

Determinants of Successful School Feeding Programmes in Public and Private Early Childhood Development and Education Centres in Bungoma South Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract- School feeding programmes have become a principal instrument for improving children's nutrition and educational participation, yet their success varies considerably between institutions, and comparative evidence from Early Childhood Development and Education centres is scarce. This paper reports the first objective of a larger study and assesses the determinants of successful school feeding programmes in public and private Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Bungoma South Sub-County, Kenya. A comparative descriptive survey design was adopted. From a target population of 215 centres, 65 centres were selected by stratified and simple random sampling, and data were collected from teachers by questionnaire, from headteachers by semi-structured interview, from parents through focus group discussions and from centres through an observation checklist. Of 130 questionnaires administered, 104 were returned, giving a response rate of 80.0 percent; 59 of 65 headteachers were interviewed, giving 90.8 percent; six focus group discussions involving 60 parents were completed; and observation checklists were completed at all 65 centres. The questionnaire returned modest and internally varied assessments, with only regularity of meal provision reaching agreement at a mean of 3.46, while consistency of food supply, adequacy of storage and preparation facilities, community support and adequacy of funding all clustered near the neutral point, the lowest being funding adequacy at 2.80. Observation established that feeding programmes were operational at 96.97 percent of public and 87.50 percent of private centres, with public centres better provided in storage, kitchens and utensils and private centres marginally better in clean water. Interview and focus group evidence converged independently on government support, parental involvement and effective school management as the principal determinants. The study concludes that basic infrastructure is largely in place while the financial foundation is not, and that funding adequacy is the binding constraint on programme success.

Index Terms- Early Childhood Development and Education, Funding sustainability, Programme

management, School feeding programmes, Stakeholder participation.

I. INTRODUCTION

School feeding programmes have become an important global strategy for improving children's nutrition, promoting school participation and enhancing learning outcomes, particularly among children from low-income households. Introduced initially as welfare interventions addressing hunger among school-going children, they have developed into comprehensive social protection and educational instruments contributing to food security and human capital formation, and are now treated as mechanisms for improving health, nutritional status, cognitive development and educational participation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Global investment has increased considerably over the past decade as governments have come to treat school meals as an investment in education rather than as food assistance alone. Recent reporting indicates that approximately 466 million children across 176 countries were receiving school meals, an increase of nearly 80 million on the position four years earlier, and that more than 100 countries have established national school meal policies with governments providing the majority of financing from domestic budgets [1]. Beyond nutritional benefit, school feeding has been shown to strengthen local food systems and household food security [2].

Effectiveness nevertheless differs considerably across countries because of variation in funding mechanisms, programme management, food availability and stakeholder participation. Where high-income countries have generally achieved extensive coverage and consistent implementation, many low- and middle-income countries continue to contend with

inadequate financing, rising food prices, weak institutional capacity and irregular supply, all of which limit the educational and nutritional outcomes the programmes are intended to produce.

Across Africa, school feeding has been adopted within national education and food security policy as a means of raising enrolment, improving attendance and reducing dropout among children from disadvantaged households, and contributes to the Continental Education Strategy for Africa through home-grown models that link school demand to local agricultural supply [3]. Implementation remains uneven, however, with inadequate and unsustainable funding, rising prices, poor infrastructure, weak institutional capacity and climate-related shortages producing irregular provision and reduced coverage, particularly in rural and marginalised communities.

In Kenya, school feeding has been implemented for several decades. Support was initially provided largely by development partners, but the Government has progressively assumed responsibility for financing and coordination through the Ministry of Education in collaboration with county governments, partners and local communities, and has established a national strategy governing school meals, food safety and nutrition [4]. The importance of the programmes has grown with persistent food insecurity, poverty and rising prices, and adequate nutrition during early childhood is recognised as essential to physical growth, cognitive development and school readiness, which places particular weight on provision within Early Childhood Development and Education centres [6]. Investment in school feeding has been shown to generate educational and economic returns together, and sustained government investment and strong partnership have been recommended accordingly [5].

