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Implementation of The School-Based Feeding Program among Primary Pupils' in San Mariano I District and Its Relation to Their Academic Performance

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) and its relationship to the academic performance of primary-grade pupils in San Mariano I District. Using a descriptive-correlational research design, data were collected from 215 identified pupils who were wasted or severely wasted, 70 teachers, and 60 parents. Findings revealed that after the 120-day feeding intervention, 161 out of 215 pupils (74.88%) achieved normal nutritional status, showing significant improvement from the pre-intervention figures of 76.7% wasted and 23.3% severely wasted. Academic performance results showed that 76.7% of pupils achieved at least a "Satisfactory" rating, with a mean general weighted average (GWA) of 81.03. However, the correlation between SBFP implementation and academic performance was found to be statistically insignificant (teachers' $r = -0.168$, $p = 0.082$; parents' $r = -0.049$, $p = 0.356$). On the other hand, a significant relationship was found between parents' educational attainment and pupils' academic performance ($p < 0.05$). Problems encountered included delayed budget release (85.7% of teachers; 96.7% of parents), lack of parental cooperation, and additional workload for teachers. Despite these issues, the respondents generally perceived the program as well-implemented, with grand mean scores of 4.30 (teachers) and 4.24 (parents). These results imply that although SBFP improves health, academic success needs a multi-faceted approach involving home, school, and community support systems. The study recommends strengthening parental involvement, ensuring timely funding, and building strong partnerships for health and nutrition among stakeholders.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One indispensable factor that affects an individual's total growth and development is proper nutrition. Essentially, taking care of oneself involves meeting one's nutritional needs. In the school context, children who are found to be undernourished should be provided with proper nutrition to support their learning, thus ensuring they receive a quality education.

It is in school that children spend most of their time learning. Thus, in order to mold children to become well-rounded individuals, that is, physically, mentally, and psychologically fit, it is necessary that the school has a healthy school environment. The provision of quality health services in schools is truly important in developing children into productive and successful adults.

Schools that have nutrition programs in place can likely prevent nutritional deficiencies in children. They can ensure brain development and help in the learning capabilities of these children, thus improving their overall health conditions. Children are said to be the hope of the Fatherland. In their hands lies the future of the nation. Thus, their being well-rounded individuals must be ensured by educators. And to do this, children must not be affected by health issues and hunger. The overall health of children is indicated by their nutritional status.

In the Philippines, children and adolescents' health status remains an important issue in public health. During the 2016 Regional Dissemination Forum, the Food and Nutrition Research Institute–Department of Science and Technology (FNRI-DOST, 2016) reported that among 5–10-year-old school children in Region II:

- 1 out of 4 (26.8%) were underweight,
- 7 out of 100 (7.2%) were wasted,
- 3 out of 10 (27.7%) were stunted, and
- 9 out of 100 (9.1%) were overweight for their height.

Although these numbers indicate a minor decrease in malnutrition, the problem remains in many provinces. Malnutrition is a key worry for the Philippines' economic stability. To address this, the government and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have developed and implemented programs and interventions, including feeding programs.

As Senator Grace Poe emphasized, "proper nutrition is a sound investment for the future of our youth" (Tamayo, 2017).

To address this issue, the Department of Education (DepEd) leads efforts to strengthen health and nutrition among school children and preschoolers in public schools through the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP). Children who reach their full potential are more likely to become productive citizens contributing to national progress.

According to Umali (2014), DepEd relaunched the breakfast feeding program in school year 2010–2011 to solve malnutrition and short-term hunger among public school children. Short-term hunger refers to children who skip breakfast, especially those who travel long distances to school on an empty stomach. This initiative later became the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP), which allows schools to determine how best to meet their pupils' nutritional needs beyond breakfast. The program also aims to improve children's health status, attendance, and academic performance.

The introduction of a feeding program is timely and appropriate, as it may help address undernourishment among pupils and ultimately enhance their academic performance. In elementary schools within San Mariano I District, most families live below the poverty threshold and struggle to meet their children's basic needs.

