school regularly.	5	24%
I have observed that well-fed students engage in productive group study sessions after school hours, contributing to their academic progress.	3	14%
The School Feeding Programme has contributed to reducing absenteeism and improving students' ability to focus on their studies.	4	19%
I support the continuation of the School Feeding Programme due to its significant benefits for the community and students.	3	14%
Total	21	100%

The responses from Head teachers, teachers, World Food Programme (WFP) officials, and the District Planning officer show a positive consensus on the School Feeding Programme's impact. Approximately 29% of participants acknowledged significant improvements in students' concentration, cognitive abilities, and academic performance. About 24% believed in a positive correlation between school meals and regular attendance, while 14% observed well-fed students engaging in productive after-school study sessions. Additionally, 19% recognized the program's role in reducing absenteeism and enhancing students' focus. A supportive stance of 14% favored the continuation of the program, citing its significant benefits for both the community and students. Overall, the responses indicate a favorable perception of the program's positive effects on students' academic outcomes and well-being.

Table 3: Learners' Perception on the School Feeding Programme's Effect on their Academic Performance

Response	Frequency	Percentage
The School Feeding Programme has a positive impact on my academic performance.	46	16%
I believe that school meals indirectly contribute to improved scholastic achievements.	38	14%
Hunger negatively affects my ability to stay attentive in class.	88	32%
When I'm hungry, I can't focus properly, and it's like being partially sick.	22	8%
School meals make me more active, alert, and attentive after eating.	43	15%
Improved attendance, influenced by the feeding program, positively affects my academic progress.	13	5%
School meals are essential in preventing absenteeism.	29	10%
Total	279	100%

The findings from the learners' responses provide valuable insights into their perceptions of the School Feeding Programme's impact on their academic performance. It is evident that a significant portion of the learners (16%) acknowledged the positive impact of the program on their academic performance, while an additional 14% believed that school meals indirectly contribute to improved scholastic achievements. The detrimental effects of hunger on attentiveness are strongly emphasized, with 32% of learners expressing that hunger negatively affects their ability to stay attentive in class. Some learners (8%) vividly described the debilitating nature of hunger, likening it to partial sickness and compromised focus. On a positive note, 15% of learners felt that school meals made them more active, alert, and attentive after consumption, further reinforcing the link between nutrition and cognitive function. Additionally, a smaller proportion (5%) of learners recognized the connection between improved attendance, influenced by the feeding program, and positive academic progress. About 10% of learners viewed the school meals as essential in preventing absenteeism. These perceptions collectively highlight the multifaceted role of the School Feeding Programme in addressing nutritional needs, attentiveness, attendance, and ultimately, academic performance among the learners.

To show that the School Feeding Programme enhanced good academic performance for pupils, the school head teachers provided the Grade Nine examination performance analyses before and during the feeding programme for the period 2015 to 2022 as shown below:

Table 4: Performance at grade 9 examination

School	Before the School Feeding Programme				During the School Feeding Programme			
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
A	120(57%)	129(60%)	140(71%)	131(65%)	150(85%)	160(90%)	155(91%)	170(93.2%)
B	72(62%)	64(51%)	78(49%)	59(52%)	98(92.4%)	120(86%)	107(97%)	116(93%)
C	110(58%)	92(39%)	76(54%)	89(54%)	149(78%)	150(76%)	164(86%)	167(92%)

