



THE SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM IN ILAGAN EAST DISTRICT, ILAGAN, ISABELA: ITS IMPLICATION TO PUPILS NUTRITIONAL STATUS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the implications of the School Feeding Program on the nutritional status and academic performance of Grade I pupils in eight selected schools of Ilagan East District, Ilagan, Isabela, for School Year 2009–2010. Using the descriptive survey method, the study involved 8 school heads, 11 Grade I teachers, and 306 pupils. Data on pupils' weight, height, and academic performance before and after the feeding program were gathered from school records, while problems encountered in implementation were obtained from administrators and teachers through questionnaires. Frequency, percentage, median, ranking, chi-square test, and variance F-test were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that most pupils had normal weight and height before and after the feeding program, with a decrease in the number of pupils classified as below normal in both weight and height after the intervention. However, academic performance generally remained low, although there was a slight increase in the number of pupils with average performance. Results further showed a significant relationship between weight and academic performance before and after the feeding program, while height showed no significant relationship with academic performance. The major problems encountered in program implementation were inadequate resources, limited parental cooperation, additional teacher workload, difficulty in deciding meals to prepare, lack of feeding paraphernalia, insufficient funds, and weak community support. No significant difference was found between administrators' and teachers' perceptions of these problems. The study recommends strengthening, sustaining, and institutionalizing school feeding

programs through stronger school-community partnerships and awareness campaigns for improved learner welfare and outcomes.

Keywords: *School Feeding Program, nutritional status, academic performance, Grade 1 pupils, Ilagan East District*

INTRODUCTION

School Feeding Program are increasingly recognized as a key strategy for improving both the nutritional status and academic performance of children. The United Nations' World Food Program (WFP) and other international organizations emphasize that a well-balanced meal at school not only combats hunger but also supports cognitive development, leading to improved educational outcomes. Malnutrition, including undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, can severely hinder children's ability to concentrate, learn, and perform well academically, making school feeding programs critical in ensuring that all children, regardless of socioeconomic background, can reach their full potential.

On a broader scale, evidence from countries across the globe indicates that providing nutritious meals to schoolchildren leads to enhanced cognitive function, better school attendance, and higher academic performance. In regions facing high levels of poverty and food insecurity, school feeding programs have been shown to reduce dropout rates and improve test scores. These programs contribute to better health and learning outcomes, thus breaking the cycle of poverty and helping to foster more equitable societies.

The implications of school feeding programs for nutrition and learning outcomes are particularly significant in areas with high levels of food insecurity, such as sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. These programs are often linked with efforts to combat childhood malnutrition because they provide children with a regular source of nutrients that may help improve classroom participation, attendance, and overall well-being (World Food Programme [WFP], 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

Locally, the impact of school feeding programs on pupils' nutritional status and academic performance is most evident in communities where food insecurity and undernutrition are prevalent. When schools implement feeding initiatives, pupils receive regular and nutritious meals that may help improve energy levels, concentration, memory retention, and classroom participation. Studies also show that school feeding programs can positively affect school attendance and selected nutritional indicators (Tan, 2013; Wang et al., 2021).

In many cases, school feeding programs are adapted to local needs by sourcing food from local farmers and incorporating culturally appropriate meals that meet nutritional requirements. This localized approach strengthens the connection between schools and communities while supporting local economies and improving pupils' health and educational outcomes (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], n.d.; WFP, n.d.).

The DepEd School-Based Feeding Program is a government initiative under the Department of Education in the Philippines that aims to address hunger and undernutrition among public school learners, particularly those who are wasted or severely wasted. The program targets learners in public schools and seeks to improve their nutritional status, classroom attendance, and health and nutrition values (Department of Education [DepEd], 2017; Republic Act No. 11037, 2018).

The food provided in the program is generally planned to be nutritious and suitable for children. School feeding initiatives may also support local food systems when meals are sourced from local suppliers, school gardens, or community-based producers. Such practices help make the program more sustainable while ensuring that meals are appropriate to local dietary preferences and cultural food practices (DepEd, 2017; FAO, n.d.; WFP, n.d.).