As a result, school administrators have identified a large number of wasted and severely wasted primary school students who need care to improve their academic performance. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of the School-Based Feeding Program on the academic performance of primary grade students in San Mariano I District.

To achieve the goals of the School-Based Feeding Program, schools adopt various strategies, particularly in areas with higher percentages of undernourished pupils. Beyond improving nutritional status and attendance, the SBFP can also boost pupils' academic performance, as well-nourished students tend to be more motivated and physically able to learn. Alcuizar (2016) said that nutrition is a very important component that affects how well students perform academically in school. Therefore, there is a need to look into the implementation and impact of the SBFP.

1.1. Conceptual framework of the study

In developing countries like the Philippines, the school feeding program is a way to help school children. This program motivates children to attend school and helps keep them enrolled. When supplemented with initiatives like deworming and micronutrient supplementation, such programs can significantly enhance learning outcomes (Bundy *et al.*, 2009).

Providing nutritious meals to malnourished school children helps alleviate short-term hunger, which can enhance cognitive function and increase concentration during learning activities.

As explained by Apondi (2009), boosting nutritional status increases educational prospects since healthier children are better equipped and willing to learn. When the pupils' nutritional needs are addressed, they become more enthusiastic and ready to learn. Furthermore, healthy pupils perform better in different educational activities (Campbell University, 2016).

Nutrition directly affects academic achievement. In the words of Campbell University (2016), deficits in zinc, vitamin B, omega-3 fatty acids, and protein have a harmful effect on children's cognitive development. Trans and saturated fat-rich diets, on the other hand, decrease cognitive function, making learning difficult.

Poor nutrition also has indirect effects on academic performance. Illnesses stemming from poor dietary habits can lead to frequent absences and reduced energy, limiting pupils' ability to concentrate and keep up with lessons.

For more than six years, the Department of Education (DepEd), through the Bureau of Learner Support Services–School Health Division (BLSS–SHD), has continued improving the health and nutrition of public school pupils by updating policies to ensure that the feeding program achieves its intended goals.

Republic Act 11037, also known as the "Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act," was signed into law by President Rodrigo Duterte. This law establishes a national feeding program to address hunger and undernutrition among Filipino



children. The program is run by the Department of Education (DepEd) in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). The DSWD offers supplemental meals to children aged 3 to 5 in childcare centers, while DepEd implements the SBFP for kindergarten through grade six students. The program consists of breastfeeding, vitamin supplementation, deworming, and vaccination (Placido, 2018). To back this initiative, DepEd Order No. 39, s. 2017 outlines operational parameters for SBFP implementation from school years 2017 to 2022. It targets all Severely Wasted (SW) and Wasted (W) Kindergarten to Grade 6 pupils, to improve their nutritional status by at least 70% after 120 feeding days. It also seeks to boost classroom attendance (85%–100%) and improve health and nutrition-related behaviors.

Furthermore, DepEd Order No. 15, s. 2018, issued supplemental guidelines for the 2018 implementation of the SBFP. It focuses on improving the attendance and performance of undernourished learners and includes Kindergarten pupils in the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition (PPAN) priority areas to combat stunting.

Senate Bill No. 1279, also known as the “Pagkaing Pinoy Para sa Batang Pinoy” Act, aims to create a national school feeding program to combat hunger and undernutrition among basic education students. It ensures access to nutritious food sourced from local farmers and fishers and encourages the integration of school and household gardening through the “Gulayan sa Paaralan Program” (GPP).