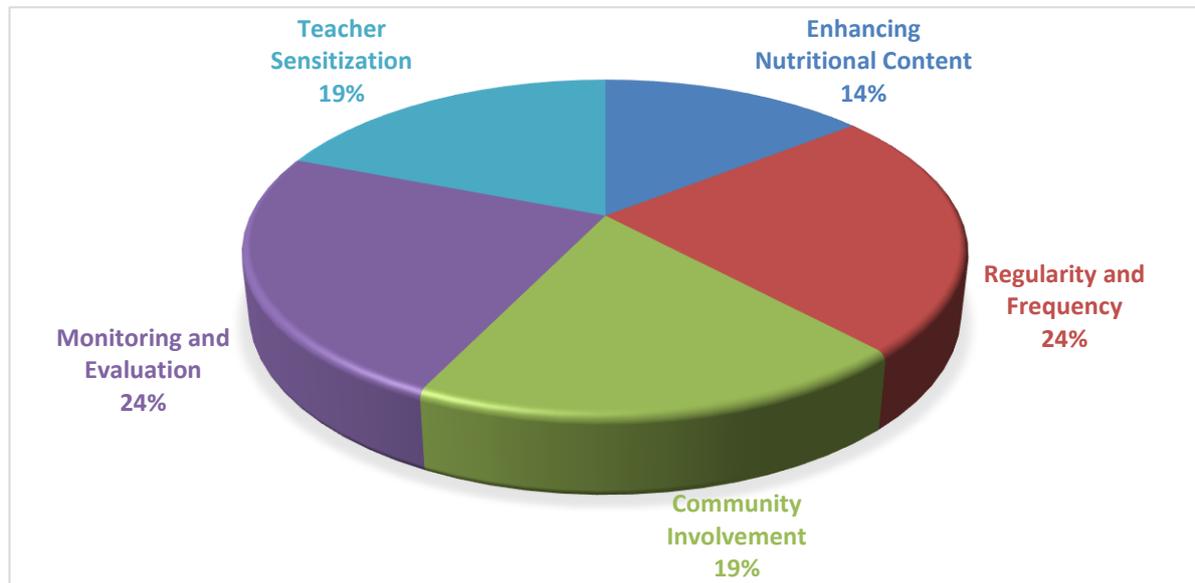
The results analysis in the above table shows that the examination pass rate rose to over 75% for the period 2019-2022 when the feeding program was implemented, as opposed to the period 2015-2018 before the program was introduced.

The study found that the School Feeding Programme helped children to become active, alert and attentive to the teacher in class during lessons and as such, the programme responds to academic needs of the pupils. This is in line with the study done in Kenya by Ouko, (2019) on the School Feeding Programme and its impact on academic achievement which found the SFP to have improved the academic performance of the school children. The study established that when food is provided to children at school, their educational outcomes are improved because learners can concentrate properly after feeding. Further, school meals improve attendance, and attendance has a direct bearing on class academic performance and, therefore, when attendance improves, academic performance is anticipated to improve as well. Notwithstanding, such findings regarding academic performance are not, however, dependent on food only. Academic performance is reliant on so many variables such as quality of teachers, proper infrastructure, capability of the learners themselves, school background, that is, were the learners are coming from, economic and social status of their parents or guardians and discipline of the learners (Matipa, 2018). If the learners are not serious and disciplined with school work, and the material that the learners interact with is not worthwhile, they may not perform well. Therefore, to think that school feeding is the only issue behind good academic performance may be an erroneous conclusion or a pitfall.

3.3. Analysis on the Recommended Ways for Improving the SFP

The figure below presented the findings regarding the recommended ways for the School Feeding Programme to improve the academic performance of learners in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mponshi district.

Chart 2: Recommended Ways for Improving the SFP



The figure above indicated the findings related to the recommended ways to improve academic performance of learners through the SFP and highlighted several key suggestions from the respondents. The data revealed that the highest percentage of respondents, accounting for 24%, emphasized the importance of regularity and frequency of the feeding program. Similarly, an equal percentage 24% of participants emphasized the need for effective monitoring and evaluation strategies to enhance academic performance. Additionally, 19% of respondents each highlighted the significance of community involvement and teacher sensitization in improving academic performance through the program. These recommendations underline the value of engaging the local community and ensuring that teachers are well-informed and sensitive to the program's objectives and benefits. Moreover, 14% of respondents emphasized the importance of enhancing the nutritional content of the provided meals.

