

Title

**EVALUATING THE INFLUENCE OF MOUNT MERU SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM
ON ENROLLMENT AND ATTENDANCE OF STANDARD ONE LEARNERS AT
CHIVALA PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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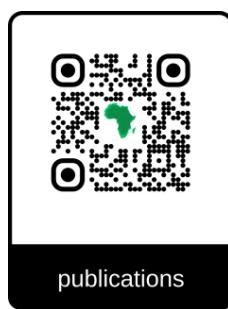
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of community-based initiatives in addressing social and developmental challenges within local communities in Malawi. Community-based approaches are increasingly recognized as effective strategies for promoting participation, empowerment, and sustainable development, particularly among vulnerable populations. The study adopted a qualitative research design and collected data through interviews and observations involving community members and key stakeholders. Findings revealed that community-based interventions contribute positively to social inclusion, access to basic services, and improved livelihoods by fostering collective responsibility and local ownership. However, the study also identified challenges such as limited funding, inadequate training, low community awareness, and weak institutional support, which hinder the effectiveness of these initiatives. Despite these constraints, community participation and collaboration were found to be critical factors in enhancing program outcomes. The study concludes that strengthening community-based approaches through capacity building, stakeholder coordination, and policy support can significantly improve social development outcomes. It recommends increased government and organizational investment in community-driven programs to ensure sustainability and long-term impact.

Keywords: Community-Based Approaches; Social Development; Community Participation; Empowerment; Local Initiatives; Sustainable Development; Malawi

INTRODUCTION

Education is important for the growth and development of children, communities and nations. However, in many poor areas children face challenges that stop them from going to school and one of the biggest

challenge is hunger. When children do not get enough food may not have the energy to attend school or concentrate in class. This has led to introduction of school feeding program to encourage school attendance and improve learning. This is important because when children have enough to eat they can focus better in class. Mount Meru has been supporting school feeding programs in different communities, including Chivala Primary School.

School feeding programs play an important role in promoting access to education, especially in low-income communities where food insecurity is a major barrier to school attendance (*World Food Programme [WFP]*, 2020). In Malawi, many young children face challenges such as hunger and malnutrition, which can prevent them from enrolling in or attending school regularly. To address this, organizations like Mont Meru have introduced school feeding programs aimed at improving learners' health and increasing school enrollment and retention (*WFP*, 2020).

This study focuses on evaluating the influence of the Mont Meru school feeding program on the enrollment rates of Standard one learners at Chivala Primary School. Standard 1 is a critical stage, as it marks the beginning of formal education. According to *WFP* (2020), access to regular school meals can save as a strong incentive for parents to enroll their children in school, especially in resource poor settings. Understanding how the availability of school meals impacts enrollment can help policymakers, education stakeholders, and development partners to design more effective strategies to encourage school attendance among young learners. The research will provide evidence on whether the school feeding program serves as a motivating factor for parents to enroll their children in school, and whether it has made a measurable difference in enrollment trends at Chivala Primary School.

Background of the study

In many parts of the world, especially in rural areas, children face many challenges when it comes to going to school. One big problem is hunger. When children are hungry it is hard for them to learn or even attend school regularly. Some parents may also choose not to send their children to school because they cannot afford food (WFP, 2013). To help with this, school feeding programs have been started in many communities. These programs give free meals to students at school. Studies have shown that school feeding can help increase school enrollment, keep children in school longer and improve their performance (UNESCO, 2020).

Studies show that school feeding programs have made more children to join school. For example, the *World Food Programme* (WFP) found that these programs can increase enrollment by as much as 9%. They also help more girls attend school, especially in countries where education is always a priority.

Mont Meru has introduced a school feeding program at Chivala Primary School. The aim is to support learning by making sure young learners, especially those in Standard one, have enough food at school. This study focused on finding out if this feeding program has really helping more children to join school.