1.2. Statement of the problem

Generally, the study aimed to determine the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program in relation to the academic performance of primary grade pupils in San Mariano I District. Specifically, the research sought to answer the following questions:

i. What is the profile of the primary grade pupils in San Mariano I District in terms of:

- sex,
- age,
- parents' educational attainment, and
- parents' occupation
- nutritional status

ii. What is the academic performance of the primary grade pupils in San Mariano I District?

iii. What is the extent of implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program in San Mariano I District as perceived by :

- teachers
- parents

iv. What are the problems encountered along with the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program in San Mariano I District by:

- Teachers
- Parents

v. Is there a significant relationship between the profile of the primary grade pupils and their academic performance?

vi. Is there a significant relationship between the extent of implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program in San Mariano I District and the primary grade pupils' academic performance?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Proper nutrition plays a big role in a child's physical growth and cognitive development. Many research studies have found that children who are well-nourished attend school regularly, have better focus on their studies, and perform excellently in academics (Galal & Hulett, 2003; Taras, 2005). On the contrary, undernourished children often struggle at school since they have low energy levels and their spans of attention are poor. Moreover, they frequently get absent, which results in their low academic performance (Amoadu *et al.*, 2024; Bundy *et al.*, 2009). In many developing countries like the Philippines, School-Based Feeding Programs (SBFPs) have been introduced as an intervention to fight malnutrition and improve learning outcomes. According to Umali (2014), the Department of Education's SBFP aims at rehabilitating wasted and severely wasted pupils through a 120-day feeding intervention. It has the intended benefits of improving school attendance and academic performance. A study by Apondi (2009) also confirmed a strong association between improved nutritional status and better classroom engagement.

In spite of the theoretical benefits, no solid evidence has been established that feeding programs improve academic achievement. Some researchers, such as Adroque and Orlicki (n.d.), discovered beneficial links between in-school eating and improved academic outcomes, such as lower dropout rates. However, Evans (2015) and Naelga (2016) stressed that feeding programs alone may not result in significant academic gains due to the impact of extrinsic factors such as quality of classroom environment, support and participation of parents, and home environment or situation.

On top of these factors, the sustainability and effectiveness of SBFPs also rely on timely funding, consistent meal quality, and stakeholder cooperation. As explained by Tamayo (2017), delays in budget release, lack of parental participation, and added teacher workload have been identified as common problems in program implementation. These implementation gaps can weaken the program's intended academic and health benefits. Although at the national level, there is available data, little research has been conducted in the local setting, in underdeveloped and rural areas such as San Mariano I District. It is therefore important to understand how local situations or conditions impact the SBFP's implementation and results. By looking into the connection between SBFP implementation and the academic performance of pupils who are nutritionally at risk, as well as by identifying challenges that affect the success of the program, this study can contribute to the existing body of literature.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

Rudison (2015) explained that the descriptive research approach enables a researcher to explain the characteristics of the target population while drawing inferences about the variables. Using a descriptive research method, the researcher can create a pre-structured questionnaire with open-ended and closed-ended questions. Moreover, the researcher can conduct statistical analysis on the acquired data.

This study employed a descriptive method of research. It



involves gathering data to determine the nutritional status, profile, and academic performance of the pupil respondents. It also includes the perception of the teachers and parents on the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program. Furthermore, a correlation design was used to determine the relationship between the profile of the primary grade pupils and their academic performance, and the relationship between the extent of implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program in San Mariano 1 District and the primary grade pupils' academic performance. A survey method through a questionnaire was conducted to determine the problems encountered in the program implementation.

3.2. Description of the respondents

The study included 215 respondents. They were pupils categorized as wasted or seriously wasted throughout the 2018-2019 school year. This number was divided as follows: Grade 1 - 86, Grade 2 - 70, and Grade 3 - 59. Primary grade pupils were enrolled in various elementary schools in San Mariano I District, San Mariano, Isabela. Furthermore, the researcher interviewed seventy (70) teachers and sixty (60) parents to assess the extent to which the School-Based Feeding Program was implemented.

3.3. Data gathering instruments used

The validity and reliability of the instrument were first established before gathering the intended data.

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), validity is measuring the degree of appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of inferences based on data collected. The research questionnaire was validated by the researcher's adviser, district school nurse, professor, principal, and school head.

