



Original Article

Effectiveness of School Meal Provision in Improving Female Students' Academic Performance in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania

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This study investigated the effectiveness of school meal provision in improving female students' academic performance in community secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality. A total of 253 respondents were randomly selected to participate in the study through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. Data was analysed through descriptive statistics. The study established regarding the effectiveness of school meals in improving female students' academic performance and found that the provision of school meals reduced absenteeism, lateness, and dropout rate, while also improving students' concentration, involvement in classroom tasks and classroom management. The study recommends that effective provision of food should be extended to all schools across the Municipal. School administration should ensure the provision of a balanced diet so that learners can enjoy the food and have better health. Government authorities and other interested groups should also strive to sustain effective food provision in order to raise the level of female students' participation in learning.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, access to primary education and secondary education has improved significantly in many parts of the world. However, globally, an estimated 61.6 million girls of secondary school age are still not enrolled in school, accounting for 53% of the total number of students out of school. During the last 40 years, the World Food Programme (WFP) has become the largest international implementer of Food for Education (FFE) programmes in the developing world (UNICEF, 2022).

In 2004, WFP-assisted FFE programmes were ongoing in 72 countries, reaching approximately 21.7 million beneficiaries. FFE programmes are designed to support equitable access to education among the most vulnerable and food-insecure population education and to reduce gender disparities in education (World Food Programme, 2005). By supporting FFE programmes that provide school feeding (school meals or snacks) and/or take-home rations, WFP intends to support efforts aimed at achieving universal primary and secondary schools.

Since 2001, WFP has been implementing standardised school feeding surveys to provide a sound basis for monitoring, evaluation, management, and reporting of FFE programmes. This report consolidates, for the first time, results from all WFP-assisted schools in sub-Saharan Africa surveyed between 2002 and 2005. The surveys covered over 1 million pupils in over 4,000 schools in 32 countries (Gelli et al., 2007). This article will describe the methodology employed in the study, outline the empirical results of the

analysis, and discuss the main findings and conclusions.

Concerted efforts toward improving the quality of education are increasingly being witnessed among the nations of the world including African countries like Zambia, Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, and Kenya. This hinges on the growing awareness of the importance of education for social-economic development and economic development, this being the basis of most gender programmes aiming at enhancing the capacities of women in various sectors including education.

Provision of school meals in Tanzania is supported by either parents contributed to or by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in collaboration with the WFP to provide foodstuff like maize and beans as well as rice sacks (Malingumu, 2008). One of the most recent initiatives was the introduction of the school meal programme in 2006, which is a nationwide programme implemented in many districts in Tanzania including Morogoro municipality.

Despite the provision of school meals in secondary schools in Tanzania, the quality of education has not been very satisfactory. Scholars and other stakeholders are worried that the quality of education has continued to decline (Malingumu, 2008). Appropriate school feeding programmes can increase access to education and its quality by improving children's nutrition and health (Alderman, 2009).

In Tanzania, several efforts have been made by scholars such as Japhari (2014) in Singida and Evaristo (2015) in Njombe District on school meal provision significance in academic performances.

However, even though several types of research have been conducted on school meal provision in relation to educational outcomes, gender perspective has not been given consideration.

Consequently, a number of issues have remained unknown: to what extent has school meal provision increased female students' enrolment and access to education? How has the provision of meals improved female students' performance by reducing their rate of school absence and lack of concentration in class? Therefore, this study aims at assessing the effectiveness of school meal provision in improving female students' academic performance in community secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodology that guided the study. The study used a mixed research approach and a descriptive survey research design. A sample of 96 Ordinary Teachers, 6 heads of Schools, 75 Form Four Female Students, 75 Parents and 1 District Education Officer were used in the study. A simple random sampling technique was used in selecting ordinary teachers to form four female students and parents, while a purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of

heads of schools and DEO. Questionnaires were administered to ordinary teachers, interviews were made to head of schools and DEO, focus group discussions were held with form four female students and parents, and documentary reviews were used in data collection. Quantitative data were analysed by using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed through content analysis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The general objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of school meal provision in improving female students' academic performance in Morogoro Municipality. The findings of this study are presented below.