Problem statement

In Malawi, school feeding programs have been introduced as a strategy to improve enrollment, attendance and retention of learners, particularly in rural areas where poverty and hunger are common challenges. One such initiative is the Mont Meru school feeding program at Chivala Primary School, which aims to encourage more children to enroll in school by providing daily meals. Despite the presence of this program, some children are still not attending school regularly in standard one. This raises

concerns about the actual effectiveness of the school feeding program in addressing the root causes of low attendance.

The continued low participation of learners, even with meals provided, suggests there is other reasons that affect the implementation of the school feeding program that affect the attendance of standard one learners. (WFP, 2020). This presents the gap if the feeding program affects the attendance and enrollment in standard so there is a need to critically evaluate whether the school feeding program improve enrollment and attendance. This study therefore seeks to assess the influence of the Mount Meru school feeding program on Standard one enrollment at Chivala Primary School and to explore the possible reasons why some children still do not attend school despite the availability of free meals.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main objective

Evaluating the influence of Mont Meru school feeding program on enrollment and attendance of standard one learners at Chivala primary school.

Specific objectives

- To examine the trends in standard one enrollment at Chivala Primary School before and after the introduction of Mont Meru school feeding program.
- Assess the influence of the school feeding program on parental decision to enroll children in standard one at Chivala primary school.
- To explore the perception of teachers and parents regarding the role of the feeding program in encouraging school enrollment.
- To identify challenges affecting the implementation of the school feeding program and their possible impact on enrollment.

Research questions

- What are the enrollment rates of standard one learners at Chivala Primary School before and after the implementation of Mont Meru school feeding program?
- How has the school feeding program influence parent's decisions to enroll their children in standard one at Chivala primary school?
- What are the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the impact of the feeding program on school enrollment?
- What challenges are faced in the implementation of the school feeding program and how might these affect its impact on enrollment?

Significance of the study

This study is important because it helps to understand how school feeding program has affect the number of children joining school, especially in standard one. A lot of children in rural communities do not attend school because of hunger or poverty. If the feeding program is helping more children enroll it mean the program is useful and is helping a lot of children in the community and it should be improved. The results of this study will help school leaders and the organization (Mont Meru) to make better decisions. They can use findings to plan how to support more schools and help more children get education. And also this study helps to determine the number of standard one learners who joined before and after the program was introduced at Chivala primary school.

Dual to an introduction of school feeding programs more parents send their children to school because when parents know that their child will get food at school and they will not stay hungry they will send their children to school and it is very helpful for families who do not have enough food at home.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is a fundamental human right and a critical factor in the development of individuals and nations. However, access to quality education remains a challenge, especially in developing countries where poverty, hunger, and poor infrastructure limit school attendance and enrollment. To address these barriers, many governments and international organizations have introduced school feeding programs, which aim to improve learner's health, increase school attendance, and boost enrollment particularly at the foundational level such as Standard one.

This literature review focuses on empirical findings from countries with similar social and economic conditions to Malawi regarding the impact of school feeding programs on enrollment rates, with an emphasis on early-grade learners. It helps to understand the possible effects of the Mont Meru school feeding program at Chivala Primary School by examining findings from similar settings.

Definition of terms

- **School feeding program:**

A school feeding program is a government or organization supported activity that provides free meals to learners during school hours. These meals are meant to improve children's health and encourage them to attend school regularly. According to the *world food programme* (2013), a school feeding is a targeted social safety net that provides both educational and health benefits to vulnerable children, thereby increasing enrollment rates, reducing absenteeism and improving food security.

- **Enrollment Rate:**

This refers to the number of leaners who are officially registered and attend school in a particular grade or level, such as standard

one. *UNESCO (2015)*

- **Standard 1 learners:**

These are children who are in the first grade of primary school, usually between the age of 5 to 7 years old. According to *Malawi's ministry of education (2020)* standard 1 marks the “initial entry point for formal learning in primary school, serving as a vital stage for foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

- **Education:**

Education is a process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and habits that enable them to function effectively in society and contribute to its development. It includes both formal learning in schools and informal learning through life experiences. *Ghosh, Nath and Singh (2013)*

- **Impact:**

Refers to strong effect or influence that something has on a person, situation or environment especially as a result of an action or event. *OECD (2021)*

- **Attendance:**

Refers to the act of being present at a place such as school, work or an event, regularly or as required. *Collins English Dictionary (2022)*

According to this theory, individuals cannot focus on higher needs such as learning unless their basic needs are first met.