In addition, the reliability of the instrument is connected to the validity. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) denote that reliability is the measure of consistency of the results gained in the instrument. The result of the reliability was calculated and described using Cronbach's Alpha.

The 16-item scale has good reliability 19, $\alpha = 0.85$. Hence, the responses/data that can be gathered from the teachers can be trusted.

Likewise, the 13-item scale has an acceptable reliability, $\alpha = 0.76$, which suggests that the responses that can be gathered from the parents are trustworthy enough to serve as a basis for the findings of the current study.

The data collection instruments used in the study include three sections for the teacher-respondents. Part I asks for information on the profile of the respondents. Part II determines the extent to which the School-Based Feeding Program has been implemented in the San Mariano I District. And, Part III solicits the challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents.

3.4. Reliability of the instrument

The reliability of the research instruments was established using Cronbach's Alpha, a widely accepted measure of internal consistency. It evaluates how closely related a set of items are as a group. To compute this, responses to Likert-scale items from teacher and parent questionnaires were encoded and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The software calculated inter-item correlations and variances to

produce the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

- The teacher questionnaire (16 items) yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.85, indicating good internal consistency.

- The parent questionnaire (13 items) yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.76, indicating acceptable reliability.

These results confirm that the items were internally consistent and suitable for measuring perceptions regarding SBFP implementation.

A table showing the profile, nutritional status, and GWA of SBFP beneficiaries in each school was also provided by the researcher. Before and after the feeding program, data on the students' nutritional status were collected. The SBFP coordinators provided information on the nutritional status of the pupil beneficiaries, while the class advisers for each student beneficiary provided information on their profile and GWA.

3.5. Operational definition of academic performance

Academic performance was measured using the General Weighted Average (GWA) of each pupil, as recorded in their report cards. The GWA used in this study was collected after the 120-day SBFP intervention, specifically from the second and third grading periods, to assess potential academic gains resulting from the program.

Grades were interpreted using the Department of Education's K to 12 standards:

90-100: Outstanding

85-89: Very Satisfactory

80-84: Satisfactory

75-79: Fairly Satisfactory

Below 75: Did Not Meet Expectations (Note: none of the pupils fell below 75)

This post-intervention measure allowed the researcher to determine whether nutritional improvements contributed to better academic outcomes.

Additionally, the researcher constructed a survey questionnaire for the parent-respondents consisting of three parts. Part I seeks the profile of the respondents. Part II determines the respondents' perception of the extent of implementation of the SBFP in San Mariano I District. And, the last part (Part III) asks the parent-respondents to identify the challenges or problems they met.

The researcher prepared her survey instrument based on DepEd Order No. 39 series of 2017 (Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of School-Based Feeding Program for School Years 2017-2022). It was subjected to validation by her adviser, district school nurse, external panelist, and statistician for a validity and reliability test.

3.6. Data analysis procedure

In analyzing the data, the researcher identifies the following statistical tools to be employed in answering the statement of the problems prepared for the study: Frequency Count and Percentage, weighted mean or mean score, Pearson's R Correlation Coefficient, and Chi-square.

The frequency counts and the percentage were used to determine the profile of the respondents as to sex, age, parents' educational attainment, parents' occupation, and nutritional status. The same tool was used for the problems encountered



in the implementation of the school-based feeding program as perceived by teachers and parents. For the respondents' academic performance, frequency, percentage, and mean were utilized. The weighted mean was employed to identify the extent of implementation of the school-based feeding program according to teachers and parents. Chi-square was used for the relationship between the pupil-respondents' profile and their academic performance. Pearson's R Correlation Coefficient was utilized to find out the correlation between the academic performance of pupils and the extent of implementation of the school-based feeding program as perceived by parents and teachers.

An analysis of the extent of the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program in San Mariano I District was made using the scale, arbitrary level, and description.

The academic performance of pupils as reflected in their general weighted average in the report cards for the two (2) grading periods determined the academic performance of the pupil beneficiaries and was interpreted using the assessment for the K to 12 Basic Education Program.

