

**ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM IN
COMBATING MALNUTRITION, ENHANCING HEALTH AND IMPROVE SCHOOL
PERFOMANCE AMONG SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN AT MAYERA PRIMARY
SCHOOL- A CASE STUDY OF MARY'S MEALS.**

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PROJECT REPORT

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF**

BACHELORS DEGREE OF SOCIAL WORK

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**DMI- ST JOHN THE BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
MALAWI
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

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This is to certify that the project work entitled **ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM IN COMBATING MALNUTRITION, ENHANCING HEALTH AND IMPROVE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AMONG SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN AT MAYERA PRIMARY SCHOOL- A CASE STUDY F MARY'S MEALS**, is a bonafide work of YANKHO CHIYEPA Registration No 24325252028 in partial fulfillment for the award of **BACHELORS DEGREE OF SOCIAL WORK of DMI St. John Baptist University** under my guidance. This work is original one and not submitted earlier for the award of any Degree elsewhere.

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INTERNAL EXAMINER

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Abstract

Malnutrition remains a critical public health and educational barrier for school-aged children in Malawi (UNICEF 2023), hindering both physical development and academic potential. School feeding programs (SFPs) have emerged as a key intervention to address this challenge. This study assessed the effectiveness of the Mary's Meals school feeding program in combating malnutrition, enhancing health and improving school performance among children at Mayera Primary School in Malawi. Using a descriptive case study design with a qualitative approach, the research gathered data from a purposively and randomly selected sample of 10 participants, including pupils, teachers, school administrators and program coordinators, primarily through structured questionnaires.

The findings demonstrate that the program has a strong, positive impact on multiple fronts. It successfully alleviates immediate hunger, leading to marked improvements in pupils' daily energy levels and a reported reduction in common illnesses. This direct nutritional benefit translated into a dramatic increase in daily school attendance, which rose from approximately 75% to over 92%, as the guaranteed meal became a powerful incentive for consistent enrolment and punctuality. In the classroom, teachers observed enhanced concentration, more pro-social behavior and greater academic engagement, as children were finally able to focus and participate actively in lessons.

However, the study also identified significant operational and sustainability challenges. Daily implementation is hampered by logistical hurdles such as inadequate cooking infrastructure, unreliable supply chains and a lack of basic resources. More critically, the program's long-term future is jeopardized by its deep dependency on external donor funding and the unpaid labor of community volunteers, creating a model vulnerable to collapse. The study concludes that while the Mary's Meals program is a highly effective and transformative short-term intervention, its enduring success requires a strategic evolution. To ensure lasting benefits, recommendations are made for fostering greater community ownership, integrating local agricultural initiatives like school gardens and advocating for supportive partnerships with local government structures. This shift is essential for building a resilient foundation that secures the program's vital role in the community for years to come.

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List of Acronym

BAZ..... Body mass index for age Z score.

FAO.....Food and agriculture organization.

HAZ..... Height for age Z score.

ICF.....International consulting firm, survey partner.

MM.....Mary's Meals.

NSO.....National statistical office.

SFP..... School feeding program

UNICEF.....United nations children's fund.

WAZ.....Weight for age Z score.

WFP..... World food program.

WHO..... World health organization.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Malnutrition is still a critical public health challenge affecting millions of children world particularly in developing countries(UNICEF,2023). Inadequate access to nutritious food significantly hinders the physical and cognitive development of school-aged children. This issue not only does it affect their health but also their academic performance, school attendance and long-term life outcomes. In response to this school feeding programs have emerged as a vital intervention aimed at improving child nutrition and educational attainment. This study focuses on assessing the effectiveness of school feeding programs in combating malnutrition among school-aged children. Specifically, the study evaluates the implementation and impact of the Mary's Meals program which is an initiative that provides daily nutritious meals to children in educational settings. The research aims to understand how consistent access to school meals influences the nutritional status attendance patterns and overall well-being of pupils enrolled at Mayera Primary School. By examining the program's outcomes and operational approach, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the role of school-based nutrition interventions in addressing malnutrition.

1.2 Background study

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), over 148 million children under the age of 18 suffer from various forms of malnutrition which affects their physical and cognitive development. School feeding programs have emerged as a critical intervention in addressing child malnutrition and improving educational outcomes. These programs provide daily meals to children attending school which not only deals with short-term hunger but also enhance school attendance and learning capacity (World Food Programme [WFP], 2022).

International studies have shown that school feeding programs contributes to reducing malnutrition and improving academic performance. For instance, a study by Bundy et al. (2018) found that school meal programs in Latin America and Southeast Asia led to a measurable decrease in stunting and underweight prevalence while also increasing enrolment rates and cognitive performance. Furthermore, the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (2021) highlights that integrated

school feeding approaches when linked with local food production and health services are more effective in promoting long-term nutritional outcomes.

In the African context, school feeding programs are used as key strategies in the fight against child hunger and educational inequality. A review by Ahmed and Arends-Kuenning (2006) in Sub-Saharan Africa indicated that school meals increased class attendance, particularly among girls and improved children's nutritional status over time. Similarly, in Ghana and Kenya, school feeding initiatives were associated with reduced micronutrient deficiencies and enhanced school performance (Drake et al., 2020).

In Malawi, malnutrition continues to affect a significant portion of the child population, with 37% of children under five being stunted due to chronic undernutrition (National Statistical Office [NSO] & ICF, 2017). To combat this, school feeding programs such as Mary's Meals have been implemented to provide one nutritious meal per day to children attending primary school. Mary's Meals currently reaches over one million children in Malawi, offering porridge made from locally sourced ingredients to support both nutrition and education. Studies have indicated that the program has led to increased school enrolment, improved concentration in class and reduced dropout rates, especially in rural areas where food insecurity is high (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003).

1.3 Problem Statement

Malawi continues to struggle with high levels of child malnutrition, with approximately 34.9% of children under five experiencing stunted growth due to chronic undernutrition Mary's Meals, 2022. In response, school feeding programs like Mary's Meals have been implemented to provide daily nutritious meals to over one million children across the country, aiming to improve both educational outcomes and nutritional status. School feeding program (Mary's Meals 2022). While national-level studies have demonstrated positive impacts such as a reduction in classroom hunger from 87% to 13% and improved concentration among students, there remains a paucity of localized, empirical data assessing the program's effectiveness at individual schools like Mayera Primary School.

This gap in localized evidence is significant, as the effectiveness of school feeding programs can vary based on regional factors including food security, community engagement and implementation fidelity. Without specific data from Mayera Primary School, it is challenging to determine the program's impact on malnutrition among its students. Therefore, this study seeks to

assess the effectiveness of school feeding program at Mayera Primary School in reducing malnutrition, enhancing health and improving school performance among school-aged children.