This theory is important to this study because many children in rural areas such as Chivala come from families facing food insecurity. If children come to school hungry, they may not concentrate or may miss school completely. The Mont Meru School Feeding Program helps to meet learners' basic food needs,

which can motivate parents to enroll their children and encourage regular attendance. When food is provided at school, education becomes more attractive and accessible to families struggling with poverty.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

School feeding meets basic (physiological) needs (e.g., food)

Increased motivation and concentration in school

Higher enrollment and regular attendance

Better learning outcomes

Theoretical framework

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory: *Maslow (1943)* proposed that human beings have different levels of needs, starting from basic physiological needs like food, water, and shelter, and moving up to needs like safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology that has been used in the study. It describes the research design and method, research setting, target population, sampling methods, sample size, research instruments,

data collection instruments, data collection procedures, pilot study, data analysis, limitation of the study, ethical consideration and chapter summary. The study is designed to assess the influence of the Mont Meru School Feeding Program on the enrollment and attendance of Standard One learners at Chivala Primary School.

Research design

This study has adopted a descriptive research design using mixed method approach. A descriptive design is suitable for studies that seek to describe and interpret conditions as they exist without manipulation of variables (Kothari,2004). This study aimed to describe the influence of Mont Meru school feeding program on enrollment and attendance among standard one learners at chivala primary school.

Research method

The study has used a mixed-methods research design. This means both qualitative and quantitative methods has been used. The quantitative method has helped to collect numerical data related to enrollment and attendance. The qualitative method has helped to collect views and opinions from parents, teachers, and school administrators. Using both methods has helped to give a better understanding of the topic (*Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011*).

Research setting

Research setting is defined as the place or area in which I as a researcher aimed at carrying my study to targeted respondents. Such as following this study, the study has been conducted in Dowa, Malawi.

Target population

Target population is defined as the total group of individuals from which sample might be drawn. A sample is the group of

people who take part in the investigation. This study targeted the population include parents or guardians and teachers.

Sampling techniques

Sampling techniques is a set of tactics I as a researcher uses to select the actual sample from the population, sampling techniques are categorized into two, probability sampling and nonprobability sampling. This study has used two sampling techniques which is simple random sampling and purposive sampling.

- **Simple random sampling:** has been used to select parents or guardians of standard one leaners at Chivala primary school. This method ensures that every member of the group has an equal chance of being selected. It reduces bias and gives a representative sample of the population ((*Kothari,2004*).
- **Purposive sampling:** has been used to select teachers at Chivala primary school. These individuals are directly involved in the implementation and monitoring of the school feeding program. They have necessary knowledge and experience to provide valuable insights for the study. In purposive sampling, participants are selected based on characteristics that are important to the research objectives (*Palinkas et al., 2015*).

Sample size

Sample size refers to the number of individuals selected from a large population to participate in research study (T aherdoost, 2016). This study recruited a sample size of 36 respondents.

- Teachers 11
- Parents 25
- Total sample size 36

Research instruments Questionnaire

Questionnaire is defined as a form containing a set of questions, especially addressed to statistically significant number of subjects and is a way of gathering information for a survey. It is used to collect statistical information or opinions about people. *The oxford advanced dictionary* (2015) defines a questionnaire as a writer or printed list of questions to be answered by a number of people, especially as part of survey.

The study has focused on the use of questionnaires to collect primary data through interviews as research tools (Kothari, 2010). *Gall and Borg* (2012) points out that, questionnaires are appropriate for studies since they collect information that is not directly observable as they inquire about feelings, motivations, attitudes, accomplishments as well as experiences of people's motivations (Silverman, 2017) further observed that questionnaires have the added advantage of being less costly and using less time as instruments of data collection. The questionnaire which is semi structured which has contained open and closed ended questions on open ended, qualitative research method has been used to allow respondents to express their thoughts, opinion or experience in their own world while on closed ended, quantitative research method has been used to provide fixed opinions for the respondents to choose from such as "Yes" or "No" multiple choice options. For the main purpose of this research, the study has collect primary data to compare it with the available secondary data for the literature review.