Students Absenteeism

Results in *Table 1* show that about 52(54.2%) respondents agreed that the provision of school meals had reduced absenteeism, 11(11.5%) respondents were neutral, and the remaining 33(34.4%) respondents strongly disagreed. These results show that the majority (54.2%) agreed that the provision of school meals had reduced female students' absenteeism hence balanced diet should be improved.

Table 1: Student Absenteeism

Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	52	54.2
Neutral	11	11.5
Disagree	33	34.4
Total	96	100

Source: Field Data (2022)

These results indicate that the provision of food acted as a strong incentive for children to attend school on a regular basis. In many communities, girls mostly benefited from the provision of school meals because in most families, girls were culturally disadvantaged such that in hardship situations, male children were given the opportunity over girls to go

to school. The provision of school meals could provide a way in which parents could save money by spending less food and thereby allowing girls to attend school.

These findings were supported by a parent in a Focus Group Discussion who revealed that: -

Since we have started the provision of school meals in our schools, it was noted that children who were provided with meals in schools attended classes more regularly and were less likely to drop out.

These findings are in agreement with the study by King and Burgess (1995) who found that school feeding programmes effectively reduced absenteeism and increased students' enrolments. Similarly, the study by Del Rosso (1999) in Jamaica showed that the provision of breakfast to primary school students acts as a strong incentive to attend school on a regular basis. As such, improving current school meal provision practices will guarantee greater school attendance on the part of female students in Morogoro. This is necessary as

Table 2: Classroom Achievements

Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	50	52.1
Neutral	10	10.4
Disagree	36	37.5
Total	96	100

Source: Field Data (2022)

The implications of this finding are that providing school meals to students helped to increase students' concentration span and learning capacity by reducing short-term hunger in the classroom. School meals acted as a good way to channel vital nourishment to poor children. Providing students with food therefore helped them to increase attention and concentration in their learning and thus led to high scores in their subjects among female students.

Table 3: Improve Involvement in Classroom Tasks

Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	54	56.3
Neutral	8	8.3
Disagree	34	35.4
Total	96	100

Source: Field Data (2022)

the contribution of women towards socio-economic development depends so much on their academic performance and achievements.

Classroom Achievements

Results in *Table 2* reveal that about 50(52.2%) respondents agreed that the provision of school meals had caused improvement in classroom achievements among students, 10(10.4) respondents were neutral and the remaining 36(37.5%) respondents disagreed. These results show that majority of respondents (52.1%) of the respondents agreed that the provision of school meals had caused improvement in classroom achievements among female students.

Involvement in Classroom Tasks

Results in *Table 3* reveal that about 54(56.3) respondents agreed that the provision of school meals had improved involvement in classroom tasks among students, 8(8.3%) respondents were neutral and the remaining 34(35.4%) respondents disagreed. These results show that the majority (56.3%) agreed that improvement in involvement in classroom tasks among students is the result of the provision of school meals in secondary schools.

Findings of the study revealed that school meal provision has made students active in class, asking questions, making comments, and joining in discussions. This plays an important role in giving students an opportunity to receive input from fellow students, apply their knowledge, and enhance their academic performance. This also helps teachers in getting a more accurate idea on what is the understanding level of students about the concept being taught. This implies that school meal provisions can serve as an important avenue of eliciting students' motivation to learn as well as enhancing their critical mindedness through students' engagement.

Table 4: Reduce Dropout Rate

Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	54	56.3
Neutral	8	8.3
Disagree	34	35.4
Total	96	100

Source: Field Data (2022)

These findings indicate that through the provision of school meals, dropout cases in selected secondary schools have been reduced. The reason given for this by some respondents is that school meal provision has reduced hunger which previously led to poor performance and consequently low motivation and abandonment of studies entirely. Furthermore, the provision of school meals helps female students to attend their classes with fresh and cosy bodies and minds than thinking about finding food.