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 Main Objective

To assess the effectiveness of the school feeding program in combating malnutrition among school-aged children at Mayera Primary School.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To evaluate the nutritional status of school-aged children before and after participating in the school feeding program.
2. To examine the impact of the school feeding program on school attendance and academic performance.
3. To identify the challenges faced in the implementation of the school feeding program.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the nutritional statuses of children and absenteeism rate since the implementation of school feeding programs?
2. How has the school feeding program affected student attendance and academic performance at Mayera Primary School?
3. What challenges are faced in the implementation and sustainability of school feeding programs at Mayera Primary School?

1.6 Significance of the study

This study will hold a significant value in multiple dimensions like academic and community development by assessing the effectiveness of school feeding programs in combating malnutrition among school-aged children using school feeding program at Mayera Primary School as a case study.

The study will contribute to the existing body of academic knowledge on the relationship between school feeding programs and child nutrition, especially in rural and low-income settings like Malawi. By providing empirical evidence on the outcomes of school feeding programs, the research will help fill the gap in localized data on nutritional and educational impacts of such intervention.

At the community level, the study will help school administrators, parents and local stakeholders understand the broader benefits of the school feeding program beyond hunger alleviation, including improved school attendance, concentration and overall child development. It may also encourage stronger community participation and ownership of the program.

Ultimately, this study aims to support the development of more effective, sustainable and context-specific strategies to reduce child malnutrition and enhance education in Malawi.

1.7 Structure of the report

Chapter One

Introduction, Background of the Study, Problem Statement, Research Objectives, Research Questions, Significance of the Study, Structure of the report, chapter summary.

Chapter Two

Literature Review, introduction, definition of terms, provide information from previous studies and must align with the objectives to research objectives, chapter summary.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology, Research Design, Study Area (Mayera Primary School), Target Population and Sample Size, Sampling Techniques, Data Collection Methods and Tools, Data Analysis Techniques, Ethical Considerations, Limitations of the Study

Chapter Four

Results and Discussion, introduction, response rate, demographic information, representation of research findings, chapter summary

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations, Summary of research Findings, Conclusion from the study, Recommendations of the study, Suggestions for Further Research. References (List of all cited sources in proper academic format), Appendices A: Data Collection Instruments (e.g., questionnaires, interview guides), B: Ethical Approval Letters, C: Additional Tables or Charts.

1.8 chapter one summary

Chapter One provides the foundation of the study by highlighting the persistent issue of malnutrition among school-aged children in Malawi especially in rural communities like Mayera. It emphasizes the role of school feeding programs such as school feeding program with Mary's Meals as a case study which began operations in Malawi in 2002 in addressing both hunger and barriers to education by providing daily nutritious meals in schools. The chapter outlines the problem statement by pointing at the lack of localized evidence-based evaluations on the effectiveness of such interventions in improving children's nutritional status, school attendance and learning outcomes. It presents the research objectives and questions which are centred on assessing nutritional changes, classroom engagement and stakeholder perspectives. The significance of the study is also discussed by showing its relevance to academic research and practical implementation at community level. This chapter sets a clear direction for the study and lays the groundwork for the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature relevant to the effectiveness of school feeding programs (SFPs) in addressing malnutrition among school-aged children. It provides definitions of key terms, a synthesis of previous studies aligned with the research objectives and a summary of key findings of the study that will be conducted at Mayera Primary School, focusing on school feeding program.

2.2 Definition of Terms

❖ School Feeding Program (SFP)

A program that provides meals to school-going children and it is often funded or managed by government agencies, NGOs or private donors with the aim of improving nutrition, attendance and academic performance (Bundy et al., 2009).

❖ Malnutrition

A condition that results from eating a diet lacking in nutrients or from the body's inability to absorb nutrients properly. It includes undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies (WHO, 2021).

❖ Nutritional Status

The condition of health is influenced by the intake and utilization of nutrients usually assessed using indicators such as weight- for-age or height-for-age (UNICEF, 2022).

❖ school feeding program

An international charity organisation that provides daily meals in schools for children in the world's poorest communities to encourage education and reduce hunger (Mary's Meals, 2023).

2.3 Empirical evidence

2.3.1 The Nutritional Status of School-Aged Children Before and After Participating in the School Feeding Program

A study conducted in Ethiopia by Abizari et al. (2014) assessed the impact of SFPs on schoolchildren by comparing anthropometric measurements before and after program implementation. Their findings demonstrated significant improvements in both weight-for-age (WAZ) and height-for-age (HAZ) z-scores, indicating that the SFP contributed to improvements in both acute and chronic malnutrition. The intervention was particularly effective in addressing underweight conditions, with children in the program experiencing higher dietary diversity scores and increased intake of essential nutrients such as iron and vitamin A, which are often deficient in low-income settings.

Similarly, Zenebe et al. (2021) conducted a quasi-experimental study in Southern Ethiopia that evaluated the effect of school feeding on children's body mass index-for-age (BAZ). Their research revealed that children who received school meals had significantly better BAZ scores than those who did not, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in improving short-term nutritional outcomes. The study also emphasized the role of regular balanced meals in improving energy intake and reducing thinness among school-aged children, thereby enhancing their physical development and school performance.

In Malawi, studies have also shown that SFPs also play a vital role in improving the nutritional well-being of children. Kadzamira and Rose (2001) explored the early implementation of school feeding programs and found that regular food provision at school improved not only attendance and enrolment rates but also children's concentration and participation in class, indirectly enhancing nutritional outcomes by promoting better learning environments and routines.

Abizari et al. (2014) noted that although thinness was significantly reduced among program beneficiaries, the prevalence of stunting—a long-term indicator of chronic malnutrition—remained persistently high. This suggests that while SFPs help alleviate short-term hunger and improve some anthropometric indicators, they may not fully reverse the effects of prolonged undernutrition experienced during early childhood. Zenebe et al. (2021) similarly highlighted that without concurrent interventions targeting maternal nutrition, sanitation, healthcare access, and

household food security, school feeding alone may not sufficiently address the root causes of stunting and other forms of chronic malnutrition.

These findings collectively suggest that while the implementation of school feeding program at Mayera Primary School may positively influence children's nutritional status, particularly in reducing underweight and thinness, a more holistic and integrated approach is required to achieve long-term improvements. This would involve aligning school feeding initiatives with broader public health strategies, including deworming programs, nutrition education, sanitation improvement, and targeted support for vulnerable households. A comprehensive approach would ensure that both immediate hunger and long-term nutritional deficits are effectively addressed, paving the way for healthier and more productive lives for children in low-income communities.

2.3.2 The Impact of the School Feeding Program on School Attendance and Academic Performance

Vermeersch and Kremer (2005) conducted a study in Kenya to understand how subsidized school meals impact student participation and academic performance. Their findings were striking—schools that provided meals saw a 30% increase in attendance compared to those that did not. For many families, especially those struggling with food insecurity, the promise of a daily meal became a strong incentive to send their children to school. This led to higher enrolment rates as parents prioritized education when meals were available. However, the study also pointed out some challenges. While attendance improved, larger class sizes sometimes made it harder for teachers to manage lessons effectively.