Chi-square was used in finding out whether or not there is a significant relationship between the profile of the primary grade pupils and their academic performance. Pearson's R Correlation Coefficient was utilized in determining whether or not there is a significant relationship between the extent of implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program in San Mariano 1 District and the primary grade pupils' academic performance.

The test of hypotheses is made at the .05 level of significance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Profile of the pupils

The profile of 215 pupils shows that a majority were male (53.48%) and aged 7 years (39.53%), with 6- to 7-year-olds having the highest number of wasted and severely wasted children. Most parents were high school graduates (37.21%) and worked primarily in farming (77.7%). Data on nutrition showed that 165 pupils (76.7%) were wasted and 50 (23.3%) were severely wasted prior to intervention. After a 120-day feeding program, 161 pupils achieved normal nutritional status, significantly improving from the pre-feeding data. This result supports previous studies showing the effectiveness of school-based feeding programs in rehabilitating at least 70% of undernourished children. Nonetheless, earlier research indicates problems can occur because of external factors such as illness or family background. On the whole, the results support the positive impact of the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) in solving malnutrition among early-grade pupils and reveal the value of continued nutritional monitoring, especially for boys and younger children who are more inclined to undernutrition.

4.2. Pupils' academic performance

Based on the academic achievement of the 215 respondents, 40% received grades between 75 and 79, which were classified as Fairly Satisfactory, and 36.7% had grades between 80 and 84, which were rated as Satisfactory. In addition, 13% received Very Satisfactory scores ranging from 85 to 89, and 10.2% received Outstanding grades ranging from 90 to 100. No pupils scored

below 75, indicating that all respondents met the minimum passing mark. The computed mean grade is 81.03, which falls within the Satisfactory range. This suggests that while most pupils performed satisfactorily, a substantial portion still needs academic support to move toward higher levels of performance.

4.3. The extent of implementation of the school-based feeding program in san mariano

The extent of implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) in San Mariano 1 District, as perceived by both teachers and parents, is generally implemented, with several indicators rated as fully implemented. Teachers stated complete implementation in areas such as concern for pupils' health, integration of nutrition subjects into classes, and hygiene instruction, with a grand mean score of 4.30. Parents shared similar sentiments, indicating strong levels of government assistance and hygiene education, with a grand mean of 4.24. However, both groups evaluated other areas as inconsistent, such as child deworming and parental cautions against junk food. Parents saw deworming as only partially implemented. These findings emphasize the value of improved teacher-parent collaboration, more constant monitoring of students' BMI, and regular health and nutrition activities. Strengthening collaboration with the Rural Health Unit and maintaining initiatives like *Gulayan sa Paaralan* are important in ensuring the program's long-term viability and efficacy in combating malnutrition.

4.4. Problems encountered by the teachers and parents along the implementation of the school-based feeding program

According to both teachers and parents, the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) met various challenges during its implementation. The foremost difficulty raised by both groups was the delay in budget release, which was cited by 85.7% of teachers and 96.7% of parents, interfering with timely meal preparation and forcing teachers to request advanced funds. Another major worry expressed by 52.8% of teachers and 81.7% of parents was a lack of parental cooperation, indicating a weak parent-teacher relationship that impedes the success of the program.

Teachers also expressed concern that the program consumes classroom time (42.8%) and adds to their workload (50%). Similarly, parents acknowledged that the program takes much of the teachers' time (63.3%) and is an additional burden (58.3%). Other issues include irregular monitoring by health experts, as noted by both groups, and the lack of utensils, though this was a lesser concern. These findings suggest the need for better budgeting processes, stronger parent engagement, and institutional support.

4.5. Relationship between pupils' profile and their academic performance

The results indicate that the only factor in the students' profile that significantly correlates with their academic performance (p -value < 0.05) is the parents' educational attainment.