The feeding activities are usually conducted on a regular basis during school days, often during recess or lunchtime, depending on the school's structure and local circumstances. Under DepEd's operational guidelines, the School-Based Feeding Program was designed to provide feeding for a specific implementation period, with earlier guidelines identifying 120 feeding days for target beneficiaries (DepEd, 2017).

Schools are provided with guidelines and resources to plan and implement the feeding program. School heads, teachers, and other school personnel are involved in managing the daily distribution of meals, while beneficiary pupils are identified through nutritional assessment. The program also includes complementary activities such as health and nutrition education, monitoring, and evaluation to assess its effect on learners' nutritional status and school participation (DepEd, 2017; DepEd, 2022).

The results of school feeding programs are generally encouraging, especially when they help reduce hunger and support pupils' participation in classroom activities. Hunger and malnutrition may hinder children from focusing on lessons, participating actively, and sustaining school attendance. Evidence from school feeding studies shows that such programs can improve attendance and may contribute to better educational and health outcomes among school-age children (Tan, 2013; Wang et al., 2021).

Across different settings, pupils' nutritional condition is closely related to school participation and learning outcomes. The status of beneficiaries is usually measured before and after the feeding period through nutritional assessment. Nutritional improvement, health appraisal, deworming, referral, counseling, and health education may serve as complementary benefits of the feeding program (DepEd, 2017; Wang et al., 2021).

School feeding is also an avenue for developing desirable health and nutrition habits among children. In the Philippine context, the School-Based Feeding Program identifies wasted and severely wasted learners as priority beneficiaries, with the aim of improving their nutritional status, classroom attendance, and health-related behaviors (DepEd, 2017; Republic Act No. 11037, 2018).

Proper nutrition should begin early in a child's development. In a nutrition survey, Solon (1997) revealed that malnutrition remained at an alarming level and continued to weaken the vitality of schoolchildren, preventing them from fully benefiting from the efforts of school authorities and teachers. Indeed, a child's ability to absorb learning is affected when he or she is undernourished. This means that proper nutrition should be one of the primary concerns of parents and should be extended through school-based feeding and nutrition programs supported by the government (Solon, 1997; Wang et al., 2021).

School feeding programs are an essential part of ensuring that children receive the nutrition they need to focus and succeed in their studies. These programs can help reduce hunger, improve attendance, and support local economies when food is sourced from local producers (WFP, 2022; WFP, n.d.).

However, there is always room for improvement in the implementation of school feeding programs. Areas for improvement include ensuring meal quality, providing balanced and nutritious food, observing cultural relevance, promoting sustainability, considering learners with allergies or dietary restrictions, and strengthening infrastructure, storage, delivery systems, and staff training. These factors are important in making feeding programs more effective, inclusive, and sustainable (DepEd, 2022; FAO, n.d.; WFP, n.d.).

The writer in her 13 years of her experienced as a teacher observed that there were advantages of the School Feeding Program like; Improved Nutrition and Health, increased School Attendance and Enhanced Cognitive Function. However, problems arose like funding and Sustainability, difficulty in making decisions on the kind of food to prepare and lack of cooperation from parents in preparing the food for the school feeding program.

These prompted the writer to undertake this study on the School Feeding Program in Ilagan East District, Ilagan, Isabela, and its implications for pupils' nutritional status and academic performance.

It was in light of the discussion that this study was pursued. This study sought to determine whether the DepEd Feeding Program had implications for pupils' nutritional status and academic performance.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of the feeding program on the nutritional status and academic performance of the Grade I pupils of the eight selected schools of Ilagan East District for SY 2009–2010.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nutritional status of Grade I pupils of the selected schools of Ilagan East District before and after feeding program?

2. What is the level of academic performance of the pupils before and after the feeding program?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the nutritional status of children and their academic performance?
4. What problems do the administrators and teacher encounters in the implementation of the school feeding program?
5. Is there any significant difference in the problems encountered by the administrators and teachers in the implementation of the School Feeding Program?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The method used in this study is the descriptive survey method. According to Sevilla et al. (1992), "This method is designed for determine which different variables are related to each other in the population of interest. This is concerned with the gathering of data regarding the relationship between the effects of the feeding program of the elementary school District to the pupils' nutritional status and academic performance.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in Ilagan East District particularly in the elementary schools of Sta. Victoria, Fuyo, Sta. Catalina, Rang-ayan and Batong Labang, Alinguigan 1st, Alinguigan 2nd, and Alinguigan 3rd. These places are far from the town proper of Ilagan. People coming to these Barangays need to commute for about kilometers before reaching their destination, even teachers.