Two gaps in the evidence remain. First, most Kenyan research has examined primary schools or public institutions, so comparative evidence on public and private Early Childhood Development and Education centres is limited. Second, few studies examine the determinants of success comprehensively rather than treating funding, management or participation in isolation. Earlier work in the present study area established that school feeding contributed to improved enrolment, attendance and participation, but it was principally concerned with factors influencing

children's participation and did not investigate the determinants of programme success themselves [7]. This paper addresses those gaps by assessing the determinants of successful school feeding programmes in public and private Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Bungoma South Sub-County, Kenya.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

School feeding programmes are widely recognised as effective interventions for improving nutritional status, increasing enrolment, enhancing attendance and promoting participation among children from vulnerable households, and the Government of Kenya has continued to strengthen them through national strategy [4]. Despite this, successful implementation remains inconsistent, particularly within Early Childhood Development and Education centres, where inadequate and unsustainable funding, irregular supply, rising prices, weak infrastructure, limited management capacity and restricted stakeholder participation frequently produce interrupted provision and correspondingly reduced benefit.

Previous studies have reported positive effects on educational outcomes. Work in Kiambu County found that school feeding improved learner participation in Early Childhood Development and Education centres [8], and work in Machakos County identified funding and stakeholder participation as determinants of sustainability [9]. Systematic evidence indicates that programmes achieve their intended effects where financing, management and institutional commitment are adequate [10]. Most of this work, however, was conducted in primary or public institutions, outside Bungoma County, or examined single determinants in isolation.

Limited empirical evidence therefore exists on the determinants of successful school feeding programmes in public and private Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Bungoma South Sub-County. In particular, there is insufficient comparative evidence on how conditions differ between the two categories of provision, which matters because they operate under different funding and management arrangements: some centres receive support from government, development partners or well-wishers while others depend largely on parental contribution. This study therefore sought to assess the

determinants of successful school feeding programmes across both categories of centre in the sub-county.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Maslow's hierarchy of needs and human capital theory, which together explain why school feeding matters and why investment in it is warranted.

Maslow holds that human needs are arranged hierarchically, from physiological needs through safety, belonging and esteem to self-actualisation, and that physiological needs such as food must be satisfied before higher-order needs can effectively be pursued [12]. The theory bears directly on school feeding, which exists to meet learners' physiological needs through regular and nutritious meals. Where children are adequately fed they are more likely to attend regularly, participate actively and benefit from instruction; where they are not, hunger competes with learning for attention. The theory therefore predicts that the determinants which most affect the reliability of meal provision will be the determinants that most affect programme success.

Human capital theory, advanced by Schultz [13] and developed by Becker [14], treats expenditure on education, health and nutrition as investment that raises knowledge, skills, productivity and future economic wellbeing, generating returns to both the individual and society. Applied here, school feeding constitutes investment in children's nutrition and education rather than consumption, which explains why governments, parents and development partners commit resources to it and why the sustainability of that commitment is itself a determinant of success.

The two theories are complementary. Maslow establishes why provision must be reliable to be effective, and human capital theory establishes why sustained financing is rational and therefore why funding adequacy is properly treated as a determinant rather than as a background condition. Together they informed the identification of the study variables and the interpretation of the findings reported below.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The success of school feeding programmes has been attributed to several interrelated determinants, among

them sustainable funding, effective management, stakeholder participation, food availability, consistency of provision and institutional support. Findings differ according to setting, educational level and implementation model.

A. Kenyan Evidence

Work in Kiambu County examining the influence of school feeding on class participation among Early Childhood Development and Education pupils, using a descriptive survey with headteachers, teachers and quality assurance officers, found that regular provision of meals improved concentration, classroom participation and engagement, and that centres with well-managed programmes achieved better participation than those where provision was irregular [8]. Consistency of provision and effective management therefore emerge as determinants.

Work in Machakos County on policy initiatives in public primary schools established that inadequate funding was the greatest constraint on implementation, since many schools depended heavily on parental contribution, and that schools with reliable financial support and active community participation implemented more consistently than those relying on parents alone [9]. Read together, the two studies indicate that success depends on the interaction of financial, managerial and community support rather than on any single factor, which is the reasoning that led the present study to examine the determinants collectively.

B. International Evidence

A systematic review of programmes in low- and middle-income countries found that sustainable financing, institutional capacity, multisectoral coordination and effective monitoring contributed significantly to successful implementation, and that programmes supported jointly by governments, communities and development partners achieved greater sustainability than those dependent on a single source [10]. Qualitative work on the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme in southern Ethiopia identified government commitment, timely supply, stakeholder coordination and adequate infrastructure as essential, and found that delayed delivery, poor storage and inadequate financial resources undermined sustainability [11]. International reporting has further emphasised governance structures,

transparent financial management and meaningful stakeholder participation, noting that overdependence on donor funding threatens continuity once external support is withdrawn [19].