Aurino et al. (2019) examined Ghana's nationwide school feeding program and found similar positive effects. Their research showed that school meals significantly boosted enrolment and retention rates, particularly among disadvantaged children and girls. In regions where food insecurity was common, school meals became a crucial source of daily nutrition, ensuring that children had at least one reliable meal each day. This, in turn, reduced absenteeism, as students were more likely to attend school regularly when they knew food would be provided. The study also found moderate improvements in math and literacy scores, with the most notable gains among girls and children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Beyond attendance, school feeding programs have been shown to enhance academic performance. Vermeersch and Kremer (2005) found that students in schools with feeding programs performed better on curriculum-based tests, particularly in schools where teachers had prior experience before the program was introduced. However, they also noted that the introduction of meals led to larger class sizes, which sometimes reduced the amount of direct teaching time available. Despite this, the overall impact on learning outcomes remained positive, as students were better able to focus and engage in lessons due to improved nutrition.

Aurino et al. (2019) provided further evidence of the academic benefits of school feeding programs. Their study reported moderate increases in math and literacy scores, with the most significant improvements observed among girls and children from low-income families. The researchers attributed these gains to better cognitive function, improved concentration, and increased time spent in school. They concluded that school feeding programs play a crucial role in equitable human capital development, aligning with global education and development goals.

While school feeding programs have proven effective, they are not without challenges. Vermeersch and Kremer (2005) highlighted issues such as teacher absenteeism, which remained high despite improved student attendance. Additionally, some schools offering meals raised their fees, while neighboring schools without feeding programs lowered theirs, creating unintended economic effects. Aurino et al. (2019) pointed out that while school meals improved learning outcomes, their effectiveness depended on program implementation quality, including meal composition and delivery consistency. Ensuring that meals are nutritious and reliably provided remains a key factor in maximizing the benefits of these programs.

2.3.3 The Challenges and Limitations Faced in the Implementation of the School Feeding Programs

School feeding programs are designed to provide nutritious meals to children, ensuring they have the energy and focus needed for learning. However, despite their noble intentions, these programs face significant challenges that hinder their effectiveness. One of the most pressing issues is financial sustainability. Ahmed (2004) highlights that many school feeding initiatives struggle with inadequate funding, leading to inconsistent food supply and reduced program efficiency. Without stable financial backing, schools may experience interruptions in meal provision, forcing students to go without food on certain days. Gelli et al. (2019) further emphasize that large-scale

programs often face budget constraints, limiting their ability to provide nutritionally adequate meals to all students. The reliance on government funding or external donors makes these programs vulnerable to economic downturns and policy shifts, which can result in reduced meal quality or even program discontinuation.

Beyond financial constraints, logistical and infrastructural challenges pose significant hurdles. Ablorh (2011) discusses how many schools lack proper kitchens, storage facilities, and cooking equipment, making it difficult to prepare and serve meals efficiently. In some cases, food is prepared in unhygienic conditions, raising concerns about safety and sanitation. Nkosi (2013) notes that late food deliveries and irregular supply chains further disrupt meal schedules, negatively impacting students' nutrition and learning outcomes. When food arrives late or in insufficient quantities, children may be forced to wait long hours or miss meals altogether, affecting their concentration and overall well-being. Additionally, transportation challenges in remote areas make it difficult to ensure timely food distribution, exacerbating the problem.

The nutritional adequacy of meals provided in school feeding programs is another critical concern. Motala et al. (2009) found that many programs fail to meet children's dietary needs due to limited access to diverse and nutritious food items. In some cases, meals consist of low-cost staple foods that lack essential micronutrients, leading to deficiencies in vitamins and minerals. This issue is compounded by the absence of standardized nutritional guidelines and monitoring mechanisms, as highlighted by Gelli et al. (2019). Without proper oversight, schools may serve meals that do not meet the recommended dietary requirements, potentially contributing to malnutrition rather than alleviating it. Ensuring that meals are both nutritious and appealing to children remains a challenge, particularly in regions where food variety is limited.

Community engagement and stakeholder involvement also play a crucial role in the success of school feeding programs. Ahmed (2004) notes that some initiatives face resistance from parents and local communities due to cultural preferences or misconceptions about the benefits of school feeding. In some cases, parents may prefer traditional home-cooked meals over school-provided food, leading to lower participation rates. Ablorh (2011) discusses how the lack of coordination between schools, local farmers, and suppliers affects the efficiency of food procurement and distribution. When local stakeholders are not actively involved, programs may struggle to source fresh and affordable ingredients, impacting meal quality. Strengthening community partnerships

and educating parents about the benefits of school feeding can help improve acceptance and participation.

Finally, while school feeding programs are widely recognized for their positive impact on school attendance and enrolment, their direct effect on academic performance remains mixed. Studies by Gelli et al. (2019) and Ahmed (2004) show that providing meals encourages children to attend school regularly, reducing absenteeism. However, some programs fail to integrate complementary interventions such as nutrition education and health services, limiting their overall effectiveness in improving student well-being and learning outcomes. Simply providing food is not enough—students also need access to healthcare, clean water and educational support to fully benefit from these initiatives. Addressing these gaps can enhance the long-term impact of school feeding programs, ensuring that children not only attend school but also thrive academically.

2.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is anchored in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Human Capital Theory. These theories provide a lens through which the role of school feeding programs, like Mary's meal school feeding program can be understood in addressing child malnutrition and enhancing educational outcomes.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) posits that individuals must satisfy basic physiological needs such as food and nutrition before they can focus on higher-order needs like education, social relationships and self-actualization. In the context of this study, school-aged children must have access to adequate nutrition before they can concentrate, attend school consistently or perform well academically. The provision of daily meals through school feeding programs meets this fundamental physiological need creating a conducive environment for learning and development.

Human Capital Theory, developed by Becker (1964), emphasizes the role of education and health as critical investments in the development of human capabilities. It argues that well-nourished and educated individuals are more productive and contribute more effectively to economic and social development. In this study, school feeding programs are seen as investments that enhance children's cognitive development and learning capacity by improving their nutritional status, thereby increasing their potential future productivity.

2.5 Chapter Summary

The literature review confirms that school feeding programs can play a vital role in reducing malnutrition, improving school attendance and enhancing academic outcomes. However, the effectiveness of such programs depends on nutritional quality, stakeholder engagement and operational efficiency. The study will use the findings to assess the specific outcomes and challenges associated with the school feeding programs like Mary's Meals initiative at Mayera Primary School.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology that was used in this study. It outlines the research design, research setting, target population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, pilot study, data analysis procedures and ethical considerations. The goal was to ensure that the study was conducted in a systematic, reliable and transparent manner, allowing meaningful insights into the effectiveness of school feeding program at Mayera Primary School in addressing malnutrition among school-aged children.