Majority of the people from these barangays are jobless and their only source of income is logging which is now prohibited by the present provincial administration.

Now, many families from these barangays live in poverty and it affects the education of the school children.

Selection and Description of Respondents

The respondents of the study comprised of 8 school heads and 11 Grade I teachers from the eight selected schools of Ilagan East District with feeding program for the school year 2009-2010.

The 306 Grade I pupils of these schools were taken in connection with their nutritional status and level of academic performance. These data are kept by the teacher – advisers.

The table shows the distribution of respondents.

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents

Schools	Administrators	Teachers	Pupils	Total
1. Batong Labang E/S	1	2	66	69
2. Rang-Ayan E/S	1	1	38	40
3. Fuyo E/S	1	1	24	26
4. Sta Catalina E/S	1	1	18	20
5. Sta Victoria E/S	1	1	33	35
6. Alinguigan 1 st E/S	1	2	51	54
7. Alinguigan 2 nd E/S	1	2	48	51
8. Alinguigan 3 rd E/S	1	1	28	30
Total	8	11	306	325

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher wrote a letter to the Schools Division Superintendent through channels asking permission to conduct a research survey to the teachers. After permission was granted, the questionnaire was distributed to the different schools involved through the help of the school heads. After a few days, the researcher retrieved the questionnaires. When all the questionnaire was retrieved, the researcher calculated the data, present them in table form and analyzed.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The following statistical tools were employed in the study:

Ranking was used for the problems encountered in the implementation of the feeding program.

Chi-square test was used to find out if there is a significant relationship, between the nutritional status and academic performance of the pupils.

Variance F-test was used to find out if there is a significant difference in the problems encountered by the administrators and teachers in the implementation of the School feeding Program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The nutritional status of Grade I pupils of the selected schools of Ilagan East District before and after the feeding program in terms of:
 - a. Weight

Table 2
On Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Weight of the Grade I Pupils in Selected Schools of Ilagan East District Before and After the Feeding Program

Weight (in kilograms)	Qualitative Description	Before		After	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
15.9 and below	Below Normal	120	39	81	26
16.0-26.6 26.7 and above	Normal	181	59	225	74
26.7 and above	Above normal	5	2	0	0
Total		306	100	306	100
Median		17.45	Normal	18.92	Normal

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the weight of the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District before and after the feeding program. The table shows that majority of the pupils before the feeding program are of normal weight. Generally, the pupils have normal weight as evidenced by the median of 17.45 kilograms rated as "normal". Likewise, it is evident from the table that after the feeding program there was a decrease in number of pupils who belong to below normal weight. However, there was a big increase in the number of pupils under the normal weight. It manifests that still majority of the Grade I pupils have normal weight as evidenced by the median of 18.92 kilograms described as normal. Thus, the researcher can state that generally the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District are of normal weight.

This affirms the findings of Barba et al. (2005), who documented the Food and Nutrition Research Institute's early implementation of school- and community-based supplementary feeding programs in Metro Manila. Their program was conducted for 120 days in six communities and two schools, and post-feeding results showed reductions in children classified as Below Normal Very Low and Below Normal Low in weight-for-age status, indicating that sustained school- and community-based feeding could improve children's nutritional status.

b. Height

Table 3
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Height of the Grade I Pupils in Selected Schools of Ilagan East District Before and After the Feeding Program

Height (in centimeters)	Qualitative Description	Before		After	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
106.3 and below	Short	140	46	75	25
106.4-125.8	Normal	166	54	231	75
125.9 and above	Tall	0	0	0	0

Total		306	100	306	100
Median		17.45	Normal	18.92	Normal

The Frequency and percentage distribution of the height of the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District before and after the feeding program are exhibited in table 3. It is revealed from the data that 54 percent of the pupils or 166 or majority of the pupils have normal heights before and after the feeding program. Generally, the height of the pupils before the feeding program is normal as manifested by the median of 107.88 centimeters.