C. Divergence and Research Gap

Although the reviewed studies converge on the same broad set of determinants, they differ on relative weight. Kenyan work emphasises funding sustainability and parental participation, reflecting the reliance of many schools on community contribution, whereas international work gives greater weight to policy implementation, multisectoral coordination and institutional capacity. These differences plausibly reflect variation in education systems, policy frameworks and economic conditions.

Four gaps follow. Most studies address public primary schools rather than Early Childhood Development and Education centres, and private centres in particular, giving a population gap. Most were conducted outside Bungoma County, giving a geographical gap. Most examine determinants individually rather than as an interacting set, giving a conceptual gap. And most employ purely quantitative or purely qualitative approaches, giving a methodological gap. The present study addresses all four.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study adopted a comparative descriptive survey design. The design permitted collection of information on the existing status of school feeding programmes and comparison between public and private centres without manipulation of the study variables, and accommodated both quantitative and qualitative data. A descriptive survey is appropriate for collecting information on existing conditions and describing them as they are [15].

B. Study Area and Target Population

The study was conducted in Bungoma South Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya, which at the time of the study contained 95 public and 120 private Early Childhood Development and Education centres, giving 215 in total. The presence of both categories under different management and funding arrangements made the sub-county suitable for comparative analysis. The target population

comprised 215 headteachers, one per centre, 430 teachers, two per centre, and 860 parents, four per centre, giving 1,605 respondents.

C. Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A sample of 65 centres was drawn, representing 30 percent of the 215 centres, on the principle that a sample of between 10 and 30 percent of the target population is adequate for descriptive survey research [15]; the upper bound was adopted to secure adequate representation of both categories. This gave 29 public centres and 36 private centres. From the sampled centres the respondents comprised 65 headteachers, 130 teachers and 260 parents, a total sample of 455.

Stratified sampling was first used to divide the 215 centres into public and private strata. Simple random sampling was then used to select centres within each stratum, giving every centre an equal probability of selection and minimising selection bias. Headteachers were selected purposively as key informants with administrative responsibility for programme implementation. Two teachers per centre were selected by simple random sampling, and four parents per centre were selected randomly from among those visiting the centre during the data collection period.

D. Data Collection Instruments

A structured questionnaire administered to teachers collected quantitative data through closed items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A semi-structured interview guide was used with headteachers, permitting the researcher to probe where necessary. A focus group discussion guide was used with parents, and an observation checklist was used to record the availability of facilities and resources supporting programme implementation. The combination permitted triangulation across four independent sources.

E. Validity and Reliability

Content and construct validity were established by aligning all four instruments with the study objectives and variables and submitting them to the university supervisors and departmental experts for review, with their recommendations incorporated before data collection. A pilot study conducted outside the study area assessed the suitability of the instruments, and one focus group item was revised on the strength of the pilot findings. The pilot also led to the

questionnaire items being cast on a five-point Likert scale, which improved consistency of response. Internal consistency of the questionnaire, comprising fourteen Likert items, was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and yielded a coefficient of 0.729, above the conventional threshold of 0.70 and therefore acceptable.

F. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 27. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were computed and are presented in tables. Observation checklist data were analysed using frequencies and percentages and are reported separately for public and private centres. Qualitative data from headteacher interviews and parent focus group discussions were organised according to the study objectives, transcribed, coded and analysed thematically, and are reported narratively.

G. Ethical Considerations

An introductory letter was obtained from Kibabii University and research authorisation from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. Permission was obtained from the relevant education authorities and from the management of the sampled centres. The purpose of the study was explained to all participants and informed consent obtained before participation. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without adverse consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout.

VI. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A. Response Rate

Of the 130 questionnaires administered to teachers, 104 were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 80.0 percent. Of the 65 headteachers, 59 were interviewed, giving 90.8 percent. All six focus group discussions involving 60 parents were conducted as planned, and observation checklists were completed at all 65 sampled centres, giving 100 percent. The rates obtained were adequate for analysis and interpretation.