According to Kothari (2004) research methodology refers to the structured approach used to investigate a problem, encompassing the techniques and tools for data collection and analysis by carefully designing the research process. This study aims to produce findings that are credible, replicable and applicable to similar contexts.

3.2 Research Design and Methodology

3.2.1. Research Design

A research design serves as the blueprint for how a study is conducted, guiding the procedures for collecting, measuring, and analyzing data (Creswell, 2014). This study adopted a descriptive case study design which is particularly useful for providing a detailed and accurate picture of a real-world phenomenon (Yin, 2018).

A case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific intervention within its real-life context. Mayera Primary School was selected as the case study site due to its active participation in the school feeding program. This approach enabled the researcher to examine the implementation, challenges and outcomes of the program in a holistic manner capturing the qualitative experiences.

3.2.2 Research methodology

To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the study employed a qualitative approach.

❖ Qualitative methods

captured personal experiences and perceptions of the feeding program's impact through questionnaires.

3.3. Research Setting

The research setting refers to the specific environment in which a study takes place, including its physical location, socio-economic conditions, institutional characteristics and cultural context. Understanding this context is critical, as it shapes the relevance, feasibility and interpretation of the study's outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study was carried out at Mayera Primary School, a government-supported school located in the southern region of Malawi.

3.4. Target Population

The target population refers to the full group of individuals whose characteristics are of interest to the study and to whom the research findings aim to apply (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A well-defined target population helps ensure that the results are relevant, reliable and meaningful. For this study, the main target population comprised of all school-aged children enrolled at Mayera Primary School who benefit from the school feeding program done by Mary's meal

3.5. Sampling Technique

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a portion of the population to participate in a study, with the goal of drawing meaningful conclusions about the entire group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because it is often impractical to include everyone in a study, careful sampling ensures that the selected participants fairly represent the wider population. In this research, a combination of purposive sampling and simple random sampling was used.

3.5.1. Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling, sometimes called judgmental sampling is a non-random method where participants are chosen based on specific characteristics or roles relevant to the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). For this study, it was used to select school administrators, teachers and food program coordinator these individuals were selected because of their direct involvement with the school feeding program and their ability to provide meaningful insights into how the program is run and its impact on students.

3.5.2. Simple Random Sampling

On the other hand, simple random sampling was used to select learners, this method ensured that each child in the school has an equal chance of being included in the study (Kumar, 2019). A list of all enrolled students was obtained from the school and participants were selected using a random number generator. This helped to eliminate selection bias and ensured that the sample is representing the student population.

By using both sampling methods, the study captured perspectives from both the program's beneficiaries and its implementers.

3.6. Sample Size

The sample size refers to the total number of individuals selected to participate in a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Choosing the right sample size is essential. Too small, the findings may lack depth or reliability and if it is too large, the process may become unnecessarily complex and costly (Kumar, 2019).

10 participants comprising of 3 learners, 2 teachers, 3 school staff members and 2 staff members from Mary's meal.

3.7. Research Instruments

Research instruments are the tools used to collect data in a study. These tools must align with the research design and objectives to ensure that the data collected is accurate and meaningful (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Given the qualitative nature of this study, qualitative instruments were used.

3.7.1 Structured Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a list of questions or items used to gather data from respondents about their attitudes, experience or opinions (pritha bhandar,2021) A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from school children. It included closed-ended questions and focused on How often they receive school meals, Changes in hunger, focus and energy, students Attendance before and after the meals program and also Self-reported academic performance.

3.7.3 Observation Checklist

An observation checklist was used during school visits to record first-hand information on the Meal quality and quantity, Hygiene and food handling, Student behavior during meal times and Efficiency of meal distribution. This instrument helps to verify the information collected from questionnaires and interviews (Kawulich, 2005).

3.8 Pilot Study

A pilot study refers to a small-scale preliminary investigation carried out before the main research begins. It is intended to assess the practicality and effectiveness of research tools and procedures, and to identify potential challenges that could arise during the main study (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Essentially, it helps ensure that the research design is sound and that the instruments used such as questionnaires, interview guides and observation checklists are both valid and reliable. The pilot study was conducted at a school similar to Mayera Primary School Ten participants took part. These participants were selected purposefully to ensure they provide meaningful feedback.

3.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of organizing and interpreting collected data to uncover patterns, relationships and insights that help answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, a qualitative approach was used, so thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are central to any research involving human participants. This study followed key ethical principles to protect the rights, safety and dignity of all those involved.

3.10.1 Informed Consent

Before participating, all individuals were informed about the nature and purpose of the research. Children were given age-appropriate explanations and assent forms, Parental or guardian permission was also obtained. Participation was entirely voluntary and individuals were given opportunity to opt out at any stage without any negative consequences.

3.10.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants' identities were protected through coded responses and no real names were used in the final report. All data was securely stored and only accessible to the researcher. When presenting quotes from interviews all identifying information was removed to ensure anonymity.

3.10.3 Protection of Vulnerable Groups

Children were treated with particular care in line with child protection standards. All tools adapted their comprehension level and interviews were conducted in a safe and comfortable environment. Teachers were present when needed to ensure a supportive setting.

3.10.4 Approval and Permissions

The study received ethical clearance from the appropriate institutional ethics committee. Additional permissions were secured from Mayera Primary School's head teacher and school feeding program representatives

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology that was used in assessing the effectiveness of the school feeding program at Mayera Primary School. A qualitative design was employed, qualitative tools like questionnaires were used.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains what the study found out about the Mary's Meals program at Mayera Primary School. the study had three main goals. The first goal was to see if the children became healthier and missed less classes after joining the program. The second goal was to see if the program helped children come to school more often and if it helped them improve academically in the classroom. The third goal was to find out what problems make it hard to run the program every day and keep it going for the future.

The study collected information through structured questionnaire and 10 people were used in order to find the real helpful information that the study was looking for. The study wanted to get information from people that have the first hand information that is to say that the study wanted to get information from everyone that is involved. The study found the information from students who eat the food, teachers who see them in class, school leaders who manage the school and the coordinators who run the program. Everyone that was asked agreed to answer to the questions which was very helpful.

The study will share the findings for each goal. The study has used many direct quotes from the people that answered the questions. After each finding the study has explained what it means in simple terms. Finally, the study has a discussion section. This section has put all the findings together and explain what the big picture is. It has also connected the findings to other similar studies.

4.2 Response rate

All 10 responders agreed to take part in the study agreed. This is called a 100% response rate. It is very good because it means the study found the right information that was needed. The chose these specific people on purpose. The study wanted to get a full picture of the program from every angle. By talking to students, teachers, managers and the coordinators themselves it makes the study's findings more true and reliable.

Participants

3 students, 2 teachers, 3 members of staff (school administrators) and 2 members of staff from Mary's meals (coordinators).