Furthermore, the table exhibits the height of the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District after the feeding program. It is clearly visible from the data that there was a great decrease in the number of pupils who are short whereas there was an additional number of pupils under the normal height comprising the seventy-five percent of the pupils. Hence, after the feeding program, still the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District have normal height as manifested by the median of 112.93.

2. The level of academic performance of the pupils before and after the feeding program.

Table 4
The Academic performance of the Grade I Pupils in Selected Schools of Ilagan East District Before and After the Feeding Program

Height (in centimeters)	Qualitative Description	Before		After	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
87% and above	High	8	2.6	15	4.9
81-86	Average	99	32.4	117	38.2
75-80	Low	161	52.6	127	41.5
74 and above	Poor	38	12.4	47	15.4
Total		306	100	306	100
Median		76.21	Low	75.49	Low

Table 4 bares the academic performance of the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District before and after the feeding program.

It is exhibited from the data that before the feeding program 52.6 percent of the pupils or 161 or majority have low academic performance as generally revealed by the median of 76.21. On the other hand, after the feeding program, it is clearly visible from the table that there was a decrease in the number of pupils who perform academically low. However, the number of pupils under poor performance had increased.

Hence, the academic performance of the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District after the feeding program is low as evidenced by the median of 75.49. Thus, the researcher can state that the feeding program did not change the academic performance of the Grade 1 pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District.

The result negates Ahmed's (2005) findings found that students who regularly received school meals demonstrated remarkable improvements in academic performance, particularly in reading and mathematics.

3. The significant relationship between the nutritional status of children and their academic performance.

a. Before Feeding Program

Table 5
Test of Significant Relationship Between the Nutritional Status of the Grade I Pupils and Their Academic Performance Before Feeding Program

Academic Performance and the following variables	Computed Value of r	Qualitative Description	Computed Value of t	Tabular Value of t	Decision	Remarks
Weight	0.20	Very low correlation	3.56	1.96	Reject Ho	Significant
Height	0.05	Negligible correlation	.873	1.96	Accept Ho	Not Significant

The results of the test of significant relationship between the nutritional status of the Grade I pupils and their academic performance before feeding program are reflected in Table 5. It is evident from the results that the computed value of $r = 0.20$ for weight and academic performance indicates very low correlation. However, to validate the strength of relationship, the t test was used. The results reveal that the computed value of $t = 3.56$. This signifies the non-acceptance of the null hypothesis at 0.05 significance level. Hence, There is significant relationship between the nutritional status in terms of weight and the academic performance of the pupils before the feeding program. It implies that the weight strongly affects the academic performance of the pupils.

Likewise, the results exhibit the computed value of $r = 0.05$ for height and academic performance which manifests negligible correlation. To validate the strength of relationship, the t test was used. The data show that the null hypothesis is accepted since the computed value of $t = 0.873$ is less than the tabular value of $t = 1.96$. Thus, there is no significant relationship between the nutritional status in terms of height and the academic performance of the pupils. It means that the academic performance of the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District is not affected by their height before the feeding program.

The findings of the present study partly support and partly contradict the findings of Tan (2013), who examined the effects of a feeding program on the nutritional status and academic performance of Grades 1 to 3 pupils. Tan's study revealed mixed results: the feeding program showed limited improvement in pupils' nutritional status, although academic performance, particularly among lower grade pupils, showed more promising improvement. This implies that school feeding programs may contribute to learners' academic development, but their effect on nutritional status may vary depending on

program implementation, duration, food quality, and the learners' baseline nutritional condition.

b. After the feeding program

Table 6
Test of Significant Relationship Between the Nutritional Status of the Grade I Pupils and Their Academic Performance After the Feeding Program

Academic Performance and the following variables	Computer Value of r	Qualitative Description	Computed Value of t	Tabular Value of t	Decision	Remarks
Weight	0.22	Very low correlation	3.93	1.96	Reject Ho	Significant
Height	0.01	Negligible correlation	0.174	1.96	Accept Ho	Not Significant

Table 6 exhibits the results of test of significant relationship between the nutritional status of the Grade I pupils and their academic performance after the feeding program. The results show that the computed value of 40.22 for weight and academic performance of the pupils which manifests very low correlation. However, the strength of relationship is validated by using the t-test. It can be glanced from the table that the computed value of $t = 3.93$ is greater than the tabular value of $t = 1.96$. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is significant relationship between the nutritional status in terms of weight and the academic performance of the Grade I pupils after the feeding program. It implies that the academic performance of the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District is significantly affected by their weight after the feeding program.