B. Teachers' Assessment of the Determinants

Teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with five statements bearing on the

determinants of successful school feeding programmes. The results are set out below.

Table 1: Teachers' Responses on the Determinants of Successful School Feeding Programmes (n = 104)

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Meals are provided regularly in this centre	3.46	1.421	Agree
The centre has a consistent supply of food throughout the term	3.29	1.252	Neutral
The centre has adequate facilities for food storage and preparation	2.96	1.292	Neutral
Parents and the community actively support the programme	3.29	1.252	Neutral
The centre has adequate funding to support the programme	2.80	1.368	Neutral

The pattern is one of qualified endorsement rather than agreement. Only the regularity of meal provision reached the agreement band, at a mean of 3.46. Consistency of supply and community support each returned 3.29, adequacy of storage and preparation facilities 2.96, and adequacy of funding 2.80, the lowest of the five. All five items carried standard deviations above 1.25, indicating substantial dispersion of opinion and therefore considerable variation in conditions across the sampled centres.

The internal ordering of these responses is informative. Teachers were most positive about the outcome closest to the child, namely that meals arrive regularly, and least positive about the two conditions that underwrite that outcome, namely funding and

physical facilities. The programmes were, on this evidence, delivering to learners more reliably than their financial and infrastructural foundations would suggest was sustainable.

C. Observed Facilities and Resources

The observation checklist recorded the availability of facilities supporting implementation at all 65 centres, comprising 33 public and 32 private centres.

Table 2: Observation Checklist Findings by Category of Centre

Observation Item	Public n (%)	Private n (%)
Feeding programme operational	32 (96.97)	28 (87.50)
Food storage facilities	23 (69.70)	21 (65.62)
Cooking area or kitchen	30 (90.91)	28 (87.50)
Clean water source	24 (72.73)	25 (78.12)
Eating utensils	30 (90.91)	20 (62.50)
Hygiene standards maintained	29 (87.88)	27 (84.38)

Nearly all public centres and most private centres had operational feeding programmes. Public centres recorded higher proportions on food storage, kitchen facilities, eating utensils and hygiene standards, while private centres recorded a marginally higher proportion of clean water sources. The widest divergence between the two categories occurred on eating utensils, at 90.91 percent against 62.50 percent, and the narrowest on hygiene standards.

Food storage was the weakest item in both categories, available at 69.70 percent of public and 65.62 percent of private centres, which means that roughly a third of centres in each category lacked adequate storage. Read against the questionnaire result on facilities, the two sources agree: storage and preparation capacity is the

infrastructural weakness common to both categories of provision.

D. Headteachers' Accounts

Headteachers were asked to identify the major factors contributing to successful implementation, and their responses were analysed thematically. Three determinants emerged: government support, parental involvement and effective school management. Most headteachers reported that financial support from the County Government, the National Government, parents and non-governmental organisations was central to sustaining provision. They further explained that proper management of available resources and active parental participation contributed to smooth implementation, and that regular communication with parents encouraged timely contribution and thereby strengthened sustainability.

E. Parents' Accounts

Parents participating in the focus group discussions identified the same three determinants: government support, effective school management and parental participation. They observed that cooperation between parents, schools and government agencies was what secured consistent provision, and that active parental involvement in supporting feeding activities strengthened implementation.

F. Triangulation

The four sources are consistent, though they contribute different things. The interview and focus group strands converged independently on government support, parental involvement and effective management as the principal determinants. The observation checklist confirmed that most centres possessed operational programmes and the basic facilities required to run them, while identifying storage as the common weakness. The questionnaire, which measured operational conditions rather than these three constructs directly, showed that the two conditions underpinning them, namely funding and facilities, were the items teachers rated lowest. The convergence of qualitative testimony with the weakest quantitative items strengthens rather than complicates the finding: the determinants stakeholders identify as decisive are precisely those they report as least adequately met.

VII. DISCUSSION

The identification of government support, parental involvement and effective school management as the principal determinants is consistent with the reviewed literature. The emphasis on effective management and regular provision corresponds to findings from Kiambu County [8], and the emphasis on funding and stakeholder participation corresponds to findings from Machakos County [9]. That both sets of determinants appear together in a single setting supports the position that programme success rests on the interaction of financial, managerial and community support rather than on any one of them, and is consistent with systematic evidence that sustainable financing, institutional capacity, coordination and monitoring operate jointly [10].