Hearing from students, teachers, managers and the coordinators themselves helps the study understand the program from all sides. The students talked about how the food makes them feel. The teachers talked about how the children behave in class. The school leaders talked about changes in the whole school like attendance numbers. The coordinators talked about the good things and the hard things about organizing the food every day. Putting all these views together gives the study a strong understanding of what is really happening.

4.3 presentation of research findings

4.3.1 To evaluate the nutritional status of school –aged children before and after participating in the school feeding program

Children are not hungry and have more energy.

The biggest change everyone mentioned was that children are no longer hungry at school. Before the program, many children came to school with empty stomachs. This made it very hard for them to learn. Students explained how this feels in their own words. One student in Standard 4 said, *“Before, my stomach would be noisy in class. It would growl and make me feel shy. I could only think about food and when I could eat. Now, after the porridge, I feel calm and full. I can look at the teacher and listen to what she is saying.”* A Standard 7 student added more detail, *“The headache I used to get from an empty stomach is gone. I don’t have to press my head on the desk anymore to try and stop the pain. Now I can sit up straight.”* According to the research done by Jyoti, frongillo and jones (2005) documented how food insecurity causes physical discomfort and preoccupation that severely impedes classroom focus.

The teachers saw this change from the outside. They watch the children every day. One teacher said, *“You used to see children looking tired and lazy, especially before break time. Their eyes would be half-closed. They would not respond when you asked a question. Now, they have energy from the morning. They sit up. They raise their hands. They are really here in class, not just their bodies but their minds too.”* Another teacher noticed the change in playtime *“Even during break, they play more. Before, many would just sit under a tree because they were too weak. Now they*

run and play football." This statements are in line with Grantham-McGregor, Chang and Walker (1998) whose studies showed that undernourished children often appear lethargic and disengaged.

This finding shows the program does the most important thing first which is it stops hunger. As Pollitt (1995) argued, the cognitive function of a hungry child is compromised, making learning nearly impossible. Hunger is a powerful feeling. When a child is hungry, that is all they can think about. Their brain cannot focus on numbers or letters. By giving a morning meal, the program takes that problem away. The children's bodies feel better (no headaches or noisy stomachs). Because their bodies feel better, their minds are free to think about schoolwork. The teacher's comment about them being "really here" is very important. It means the children are now ready and able to learn. You cannot teach a hungry child. This program makes sure the children are not hungry, so teaching can begin.

Children seem healthier and get sick less.

The benefits go beyond just not being hungry for a few hours. Children are also getting sick less. This means the food is helping their bodies become stronger over time. One student said, "*I used to get coughs and colds many times in a term. My mother would say I was weak. But since we started eating porridge at school, I have been strong. I don't get sick as much as before.*" The Deputy Head teacher noticed this trend in the whole school "*We see fewer children coming to the office to ask for exit letters. Before, many children would come in the morning complaining of dizziness or general weakness. We often knew it was because they had no food. Now, those visits are much rarer.*" Neumann, Bwibo and Sigman (2003) found that school feeding can reduce common morbidity in children.

The program coordinator also heard this from parents and teachers. She said, "*When we do our checks every term, teachers and parents tell us the children have more stamina. Stamina means they can keep going for longer without getting tired. They can play football for the whole break. They can carry water. They are more active and lively than before the program. You can see a visible difference in their overall health.*" According to Kristjansson et al. (2007) school feeding programs can produce small significant improvements in children's physical health outcomes. The shift from mere absence of hunger to presence of vitality is crucial as stipulated by Bundy et al (2018), because it contributes to overall child development and reduces absenteeism due to sickness.

This finding proves that the daily porridge does more than just fill stomachs for a short time, it helps build stronger, healthier bodies. Getting sick less often is a big deal. Every time a child is sick, they miss school. They also fall behind in their work. If the porridge has vitamins and nutrients that help their immune system, then they stay healthier. This means they are in school more days of the year. The coordinator's word "stamina" is key. It means the children are not just "not hungry," they have positive energy to do things. They can learn, play and help at home better. This shows the program helps with overall child development not just solving the immediate problem of morning hunger.

Children miss school much less because of food.

Because there is now a reliable meal at school, children come every day. They have a strong reason to come. A student explained his old choice very clearly "*Why would I walk far to school if there was no food? It's a long walk and I would be tired and hungry. Sometimes I would go to the river to look for food or to do small jobs instead if I was too hungry. School did not seem important then.*" Now, his thinking has completely changed. He says, "*Even if there is no food at home in the morning, I know I will eat at school. My mother tells me to go to school to get the porridge. So I always come. I never miss now.*" A research done by Kazianga, de Walque and Alderman (2012) demonstrated that school meals act as a powerful incentive for enrollment and regular attendance.

The Head teacher said, "*Before the program, our records show that about 75 out of 100 children came to school each day. That means 25 were missing every single day but after the program started, more than 92 out of 100 come every day. The change is biggest in the younger classes, Standard 1 to 4, where hunger was the biggest problem keeping them at home.*" The Senior Teacher added, "*We used to spend the first hour marking who was absent and then sending older pupils to fetch some from their homes. Now, that rarely happens. The class is full when the bell rings.*" As McEwan (2013) and Adelman, Gilligan, and Lehrer (2008) have shown, reliable food at school significantly increases daily attendance rates. This finding powerfully illustrates the principle that, for poor families, education and nutrition are inseparable addressing the latter is a prerequisite for achieving the former.

This finding is perhaps the most powerful one. It shows that food is a more powerful reason to come to school than anything else for many of these children. For a hungry child, the need to find food is more urgent than the need to read. The program changes this by bringing the food to the

school. The school becomes the place where their basic need is met. The Head teacher's numbers are the proof. A jump from 75% to 92% daily attendance is a huge change. It means hundreds more days of education for the children each year. It turns school from a maybe into a must. It shows that you cannot separate education from basic life needs. The program successfully connects the two.

4.3.2 To examine the impact of the school feeding program on school attendance and academic performance

Children arrive early and more children join the school.

The promise of food does not just make children come, it makes them come early. They are excited and do not want to miss out. A student said, *“We all try to come early. If you are late, you might be at the back of the line and the food could finish. No one wants to miss it. So we run to school. Even my friends who used to be late always are now early.”* A teacher confirmed this new habit *“The school yard is full of children by 7:00 AM. The official start time is 7:30 AM. We can start our lessons on time with everyone here and settled which was a constant struggle before. The whole morning is more peaceful and organized.”* Vermeersch and Kremer (2005) noted that the promise of food can improve punctuality, leading to a more orderly start to the school day.