On the other hand, the results reveal that the computed value of $r = 0.01$ for height and academic performance of the pupils which indicates negligible correlation. To validate the correlation, the t-test was used. It is evident from the data that the computed value of $t = 0.174$ is less than the tabular value of $t = 1.96$. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between the nutritional status in terms of height and the academic performance of the Grade I pupils. It means that the height after the feeding program does not affect the academic performance of the Grade I pupils in selected schools of Ilagan East District. The findings after the feeding program conform with the findings before the feeding program.

This finding is the same with the study of World Health Organization both confirms that undernourished children who participated in school feeding showed significant improvements in both nutritional status (such as BMI and micronutrient intake) and cognitive skills, leading to better academic performance. Similarly, Neumann, et.al., (2007) in a study conducted in rural Kenya, observed substantial improvements in weight-for-age and height-for-age, as well as enhanced performance in cognitive tests among children receiving daily meals.

4. Problems encountered in implementing the feeding program.

Table 7
Home Problems Encountered in Implementing the School Feeding Program

Home	Frequency	Rank
1. Inadequate supply of needed resources for feeding program.	10	1
2. Not enough supply of noodles or soup for the weekly feeding.	9	2
3. Lack of cooperation from parents in preparing the food for the program.	7	3.5
4. Limited time of parents to prepare the food.	7	3.5
5. Negative feedback and indifference of parents towards the program.	5	5
6. Inadequate cooking paraphernalia for pupils.	4	6

The table above presents the home problems encountered by the respondents in implementing the school feeding program.

It can be seen that inadequate supply of needed resources for feeding program got the highest frequency of 10 or rank 1. This is followed by not enough supply of noodles or soup for the weekly feeding in preparing with a frequency of nine or rank 2. Lack of cooperation from parents in preparing the food for the program and limited time of parents to prepare the food for the program and limited time of parents to prepare the food received the same frequencies of seven so both are rank 3.5. Negative feedback and indifference of parents towards the program yielded a frequency of five, which is rank 5 and the lowest frequency of four is received by inadequate cooking paraphernalia for pupils in rank 6.

This supports the arguments of Beaton and Ghassemi (2007) that emotional stability and morale in children are improved when school feeding programs operate with community participation and parental engagement.

Table 8
School Problems Encountered in Implementing the School Feeding Program

School	Frequency	Rank
1. Additional work on the part of the teacher	11	1
2. Difficulty in making decisions on the kind of food to prepare	8	2
3. Lack of school feeding paraphernalias for pupils	7	3
4. Disturbance of classes due to irregular arrival with cooked food	5	4.5

5. Absenteeism of pupils limits complete feeding schedule	5	4.5
6. Delayed arrived of cooked noodles/ soup from the home	4	6
7. Lack of fund	2	7
8. Inadequate funds for the feeding program	1	8.5
9. Self -help of teachers for the feeding program	1	8.5

The school problems encountered by the respondents in implementing the school feeding program are shown in table 8. The table shows that the first three problems are additional work on the part of the teacher, decision on the kind of food to prepare and lack of school feeding paraphernalia with frequencies of 11, eight and seven respectively. On the other hand, the last three problems are lack of funds, inadequate funds for the feeding program and self- help of teachers for the feeding program with frequencies of two and one respectively.

This affirms the idea of Del Rosso and Marek (2008), when they mentioned that the success of school feeding lies not merely in meal provision but in ensuring balanced food content, hygiene, and local participation in meal preparation. They also emphasized the importance of training teachers and local staff in basic nutrition and monitoring practices. Similarly, Beaton and Ghassemi (2007) argued that emotional stability and morale in children are improved when school feeding programs operate with community participation and parental engagement.