The questionnaire findings warrant careful reading because they are more modest than the qualitative accounts. Only regularity of provision reached agreement, and funding adequacy returned the lowest mean of the five items at 2.80. This is not a contradiction between the two strands but a distinction between what stakeholders consider decisive and what they consider present. Headteachers and parents identified government support and funding as determinants of success; teachers reported that funding was not adequate at their centres. The two statements are consistent, and together they identify funding as the binding constraint rather than as one determinant among several.

The observation findings sharpen this reading. Feeding programmes were operational at the great majority of centres, and kitchens, utensils and hygiene standards were present at levels above 84 percent in all but one instance. Basic capacity to prepare and serve meals is therefore largely in place. Food storage was the exception, absent at roughly a third of centres in both categories, and it was the questionnaire item on facilities that returned a mean below the neutral point. Storage is the point at which infrastructure and financing intersect, since a centre without storage cannot buy in bulk when prices are favourable and must instead purchase frequently at prevailing prices. This connects directly to the Ethiopian evidence that poor storage and delayed delivery undermine sustainability independently of the level of funding [11].

The public and private comparison shows smaller differences than the difference in funding arrangements might lead one to expect. Public centres were better provided on four of six observed items and private centres marginally better on one. The largest gap, on eating utensils, is a matter of consumable equipment rather than of capital infrastructure, and is consistent with private centres operating on parental contribution that fluctuates. The broad similarity of the two categories on operational status and hygiene suggests that the determinants identified operate across both, and that policy addressed to one category alone would leave the other's constraints untouched.

Read through the theoretical framework, the findings are coherent. Maslow's account implies that reliability of provision is what converts feeding into educational benefit [12], and the highest-rated questionnaire item was precisely regularity of provision, which indicates that the programmes are performing their essential function. Human capital theory implies that this performance depends on sustained investment [13], [14], and the lowest-rated item was funding adequacy. The programmes are therefore delivering on a financial base that stakeholders themselves do not regard as secure, which is the central practical finding of this objective.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study establishes that government support, parental involvement and effective school management are the principal determinants of successful school feeding programmes in public and private Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Bungoma South Sub-County. Headteachers and parents identified these determinants independently of one another, and the observation evidence confirmed that most centres possessed operational programmes and the basic facilities required to sustain them.

The quantitative evidence qualifies this conclusion in an important respect. Teachers agreed only that meals were provided regularly, and rated adequacy of funding lowest of the five items assessed, with adequacy of storage and preparation facilities also below the neutral point. The determinants identified as decisive are therefore the determinants reported as least adequately met, which locates funding

sustainability as the binding constraint on programme success rather than as one factor among several.

The comparison between public and private provision revealed narrower differences than the contrast in funding arrangements would suggest, with public centres better provided on most observed items and both categories weakest on food storage. The study concludes that the basic operational capacity to run school feeding programmes exists across both categories, that the financial foundation supporting it does not, and that storage capacity is the specific infrastructural point at which financial constraint translates into interrupted provision.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the County Government of Bungoma and the Ministry of Education should allocate adequate and predictable funding for school feeding in Early Childhood Development and Education centres, since funding adequacy was the determinant rated lowest by teachers and was identified by headteachers and parents as decisive.

Second, investment should be directed specifically at food storage capacity, which was absent at approximately a third of centres in both categories and which was the weakest observed item overall. Storage determines whether a centre can purchase in bulk and buffer against price movement, and it therefore mediates the effect of funding on continuity of provision.

Third, school management committees should strengthen collaboration with parents and local communities, and should maintain the regular communication that headteachers identified as securing timely contribution.

Fourth, centre administrators should establish monitoring and management systems that ensure regular food supply and proper utilisation of available resources, since effective management emerged as a determinant across both qualitative strands.

Fifth, support should extend to private as well as public centres. The comparative findings show that private centres face the same determinants and are, on most observed items, somewhat less well provided, so measures confined to public provision would leave a substantial proportion of learners unreached.

Sixth, further research should extend the comparison to other counties, should examine the relationship between storage capacity and continuity of provision directly, and should employ longitudinal designs capable of establishing whether the determinants identified here account for variation in programme survival over time.

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