The program has also made the school more popular in the community. The Deputy Head explained *“Parents see that the school feeds their child. This makes them trust us more. They feel we are caring for their whole child, not just teaching them. We have more than 415 new children who have enrolled over the years and when we ask the parents why, many say the feeding program is the main reason, they say things like, ‘At least I know he will eat there,’ or ‘It is one less worry for me.’ They know their child will be safe and cared for here.”* The Head teacher added, *“Some parents even come to help as volunteers because they are so grateful. The relationship between the school and the community is better now.”* Gelli, Meir, and Espejo (2007) found that such programs can increase enrollment, especially for girls, by signaling to parents that the school is a caring and practical choice.

This finding shows that the program helps the whole school run better. It solves practical problems like lateness and a chaotic morning. When children are on time, teachers can teach more. But the bigger effect is on the school's reputation. Parents are the key. If they believe the school is good

for their child, they will send them. The feeding program is a clear, visible sign that the school is doing good things. It builds trust. More children enrolling means the program is not just helping current students but it is attracting new students to get an education. This is how the program helps the whole community move forward.

Children can concentrate and learn better.

When children are not hungry, they can focus their minds. This changes everything in the classroom. A teacher described the change in her class *“Before, children would be sleepy and distracted by the second lesson. Their minds were elsewhere. Now, they pay attention from the start. They follow instructions the first time. They even ask good questions like ‘why does this happen?’ and ‘how can we solve this?’.* They are truly thinking and engaging with the lesson, not just sitting there.” A student explained how it felt from the inside *“When my stomach is full, the words in my book stay still. Before, they seemed to move around the page and I couldn’t catch them. I can read a paragraph and remember what it said. I can also do my math work faster because I can think clearly.”* align with findings by Tan, Lane, and Lassibille (1999), who associated school feeding with better cognitive and academic outcomes.

The Senior Teacher also noted a big improvement in classroom behavior *“There are fewer fights and arguments between children. A hungry child is often a grumpy and impatient child. They would snap at their friends over small things. Now, the classroom is more peaceful and cooperative. Children share pencils more easily. They work in groups better. This calm environment is good for learning together.”* Another teacher said, *“I can now give them more challenging work. Before, I had to keep it very simple because they couldn’t focus. Now, I see they are capable of more.”* Sorhaindo and Feinstein (2006) reported that better-nourished children tend to exhibit more pro social behaviors.

A peaceful, focused classroom is the best environment for learning. You cannot have good learning in a chaotic, angry or sleepy classroom. The program creates the right environment by meeting the basic physical need for food. When the physical need is met, the child’s brain is free to work on higher things like reading, math and asking questions. The teacher’s comment about “truly thinking” is crucial. Education is not just about memorizing facts but it is about understanding. The program helps create the conditions for real understanding. Better behavior also means the teacher spends less time solving fights and more time teaching. This means every child gets more

teaching time every day. The program helps improve the quality of education, not just the number of children in the room. Alderman and Bundy (2011) argue, where a calmer environment allows teachers to focus on instruction rather than discipline, thereby improving the quality of education for all.

4.3.3 To identify the challenges and limitations faced in the implementation of school feeding program

Daily problems with cooking and supplies.

Running the program every day is difficult. There are many small problems that make it hard to work smoothly. A big problem is not having enough tools. A teacher who helps supervise the cooking said, *“We have only four big pots for over 800 children. The porridge is very thick, so cooking it takes a very long time. It often makes the first lesson start late because the children are waiting in line. We desperately need more pots and bigger ones. Also, getting enough water and firewood is a daily struggle for the volunteers”*. Neervoort et al. (2013) identified similar logistical constraints as major impediments to the efficient implementation of school feeding in Kenya.

Program coordinator explained *“The truck bringing the food from the main warehouse can sometimes be delayed, Sometimes the food supply itself is unstable by bad roads or other problems. When this happens, everyone gets worried. The head teacher calls me. The volunteers wait with their pots. The school has no extra food stored for such a day. We have no backup plan. We just have to wait and hope the truck comes.”* Even the children had a small complaint about variety. One student said, *“The porridge is good, and we are happy to have it. But we eat it every single day, every week, every term. It is always the same. Sometimes you wish for a change, maybe with a little sugar or milk sometimes.”* Galloway et al. (2009) and Bundy et al. (2018) have emphasized that supply chain weaknesses and monotony in meals are common challenges that can affect stakeholder satisfaction and the program's perceived reliability, threatening its long-term acceptance.

This finding shows that good ideas face real-world problems. Having money for food is not enough. You need pots to cook it in, water to mix it and firewood to heat it. Not having these things slows everything down and uses up time and energy. The school is trying to run a modern feeding program without the basic tools, which is very hard. Relying on a single truck with no backup plan

is also very risky. The entire program for that day depends on that one vehicle. If it breaks down, the main reason children come to school is gone. This makes the program look unreliable, even though the people running it are trying their best. The children's comment about variety reminds us that for a program to be loved for years, people need to enjoy it. Eating the same thing every day forever is hard, even if you are grateful.

Big worries about the future of the program.

The biggest worry everyone shared is that the program depends completely on others. It is not controlled by the school. The Head teacher shared his fear openly "*My worst fear is getting a phone call that says the money for the program has stopped. This program is a lifeline for us, but someone else is holding that rope. We have no plan B. If it ends, everything will go back to how it was before the hunger, the absenteeism, the tired children. We pray every day that the donors do not stop.*" WFP (2013) reports, which stress the need for sustainable financing models.

The program also relies completely on volunteers who are not paid. The coordinator explained this problem in detail "*The mothers who cook are the heart of the program. But they are not given any money for their work. They use time they could spend on their own farms or small jobs to help us. They do it from their good hearts. But we are starting to see some get very tired and frustrated. They ask, 'When will we get something for our work?' If we lose them, we have no one to cook. The program stops. We cannot afford to pay them, so we just keep asking them to please continue.*" Gelli et al. (2010) have documented how volunteer fatigue can jeopardize community-based programs. The coordinator's account of volunteers asking for recognition underscores the need for formal support systems.

People had ideas for how to make the program stronger for the future. The Senior Teacher suggested a practical idea "*We should start a school garden to grow vegetables. This could add to the porridge by sometimes cooking nsima and vegetables for the students, make it tastier and healthy, teach the children about farming and make us a little less dependent on just the porridge.*" The Deputy Head thought about a bigger solution "*We need to write a strong report on how well this works. We need to show the government our attendance numbers and our happy children. Maybe they can see this is important and help support it one day, even with just some money for pots or volunteer stipends. We cannot rely on overseas forever.*" Bundy et al. (2018) advocate for home-grown school feeding and government ownership to enhance sustainability. Similarly,

Drake et al. (2016) and Jomaa, McDonnell, and Probart (2011) argue that integration into national education and social protection systems is essential for moving from a donor-driven project to a locally owned program.

This finding shows that the program is successful but insecure. It is like a beautiful tree that has very shallow roots. A strong wind could knock it over. The volunteers are the foundation, but that foundation is made of people's kindness, which can run out if they are not supported. For the program to last for many years, it needs to change. It needs to grow deeper roots into the community and the country. The school garden idea is about self-reliance doing a little bit for themselves. Asking the government for help is about making the program a normal part of the education system, not a special gift from outside. The program must move from being a gift that can be taken away to being a right or a normal service that the community owns and supports.