This indicates that children of more educated parents tend to perform better academically, likely due to increased parental



involvement, provision of learning materials, and support in schoolwork. Other profile variables—sex, age, parents' occupation, and nutritional status – do not show a significant relationship with academic performance ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$). These results align with studies by Bakar, Mamat, and Ibrahim (2017), emphasizing the impact of parental education on children's academic success. Although nutritional status was not statistically significant, previous studies suggest it may still influence learning indirectly, as poor nutrition can lead to illness and absenteeism. The results underscore the important role of parents as first educators and suggest that improving their educational level can positively affect their children's academic outcomes.

4.6. Relationship between pupils' academic performance and the extent of implementation of school-based feeding program

The correlation between pupils' academic performance and the extent of implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP), as perceived by both teachers and parents, shows no significant relationship, with $p\text{-values}$ of 0.082 and 0.356, respectively ($p > 0.05$). The Pearson correlation coefficients (-0.168 for teachers and -0.049 for parents) indicate a weak negative correlation, suggesting that the implementation level of the SBFP does not directly influence pupils' academic performance. These findings align with previous studies by Naelga (2016), Evans (2015), and Adrogué and Orlicki, who suggest that various intervening and uncontrollable factors, such as the quality of meals, data limitations, and other external influences, may affect outcomes. This contrasts with studies reporting a positive link between feeding programs and academic achievement, including improved enrollment, attendance, and cognitive function.

The lack of a significant association suggests that nutrition alone may not be sufficient to effect measurable improvements in academic performance. Other mediating factors could be at play. Poor school attendance, even among SBFP beneficiaries, can affect learning continuity. Similarly, low parental participation and an unsupportive home environment might impede academic progress. Teaching quality is also important; with teachers reporting increased SBFP workload, teaching efficacy may have been impacted. These findings highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach that incorporates health, family engagement, and high-quality training to optimize the advantages of feeding programs.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study imply several important directions for educational stakeholders. First, the significant improvement in pupils' nutritional status following the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) shows its effectiveness in addressing malnutrition; however, the absence of a significant correlation between SBFP implementation and academic performance suggests that nutrition alone is not sufficient to enhance learning outcomes.

This emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive strategy that includes family involvement, academic support, and health. Given the strong correlation between parents' educational

attainment and students' academic success, it stands to reason that educating and actively engaging parents can have a favorable impact on student achievement. Furthermore, issues like poor parental involvement and delayed budget release indicate the need for structural changes, which consist of better program management, timely funding, and more robust parent-teacher collaborations. Lastly, the nutritional and educational advantages of the program can be further sustained by preserving complementary initiatives like *Gulayan sa Paaralan* and strengthening partnerships with health organizations.

To support the above, schools may form SBFP teams and coordinate closely with the Local Government Unit (LGU) of San Mariano for timely fund release and reduced teacher workload. Collaboration with health agencies (Municipal Health Unit) and barangay health workers is also important to integrate basic health services into the SBFP program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study offers the following recommendations:

- i. The implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program should be strengthened to effectively reduce the number of malnourished young school children.
- ii. Regular monitoring of the health status of the SBFP beneficiaries through the help of a nutritionist who is assigned to each school should be done.
- iii. A regular cook in every school should be hired to prepare nutritious meals so as not to cause unnecessary interruptions to the classroom activities of the teachers.
- iv. Conduct of orientations on the importance of nutrition to pupils' health and academic achievement should be done with the parents of SBFP beneficiaries.
- v. The 120-feeding days implementation of the SBFP should be extended, and the timely release of funds should be ensured.
- vi. Partnerships with stakeholders such as individuals, business groups, and non-profit organizations should be made stronger, thereby ensuring continuity of the SBFP program, which shall result in improved academic performance of the beneficiaries.
- vii. As there exists a strong correlation between parents' educational attainment and pupils' academic performance, the parents should be made aware of their indispensable role in supporting their children's nutrition and education.
- viii. Further studies that explore ways to improve the implementation and gains of the SBFP should be conducted.

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