Table 9
Community Problems Encountered in Implementing the School Feeding Program

Community/Local Government	Frequency	Rank
1. Lack of funds for the feeding program	11	1
2. Lack of assistance from the community in the food preparation program.	8	2
3. Poor PTA / Barangay officials cooperation and coordination of the feeding program.	7	3
4. Indifference of the Barangay officials regarding feeding program	5	4
5. Negative feedbacks of community people	4	5
6. Quarterly allocation of barangay funds for the school feeding program	1	6

Table 9 bares the community, problems encountered by the respondents in implementing the school feeding program. The table reveals that lack of funds for the feeding program got the highest frequency of 14, rank 1. Rank 2 with a frequency of 18 is lack of assistance from the community in the food preparation program. This is followed by poor PTA/ Barangay Official Cooperation and coordination of the feeding program, regarding the feeding, five or rank 4, negative feedback, four or rank 5 and quarterly allocation or rank 6.

This conforms with the arguments of Beaton and Ghassemi (2007) that emotional stability and morale in children are improved when school feeding programs operate with community participation and parental engagement.

5. Significant difference in the problems encountered by the administrators and teachers in the implementation of the School Feeding Program

Table 10
Significant Difference in the Problems Encountered by the Administrators and Teachers in the Implementation of the School Feeding Program

Along	Significance <i>F</i>	Decision	Remarks
Home Problems Encountered	.48	Accept Ho	There is No Significant Difference
School Problems Encountered	.21	Accept Ho	There is No Significant Difference
Community Problems Encountered	.33	Accept Ho	There is No Significant Difference

Table 10 reveals the significant difference in the problems encountered by the administrators and teachers in the implementation of the School Feeding Program using Analysis of Variance *F*-test at .05 level of significance. As can be seen, the significance *F*-values for all the profile of the respondents mentioned are greater than .05 which resulted to the acceptance of null hypothesis *H*₀. This statistically indicates that there was no significant difference in the problems encountered by the administrators and teachers in the implementation of the School Feeding Program.

Result indicates that the problems encountered in the implementation of the School Feeding Program are claimed by both the administrators and teachers to be significantly the same.

Conclusions

After careful analysis of the findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

Majority of the pupils are normal in height and weight before and after the feeding program. As to academic performance, majority of the pupils performed low before the feeding program. There is a slight increase of the number of pupils who performed average, but still majority performed low. The weight strongly affects the academic performance of the pupils but height does not affect academic performance. This is true for both before and after the feeding program. The problems encountered by the respondents in implementing the school feeding program are home, school and

community related. The problems encountered in the implementation of the school feeding program are claimed by both the administrators and teachers to be significantly the same.

Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The Department of Education through School Administrators should find ways to sustain and strengthened school feeding program.
2. The School Community should establish a strong relationship with the parents in support of the school feeding program
3. The school should make an Awareness Campaign in the community educating them of the objectives of the school feeding program.
4. The Department of education should institutionalize Feeding Programs in all schools

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study observed ethical standards in the conduct of educational research involving school personnel and pupil records. Prior to data gathering, permission was secured from the appropriate school authorities, particularly through the Schools Division Superintendent and the school heads of the participating schools. The purpose of the study, the nature of the data to be gathered, and the intended use of the results were properly communicated to the concerned administrators and teachers.

Since the study involved Grade I pupils, who are minors, the researchers ensured that only relevant school records on nutritional status and academic performance were used for research purposes. The identities of the pupils, teachers, and school administrators were treated with strict confidentiality. No names or personal identifiers were disclosed in the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data. The information gathered was used solely for academic and research purposes.

Participation of the school heads and teachers in answering the questionnaire was voluntary, and they were assured that their responses would be handled objectively and confidentially. The study did not involve any procedure that could cause physical, psychological, social, or academic harm to the respondents. The researchers maintained honesty, fairness, and objectivity in collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data.

The researchers also ensured that proper acknowledgment was given to all sources and references used in the study. No conflict of interest was declared in the conduct of the research. Overall, the study upheld the principles of informed participation, confidentiality, respect for respondents, responsible use of data, and academic integrity

in examining the implications of the School Feeding Program on pupils' nutritional status and academic performance.

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