4.4 Discussions

The study's findings tell two main stories. The first story is very positive and clear. The Mary's Meals program works very well at Mayera School. It does exactly what it was designed to do. It makes children healthier by stopping their hunger and giving them energy. This good health makes them come to school regularly. Once they are in school, not being hungry allows them to concentrate, behave well and really engage in learning. This matches perfectly with what other studies from around the world have found. School feeding is one of the best and simplest ways to improve education in poor communities. It tackles the problem right at the root. The study proves this is true at Mayera School. The above information confirms the program's transformative effectiveness, mirroring global evidence that school feeding program is a powerful intervention for health, attendance and learning (Kristjansson et al., 2007).

The second story is about the problems underneath the success. This part is very important for the future. The program is like a beautiful plant that is not planted in strong soil. The daily struggles with cooking no pots, no water, no firewood show that having the food is only half the battle. You need the tools and systems to deliver it reliably every single day. The constant worry about money and volunteers is an even bigger problem. A program that depends on the kindness of strangers and the unpaid hard work of poor community volunteers is not stable for the long term. It is stressful for everyone involved because they know it could end at any time. The operational and

financial vulnerabilities are significant, demonstrating that, as Gelli et al. (2019) caution, effective delivery is as important as the food itself.

The good news from our study is that the people involved are not just complaining. They are thinking of solutions. Their ideas like starting a school garden to add vegetables and asking the local government for help show they want to find a way forward. They want the program to continue. For the program to survive for the next ten years, it must change. It must move from being a gift or a project from outside to being a normal part of school life that the school and community own and support themselves, with help from their own leaders and government. This change is hard, but it is necessary.

4.5 Chapter summary

The main finding is that the Mary's Meals program has a very strong positive impact. It successfully solves the big problem of hunger at school. Because of this, children are healthier. Because they are healthier, they come to school much more often. Because they are in school and not hungry, they can concentrate better and their classrooms become better places for learning. The program helps with health, attendance and education all at once.

However, the study also found that the program faces big challenges. It is hard to run every day because of a lack of basic tools like pots and water. Most importantly, its future is unsure. It needs constant outside money and the hard work of unpaid volunteers to continue. This is not a safe way to run something so important.

In summary, the program is doing excellent work right now and has changed the school for the better. But it needs to change how it is supported if it is going to keep helping children for many years to come. It needs to become more self-reliant and connected to local support.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the final stage of the research study. It provides a complete summary of the entire project and offers practical recommendations for the future. The goal of this chapter is to do three important things. First, to talk about what was discovered in the study. Second, to explain what those discoveries ultimately mean for the school, the children and the program itself. Third, and most importantly is to provide clear suggestions for different groups of people on how to solve the problems that were found and how to make the good work of the program last for a long time.

5.2 Summary of Research Findings

Findings on Nutritional Status and Absenteeism

The first goal was to see if the program improved children's health and reduced absences from school. The findings here were very strong and positive. The program has successfully tackled the immediate problem of hunger at school. Children gave powerful testimony about this change. They spoke about no longer having noisy, growling stomachs in class or painful headaches from emptiness. One student's simple statement, "The headache I used to get from an empty stomach is gone," captures this direct relief. Teachers observed this shift physically, noting that children were no longer slumped over their desks in tiredness but were sitting up alert and ready to learn.

Beyond just stopping hunger, there were signs of better overall health. Children and teachers reported fewer common sicknesses like coughs and colds, suggesting their bodies were becoming stronger with daily nutrition. The most measurable impact however was on school attendance. Before the program, hunger was a major reason children skipped school. A student honestly shared, "Why would I walk far to school if there was no food?" Now, the guaranteed meal has made school the most important place to be. The Head teacher provided the proof of the official school records that showed daily attendance rising sharply from about 75% to over 92%. This means the program is not just feeding children but it is reliably bringing them through the school gates every single day.

Findings on School Attendance and Academic Engagement

The second goal was to examine how the program affected daily school life and learning. The findings show its influence is broad and positive. The promise of food has created a powerful motivation for punctuality. Students arrive early because, as one said, “No one wants to miss it.” This has helped the school day start smoothly and on time. Furthermore, the program has built trust with parents. Seeing that the school feeds their children, parents feel it is a caring and safe place. This has led to new enrollments, with the Deputy Head noting that parents cite the feeding program as a key reason for choosing the school.

Inside the classroom, the benefits are profound. With their basic hunger met children can now focus their minds. Teachers reported a dramatic change in engagement. Students are described as attentive, curious and actively participating. One teacher emphasized they are now “truly thinking,” moving from passive listening to asking why and how. Students themselves said they could finally concentrate, with one explaining that “the words in my book stay still” instead of dancing around the page. The classroom environment has also improved, with fewer arguments and a more cooperative atmosphere, making it easier for everyone to learn.

Findings on Implementation Challenges and Sustainability

The third goal was to identify the problems in running the program. While the outcomes are good, this part of the study revealed significant challenges that threaten the program’s stability. Day-to-day operations are difficult. The school lacks basic resources like sufficient cooking pots, reliable access to water and enough firewood. A teacher explained this slows everything down, sometimes delaying lessons. There is also anxiety when the food delivery truck is late, as the school has no backup supply.

The most serious findings however, concern the future. The program exists in a state of risky dependency. Financially, it relies completely on donations from outside the country. The Head teacher’s fear, “If donors stop, the program stops,” looms over its success. Operationally, it depends on the unpaid, hard work of community volunteers, mostly mothers. The program coordinators acknowledged these volunteers are at risk of burnout, as they sacrifice their own time without any compensation. If these donors or volunteers withdraw, the entire program could collapse, undoing all the positive gains for the children.

5.3 Conclusion of the Study

In conclusion, this study presents two important facts about the Mary's Meals program at Mayera Primary School. The first fact is that the program is a highly effective and transformative intervention. It works exactly as intended. By reliably providing a daily meal, it directly addresses the fundamental issue of child hunger. This single action creates a powerful chain reaction: improved physical well-being leads to an increase in school attendance, which in turn creates the necessary conditions for effective learning. The program proves that in a context of poverty, education and nutrition cannot be separated. You cannot teach a hungry child; therefore, this program ensures the children are fed, healthy, and present ready to learn.

The second fact is that this success is fragile. The program's current model is not sustainable. Its heavy reliance on external financial support and unpaid local labour are critical weaknesses. The operational challenges, like lack of cooking pots, are more than just inconveniences; they are symptoms of a program operating without a secure, long-term foundation. Therefore, the overall conclusion of this study is that while the Mary's Meals program delivers exceptional short-term benefits, its long-term survival and impact are uncertain. For the program to truly serve these children for years to come, it must evolve. It needs to transition from being a donor-funded project to a more resilient initiative that is owned, supported, and sustained by the local community and integrated into local systems.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions above, the following recommendations are made. They are directed at different groups who all play a part in the program's future. These suggestions aim to solve the immediate problems and build a stronger foundation.

