

Parents' Perceptions on the Absence of Food Provision on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools

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Abstract: *The study focus was to find out parents' perceptions on the absence of food provision on students' academic performance in public secondary schools. The study used the Qualitative research approach under a descriptive design of which a total of 78 respondents were used as key informants. The study was conducted from the five selected secondary schools in Morogoro municipal council which were Kilakala, Morogoro, Mafiga, Kingalu and U/Taifa. The study was guided by Social Cognitive Theory and Maslow Hierarch of Needs which emphasized the importance of having basic needs in a given social context for the sake of developing the cognitive abilities. The data were collected through interview, observation and questionnaire for the proper identification of parents' perceptions towards food absences in schools. The data obtained was presented through frequency and percentages with support of direct quotations from respondents. Diagrams were also used in showing the data view for easy understanding. The study was guided by Food Nutrition policy (1992). The study results indicate that, the food provision in schools had a positive impact on students' academic performance though most parents were reluctant to pay for their children food. And those who show positive responses end up by paying for only one kind of food category (starch) instead of having all the required nutrition. The respondents fail to explain the association between food absence and students' academic performance but agreed to teach hungry students who finally show the learning misbehavior like irregular truancy, sleeping during the lesson and tiredness among students. Hence, it can be concluded that, parents' participation on the absence of food provision on students' academic performance in public secondary schools were positive but their participation were negatively affecting the presence of foods in schools and leave the majority of children to stay with hungry while in schools.*

Keywords: parents perceptions, food provision, academic performance, and public secondary schools.

1. Introduction

In developing countries, children who stay long hours with hungry in schools was highly experienced to come from low income families. The situation made them to seek for a strong support from their parents/guardians so as to achieve their educational aspirations/goals (WFP, 2013). In Tanzania where the study was conducted, the government seems to pay attention by providing foods to boarding schools and ignores day schools (URT, 1995 and Mashala, 2019).

The situation became worse after the introduction of fee free education policy of 2014 which prohibit head of school to collect any contribution from parents without permission from the top officials (Mwangota 2019). This makes parents to be rigid to contribute for food even after the re-introduction of circular No. 6 of 2015 to rectify the role of parents by allowing them to contribute for their children meals due to their wrong perceptions on the free education policy as declared by late President of Tanzania John Pombe Magufuri. The poor perceptions and reluctant of parents from public secondary schools to pay for food services was associated with underpinned high poverty level that limits their ability to meet their sides of obligations for their children education (Khamati and Nyongesa, 2013).

Due to the static of some parents in contribution for their children food, some rural head of public schools use to show their efforts by improving their school farms to ensure the availability of foods for children in their schools (Shukia, 2020). The approach was contrary to urban public schools which possess no farms. Hence, the public schools remained dilemma on whether to abide to the policy recommendations or to convince parents to contribute for their children foods (Daniel 2020).

Some reviewed literature blamed the government to put fewer efforts on food provision in public schools while others acknowledged the public schools to teach hungry children (Hakielimu 2017 and Daniel 2020). The failure for contribution for food and teaching hungry children was against the Tanzanian Food and Nutrition Policy of 1992 which put emphasize on parents to provide breakfast for their children before leaving to school and ensuring the availability of lunch time while in public schools.

2. Study Objective

The general objective of this study is to find out the parents' perceptions on the absence of food provision on students' academic performance in Morogoro municipality.

3. Methodology Employed in the Study

The study employed qualitative research approach under descriptive design. The sampling techniques employed were purposive and simple random sampling. The data collection method employed was interview, observation and questionnaire. The validity and reliability for the collected data was established through piloting. The thematic analysis was employed.

4. Findings of the Study

4.1 To identify parents understanding on their responsibilities for the absence of food provision in their schools on students academic performance

In finding the parents perceptions towards their responsibilities the study revealed several perceptions connected to food costs, school facilities, food quality, food

security, food suppliers and food satisfactions. In food costs, majority of respondents blamed on the variation of costs which need an agreements from the parents meetings. The respondents said;

*Though the demand for food among children was high but the school had to wait for the parent meeting to suggest the amount of money they could pay for their children mills per day or week or month...
...foods will be easily available if parents will be able to pay 1,200/- per day or 24,000/- per month because now days the expense for food is experienced to raise...*

The quotations unveil the truth that, the public schools faced instability on food costs which lead to their absence. Mashala (2019) viewed the presence of strong relationship between the presence of foods in selected public secondary schools and students' participation in different activities during the lesson.

In case of facilities, the respondents agreed the majority of selected public schools to have inadequate facilities for food services as they said;

*...our school had no specific place where students could sit and eat their lunch ... they usually take the food and sit under trees or in their classes ...
Our school had no kitchen but the parent committee selected a place behind classroom building under trees where they could prepare foods for our children...
We have no building for kitchen but we have a room which used for cookery subject which are used by teachers and students during the lesson...the food providers use catering service as they cook from their homes and bring the food during black time...*

The above perceptions of respondents from different selected public secondary schools show that, the environment for food provisions differ across the selected public secondary schools though the majority experienced poor environment for food provision services. This means that, the school administrators put less efforts in making a conducive environment where foods could be prepared and saved for children.