Interview

Interview has been used to collect data from teachers. The participates have direct knowledge and experience with the Mount

Meru school feeding program and has provided detailed information about the impact of leaners enrollment and attendance.

The study has use semi structured interview, whereby interview followed a set of guiding questions and has also allow room for the participants to speak freely and explain their views in details. This method helps the researcher to collect detailed information (Cohen, Manion, & Morris, 2011).

Pilot study

Before the main data collection begins, a pilot study has been conducted to test the research instruments. The purpose of the pilot study is to check if the questionnaires and interview guides are clear, relevant, and easy to understand for the participates. It has also helped identify any problems or mistakes in the questions, such as confusing instruments and missing information.

The pilot study involved 5 participates who are similar to the target population but has not been included in the final sample.

Conducting a pilot study helps improve the validity and reliability of the of the data collection tools (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Data presentation and analysis

Data presentation refers to the organization of data in tables, graphs, or charts so that logical and statistical conclusion can be taken from the collected measurements. Data analysis is the process of systematically applying statistical and logical technique to describe and show condenses and recaps evaluation data (Savenye and Robinson, 2004)

Quantitative data which was collected in this study has been presented and analyzed using SPSS. And qualitative data used content analysis, content analysis was conducted manually to identify and develop themes were then coded and identified. SPSS was

used to summarize the coded data and analyze them. Subsequently, the collected data has been entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Ethical consideration

- **Obtained consent from the school**

An ethical approval was obtained from the selected school before the collection of data begins.

- **Obtained consent from the respondents**

Every participant was given the right to participate, withdraw or decline to take part in the research project no one did it against their wish

- **Assuring no harm to the respondents**

The respondents who were involved in this study were assured of no harm and there was no abuse of information. Privacy of the participants detailed was maintained and the information collected has only been used for academic purposes.

- **Anonymity and confidential**

Information shared by the respondents has not been disclosed their identities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the influence of mount Meru school feeding program on enrollment and attendance of standard one leaners at Chivala Primary School Dowa Malawi. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this research. This chapter presents the findings obtained from respondents. The other part are findings from the research objectives and interviews.

Response rate

There were 36 respondents sampled in this study and a response of 100% was realized in this study since the entire questionnaire and interviews were returned. According to *Showkat (2017)* a response rate of 50% is adequate, 60% is good, 70% and above is very good. Based on the above percentage of respondents the rate is very good.

Demographics

This part presents the basic characteristics of the respondents, the demographic information in this study was made up of gender, age, role and years associated with Chivala primary school.

CONCLUSION

The study found that despite these positive outcomes the study revealed that operational challenges, such as food shortages and delayed meal provision affect the programs efficiency and in some cases discourage attendance.

Mount Meru school feeding program has proven to be an effective strategy for increasing access to education, improving learner's enrollment and supporting parental engagement but its success depends on addressing the operational challenges identified in this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the Mont Meru school feeding program:

Ensure consistent meal provision

- The school and program partners should prioritize regular and timely provision of meals to maintain trust among parents and sustain learner's attendance.

Addressing food shortage challenges

- Supply chain management will minimize food shortage and ensure that meals are available consistently.

Enhance community awareness through regular Parent-Teacher Association meetings

- These meetings can serve as a platform for informing parents and progress of the objectives, benefits and progress of the school feeding program. Through PTA meetings school management can engage the community, address concerns, encourage parental participation and strengthen collective responsibility for sustaining the feeding program which in turn can support improved enrollment and attendance.

Monitoring and evaluate program impact

- Regular monitoring and evaluation of meal quality, attendance rates and enrollment trends will help identify issues early and improve program implementation.

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