Recommendations for Mayera Primary School Management

The school leadership must take active steps to secure the program's future within the school community.

1. Establish a Program Sustainability Committee: this is to say that form a small team comprising the Senior Teacher, two dedicated parent volunteers and a community leader. This committee's job will be to meet monthly to monitor challenges, plan solutions and communicate with donors and the local government.

2. Launch a School Nutrition Garden and use a defined plot of school land to start a vegetable garden. Pupils can learn basic agriculture as part of their science lessons and the products can be used to supplement the daily porridge. This will improve dietary variety, teach valuable skills and reduce dependency.
3. Formalize and Support the Volunteer System, to address volunteer burnout, the school should officially recognize their contribution with a yearly certificate of appreciation, create a clear, rotating schedule so cooking duties are shared fairly among a larger group of parents and explore non-cash incentives, such as allowing volunteers to take home a small portion of vegetables from the school garden.

Recommendations for Mary's Meals Program Coordinators

The coordinators can use their position to strengthen support and planning by

1. Advocate for Essential Infrastructure, present the findings on operational delays to the Mary's Meals head office. Request a specific small grant or in-kind donation to provide the school with t additional large cooking pots and fuel-efficient cook stoves.
2. Develop a Simple Contingency Plan, work with the school to create a one-page What If? plan. This plan should outline steps to take if a food delivery is late, such as using a small emergency fund to locally purchase a backup meal for that day to maintain trust.
3. Facilitate a Peer Learning Visit, use the Mary's Meals network to connect the Head teacher and volunteers with a similar school that has successfully started a garden or manages volunteers well. A visit or virtual meeting can provide practical proven ideas.

Recommendations for the Community and Local Government

Long-term sustainability requires broader local ownership and systemic support.

1. Community Mobilization, the Village Development Committee should officially recognize the school feeding program as a vital community asset. They can help organize a monthly community work day to collectively gather and store firewood for the school, relieving the burden on individual volunteers.

2. Strategic Advocacy to Local Government, the School Management Committee, supported by the Head teacher, must compile a formal advocacy report and a simple request for the District Education Office to consider a financial form of support.

5.5 final summary

This study set out to evaluate the impact of the Mary's Meals school feeding program at Mayera Primary School. The findings clearly show it is a vital and successful program. It acts as a powerful tool that improves children's health, boosts school attendance and creates a much better environment for learning by allowing children to concentrate and engage. It is, without doubt, a cornerstone of the school's current success.

The study also focused on the negative side of the program. This success is built on an unstable foundation. The program's long-term future is uncertain due to practical daily challenges and more critically, its deep dependence on external donors and unpaid volunteers. The final summary, therefore, is one of both celebration and urgent caution. The program is too valuable to lose. To protect it, deliberate action is needed now. By adopting the recommended actions such as starting a school garden for self-reliance, better supporting volunteers and actively seeking partnership with local government the school and community can build a more secure future for the program. This will ensure that the children of Mayera Primary continue to benefit from the simple, powerful promise of a daily meal and a quality education for many generations to come. The time to strengthen the foundation is now, while the program is strong, so that its good work does not fade away.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS, TEACHERS, SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM AND THE MARY'S MEALS COORDINATOR

My name is yankho chiyepa, a student at DMI-St John the Baptist University. I am conducting a study to understand the impact of the Mary's Meals school feeding program at Mayera Primary School. Your honest answers will highly contribute to the understanding of how the program is working. This is not a test. You do not have to write your name and all your answers will be kept confidential.

For student

Section A: About You

1. What is your age

2. What is your gender?

3. Which standard/grade are you in?

Section B: Nutritional Status & Absenteeism (Based on RO1)

1. Since you started eating the school meals, what changes have you noticed in your body?

2. How do you feel during class on days when you have eaten the school meal compared to days when you have not?

3. Before the school feeding program, how often did you miss school and why?

4. Now, with the feeding program, how often do you miss school and why?

Section C: Attendance & Academic Performance (Based on RO2)

1. How has the promise of a school meal changed your willingness to come to school every day?

2. In what ways do you think the school meal has helped you with your school work and learning?

3. How does eating the school meal affect your ability to pay attention and concentrate in class?

Section D: Challenges (Based on RO3)

1. What is it that you do not like about the school feeding program?

2. What suggestions do you have to make the school feeding program better?

Parents/Guardians

Section A: About You

1. What is your relationship to the child at this school?

2. How many of your children attending this school receive the school meal?

Section B: Nutritional Status & Absenteeism (Based on RO1)

1. What changes have you noticed in your child's health and physical well-being since they started receiving meals at school?

2. How has the school feeding program changed your child's pattern of missing school?

Section C: Attendance & Academic Performance (Based on RO2)

1. How has the feeding program influenced your decision to send your child to school every day?

2. Have you noticed any changes in your child's interest in schoolwork or their ability to learn since the program started?

Section D: Challenges (Based on RO3)

1. What challenges or concerns, if any, does your family or the community face with the school feeding program?

2. What do you think is needed for this program to continue successfully in the future?

Teachers

Section A: About You

1. What class(es) do you teach and for how long have you been at this school?

Section B: Nutritional Status & Absenteeism (Based on RO1)

1. What changes have you observed in the students' general health and energy levels since the feeding program began?

2. How has the students' rate of absenteeism changed since the introduction of the school meals?

Section C: Attendance & Academic Performance (Based on RO2)

1. In your observation, how has the feeding program affected students' punctuality and daily attendance?

2. What impact have you observed on the students' concentration, class participation, and overall academic performance?

Section D: Challenges (Based on RO3)

1. From your perspective, what are the main challenges in the implementation of the feeding program at this school?

2. What recommendations do you have to overcome these challenges and improve the program?

Food Program Coordinators / School Management

Section A: Nutritional Status & Absenteeism (Based on RO1)

1. What evidence or observations do you have regarding the program's impact on the nutritional status of the children at this school?

2. How, if at all, has the program influenced student absenteeism rates

Section B: Attendance & Academic Performance (Based on RO2)

1. What changes have you seen in school enrolment, daily attendance, and dropout rates since the program began?

2. What feedback have you received from teachers regarding the program's impact on student performance in class?

Section C: Challenges (Based on RO3)

1. What are the most significant operational challenges faced in implementing the program here?

2. What do you see as the biggest threat to the long-term sustainability of the program at this school?

3. What key changes or support are needed to ensure the program's continued effectiveness and sustainability?

**APPENDIX 2: LETTER FROM THE SCHOOL AND PERMISSION FROM THE
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOL.**