The study highlighted the critical importance of the nutritional content of meals provided through the program. Establishing a well-balanced and nutritious meal plan was identified as a foundational aspect of the SFP. Nutrient-rich foods, including essential vitamins and minerals, are essential for supporting students' cognitive development, concentration, and overall health (Oganga, 2017). Ensuring the inclusion of diverse and healthy food options is vital to maximize the positive impact of the program on academic performance. Regarding the importance of nutritional content, previous research has emphasized the role of nutrient-rich foods in supporting students' cognitive development and academic performance. Studies have shown that providing a diverse range of nutritious meals positively affects students' concentration, memory retention, and learning outcomes. This study's findings are consistent with this body of research (Dei, 2016; Del Rosso, 2019; Del Rosso & Marek, 2016), underscoring the significance of prioritizing the nutritional quality of meals in the SFP.

The findings emphasized the significance of consistency and regularity in providing meals through the SFP. Learners benefit most when they have access to nutritious meals consistently, creating a stable learning environment and reducing hunger-related distractions (Dheressa, 2018). A well-regulated feeding schedule helps maintain students' focus and attention in class, ultimately contributing to better academic outcomes. Similarly, the emphasis on consistency and regularity in meal provision aligns with previous studies that highlight the positive impact of stable food access on students' academic engagement. Ibid (2016) pointed out that consistent meal schedules have been associated with improved attendance rates, reduced absenteeism, and increased student participation in classroom activities. The current study's findings corroborate these previous findings, emphasizing the importance of a well-regulated feeding schedule in promoting better academic outcomes. Johnson, et al (2018), supports that community involvement emerged as a crucial element in the success of the SFP. Collaborating with local communities and engaging parents in the program fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to its objectives. Strong community support ensures the sustainability of the program and reinforces the importance of nutrition in supporting students' academic success. The significance of community involvement in supporting the School Feeding Programme echoes previous research. A study conducted by Johnson (2021) established that engaging local communities and parents creates a sense of ownership and commitment to the program's success. Previous studies have shown that strong community support enhances program sustainability and reinforces the importance of nutrition in supporting students' educational achievements, in line with this study's findings.

The study emphasized the need for teacher and staff training on the objectives and best practices of the SFP. Educators play a central role in monitoring students' progress and providing necessary support. Equipping teachers with the knowledge and tools to leverage meal times as learning opportunities allows for better integration of nutrition into the educational experience. The emphasis on teacher and staff training aligns with previous research

highlighting the pivotal role of educators in the success of school feeding initiatives (MoE, 2013). Well-informed teachers can effectively monitor students' progress and leverage meal times as valuable learning opportunities. This empowers educators to integrate nutrition into the learning experience, positively influencing students' academic engagement and achievements. The findings suggested several recommended ways to improve the academic performance of learners through the SFP in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mponshi district. These include ensuring a well-balanced and nutritious meal plan, providing meals consistently, integrating meal times with education, fostering community involvement, and conducting teacher training (Lambers, 2015). Implementing these strategies is crucial to maximizing the program's positive impact on students' academic achievements and promoting a conducive learning environment.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study revealed that compiling findings regarding the School Feeding Programme's had profound effect on learners' academic performance in selected Secondary schools of Kapiri Mponshi district of Central Province, Zambia. Through a comprehensive exploration, it became evident that the provision of nutritious meals significantly enhances students' cognitive abilities, attention span, and overall well-being. The positive correlation between regular meals and improved attendance underscores the program's role in reducing absenteeism and creating an optimal learning environment. These findings affirm the program's efficacy in not only addressing nutritional needs but also in fostering enhanced academic achievements among learners. Such insights emphasize the program's invaluable contribution to promoting educational success and overall development within the district's schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

- The Ministry of Education and local authorities should foster closer collaboration to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of the School Feeding Programme.
- School administrators and teachers should integrate nutritional education initiatives into the curriculum thereby empowering learners with knowledge on healthy eating habits will make them more conscious of their dietary choices and promote long-term health benefits.
- Community members and parents' associations should be actively involved in supporting the School Feeding Programme to fosters a sense of ownership and commitment.
- Schools should strengthen monitoring and evaluation practices to track the effect of the School Feeding Programme on academic performance.
- The government and relevant non-governmental organizations should allocate adequate funding and resources to sustain the School Feeding Programme. Continuous financial support will ensure uninterrupted program implementation, enabling schools to consistently provide nutritious meals to learners.

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