These findings were supported by a parent in a Focus Group Discussion who revealed that: -

I am very happy with the programme and my children get meals at the school. This

The Rate of Dropout

Results in *Table 4* reveal that about 54(56.3%) respondents agreed that the provision of school meals had improved involvement in classroom tasks among students, 8(8.3%) respondents were neutral and the remaining 34(35.4%) respondents disagreed. These results show that the majority of respondents (56.3%) agreed that improvement in involvement in classroom tasks among students is the result of the provision of school meals in secondary schools.

programme helps my children in getting enough meals at school and is hoping to improve their academic performance.

Concentration in Class

Results in *Table 5* reveal that about 56(58.3%) respondents agreed that the provision of school meals had improved involvement in classroom tasks among students, 6(6.3%) respondents were neutral and the remaining 34(35.4%) respondents disagreed. These results show that majority of the respondents (58.3%) agreed that improvement of concentration among students is the result of the provision of school meals in secondary schools.

Table 5: Concentration in Class

Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	56	58.3
Neutral	6	6.3
Disagree	34	35.4
Total	96	100

Source: Field Data (2022)

These findings indicate that schools making the connection between what students eat and their health need to serve healthier meals. In order for students to concentrate on their schoolwork, they need a healthy brain. The provision of school meals has played an important role in contributing to brain function. The finding revealed that more time is spent on achieving the objectives of the lesson and less time on activities or discipline is needed to retain the female students' focus.

Classroom Management

Results in Table 3.6 reveals that about 50(52.1%) respondents agreed that the provision of school meals had improved classroom management, 10(10.4%) respondents were neutral and the remaining 36(37.5%) respondents disagreed. These results show that majority of the respondents (52.1%) agreed that improvement in classroom management is the result of the provision of school meals in secondary schools.

Table 6: Classroom Management

Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	50	52.1
Neutral	10	10.4
Disagree	36	37.5
Total	96	100

Source: Field Data (2022)

The findings revealed that through the provision of meals, classroom lessons run smoothly without disruptive behaviour from students compromising the delivery of instruction. This happens because students are learning without hunger. Furthermore, students actively participate in the creation of guidelines governing classroom behaviour. In addition to that, these programmes enhance student behaviour so effective learning can take place.

Lateness to Class

Results in Table 3.7 reveals that about 54(56.3%) respondents agreed that the provision of school meals had reduced lateness in classroom tasks among students, 8(8.3%) respondents were neutral and the remaining 34(35.4%) respondents disagreed. These results show that the majority of the respondents (56.3%) agreed that reduce in lateness is the result of the provision of school meals in secondary schools.

Table 7: Lateness to Class

Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	54	56.3
Neutral	8	8.3
Disagree	34	35.4
Total	96	100

Source: Field Data (2022)

The findings revealed that, before the preparation of food, the school cook has to take the attendance of the students who are available. This has forced students to attend earlier in school so as to be included in the list of those who will take meals on that day. For those students who come late after attendance has been taken, they are the last ones to take meals. The consequence of this is that such students might not get meals. These findings were supported by a head of school in the interview who revealed that: -

In our school, since we have started providing meals to our students, lateness among students has been reduced to a great extent. This happened because in order for a student to get meals, she has to come early and be registered.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussions presented, the study makes the following conclusions; school meal provision fosters female students' learning by reducing their absenteeism and dropout and improving involvement and concentration. It can also be concluded that school meal provision is effective in improving female students' educational attainment. In this perspective, school provision is a viable undertaking in the educational sector.

The study recommends that effective provision of food should be extended to all schools across the Municipal. School administration should ensure the provision of a balanced diet so that learners can enjoy the food and have better health. Government authorities and other interested groups should also strive to sustain effective food provision in order to raise the level of female students' participation in learning.

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