The type of food provided in the selected public secondary schools was also questionable due to the fact that, most foods based on starch due to their cheapest and availability. The common food type available across selected public secondary schools was rice, beans, stiff porridge, *makande*, tea, meat and vegetable. The respondents said;

*...rice, beans and kande are simple food to prepare and cook compared to other foods like vegetables and meats...
...student should eat a mixture of foods which containing protein, carbohydrate and minerals that could enhance proper body functioning and growth...
... Some foods like rice, beans and makande are affordable and easy to get from the market place and other places around our residences ...*

The respondents emphasized that, the variety mentioned to be suitable for both breakfasts and lunch. The food was said to be secured. The explanation on food security was contrary to Magoti (2016) study which recommends the government owed public secondary schools to have less food security compared to their counterpart private schools. The respondents said;

No reported information for students' health problems due to foods

The current study revealed that, the school administration use to involve parents to the whole process of contribution, selection of suppliers, proposing food quality and quantity. The highly encouraged parents showed high participation regardless their economic social backgrounds though they had ignored other programs like the preparation for cooking facilities. They said; *Parents ignore the program for establishing cooking facilities in public schools ...*

Education policy didn't involve parents in building school facilities that supports food provisions activities ...

The situation of ignoring programs was against the Tanzanian Food Nutrition Policy (1992) which emphasized on involvement of parents on food provision in public secondary schools. This means that, many parents use the current education policy of 2014 that didn't explain how parents could be more involved in other school programs apart from buying uniforms and exercise books. In other hand, they showed positive perceptions on food suppliers as they said;

Parent meetings select food supplier who can afford to supply food as they agreed ...

The quality of food provided by suppliers depends on the amount of money to be provided by each individual parent ...

The above quotation shows that, most suppliers provide foods as ordered by the school or parents. Therefore, the satisfactions of food quality and quantity depend on the amount money agreed and contributed by parents;

Food satisfactions in public secondary schools were based on ability of family income that depending on the amount paid ...

Food satisfaction depends on the type of food that selected from parents meetings ...

The above ideas show that, the income among parents controls what children should eat in their schools. The public secondary schools with majority of parents who were well-off use to proposed price that reached up to 1200/- per day.

5. Discussion of the findings

The presentation of the first study objective on parents' perceptions towards school responsibility as the first objective shows that, parents, teachers and head of selected public secondary schools had the similar views. They both

agreed parents to have great responsibility in food provision for students though the number of parents contributing for food was too low. They also agreed on the school facilities for the preparation and saving foods to be uncondusive in some schools but acknowledge the existing poor participation of parents in building such important facilities like kitchen due to low financial abilities and the wrong perceptions of parents on the education policy recommendations.

Also most selected public secondary schools did not provide a balance diet whereby the food suppliers were providing the food basing on the amount of money contributed. The lower amount revealed by the study as proposed by parents was 500/- while the higher amount was 1200/- across the selected public secondary schools. This makes most school to choose the lower whose food was mainly under starch categories (rice, beans and *makande*). The food was safe though it was less satisfactory to learners. The finding was supported by the study theory (Social Cognitive Theory) which which emphasized on creating conducive learning environment for learners by meeting their basic needs. Finding was also supported by Food Nutrition policy in Tanzania of 1992 which emphasized parents to ensure the availability of food in their homes and at school.

6. Summary of the findings

The data collected in the study shows that, the food provision in selected public secondary schools had a positive impacts on students' academic performance though most parents were reluctant to pay for their children food. And those who show positive responses end up by paying for only one kind of food category (starch) instead of having all the required nutrition. The respondents fail to explain the association between food absence and students' academic performance but agreed to teach hungry students who finally show the learning misbehavior like irregular truancy, sleeping during the lesson and tiredness among students. Also, the schools experienced to have positive reactions from parents concerning with food contribution but their actual participation when come to money contribution was very poor.

7. Conclusion

The public school education stakeholders in were still in dilemma on who was responsible to pay for the school meals because the current policy make a clear mentioned on parent to be accountable for their children meals. The only policy context applied was in section No. 6 of 2015 which allow parents to discuss and agree what they want to contribute for school. Finally, they had to put their writing as request to the local authorities. The government was still prohibiting them to make any contribution until they were granted with lawful permission from the government authority. Even after given the permission, the school leaders should not use force in collecting the requested contribution. This means that, the contribution for school meals had less emphasize from the government and other education stakeholders including parents themselves. Hence, satisfying hungry children needs a strong policy recommendations and government support.

8. Recommendations

Basing on the findings the following recommendations from the study were made:

- 1) The government should announce the parents contributions for their children foods as mandatory so as to reduce number of children who were taught while they were hungry
- 2) There should be unique food costs across the selected public secondary schools so as to avoid the present confusion on the exactly amount of money to be paid by parents for their children meals.
- 3) The school facilities concerning to food provision should be improved to be safe and healthy to children

The Recommendations for further studies

- 1) The study should be conducted on the influence of school leadership on parents contribution for their children meals
- 2) The study should be conducted in finding out the influence of family backgrounds on the ability to contribute for school meals

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