

Challenges Facing School Head Teachers' Roles in the Implementation of Home Grown School Feeding Programmes in Makueni County, Kenya

Angelica M. Kimwele^{1*} Sophie A. Ochola² Mary N. Mugambi³

1. School of Health and Biomedical Sciences, Technical University of Kenya P.O. Box 52428 - 00200, Nairobi, Kenya

2. Sophie Ochola, Department of Food, Nutrition and Dietetics, Kenyatta University, P.O. BOX 438433 00100 Nairobi, Kenya

3. School of Health and Biomedical Sciences, Technical University of Kenya, P.O. Box 52428 - 00200, Nairobi, Kenya

* E-mail of the corresponding author: angelyn2km@gmail.com

Abstract

The Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) is an initiative to provide locally purchased, nutritious food to schoolchildren. There is documented literature on HGSFP but there are limited studies on the roles and challenges facing school head teachers in the programme implementation. This study explored challenges facing head teachers roles in the in the implementation of HGSFP in Makueni County. The study was carried out with school head teachers in Makindu Sub County, in Makueni County. This study location and study participants were purposively selected. The inclusion criteria for this study were all school head teachers in all (27) schools implementing HGSFP in Makindu Sub-County. However only three school head teachers voluntarily agreed to participate in this study, and therefore purposively sampled. The study used cross sectional study design and interview guides to collect qualitative data. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with head teachers from school implementing HGSFP were conducted by the principal researcher. Data from KIIs was coded, and then organized into themes using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Miner Lite software. Findings from this study showed that; school head teachers served as the managers, accountants, and procurement officers for the HGSFP and were facing challenges of payment delays and unpaid bills of food supplies, lengthy procurement processes, inadequate and low-quality food supply, and overwhelming responsibilities. Insights from this investigation on challenges facing the role of head teachers in the implementation of HGSFP in Makueni County can be key in making changes to the feeding programme processes.

Keywords: head teachers, roles, challenges, homegrown, school feeding, programme

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1. Introduction

School feeding programmes are interventions that regularly provide nutritious food to children attending schools (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),2019). Most countries in the world have some form of School Feeding Programme (SFP) in some way and at some scale (World Food Programme, (WFP), 2020). In the USA, there are variety of school feeding programmes such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Programme (SBP), After School Snack Programme (ASP) and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Programme (Ogachi, 2016). These programmes serve to protect the health and well-being of those participating in the SFP, especially favoring children from socio-economically poor backgrounds (WFP, 2020). School feeding programmes (SFPs) are steadily gaining popularity in developing countries (Jomaa et al., 2011). According to African Union (AU) Biennial Report on Home-Grown School Feeding, 65.4 million children across Africa received school meals in 2019, a staggering 71% increase from 38.4 million in 2013 (African Union biennial report on home-grown school feeding (2019-2020), n.d). In 39 countries across the African continent, governments are financing and managing national school feeding programmes. Countries like; Ghana, Malawi, Kenya and Zimbabwe all feed over 1 million schoolchildren, while Egypt and Nigeria each feed more than 9 million children every day of the school year (African Union, 2023). School feeding programmes aim to enhance the concentration span and learning capacity of schoolchildren by providing meals in schools to reduce short-term hunger that may otherwise impair children's performance (WFP, 2017).

Available literature show that, the Kenyan government started implementing school meal programmes in 1980 in coordination with development partners (Langinger, 2011). Since that time, school meals have remained a crucial development strategy to support the nation's successes in the education sector. To date (2023), based on the National School meals and nutrition strategy 2017-2022 (Republic of Kenya, n.d), the Government of Kenya runs the Home-Grown School Meals Programme. School head teachers receive funds from the National Treasury through the Ministry of Education. Each school head teacher constitutes a school meals programme committee,

composed of four teachers and four parents, who issues a call for tenders and buys food from local suppliers (traders or farmers) from the school meals bank account. school head teacher co-ordinate with parents who are required to provide firewood and salt along with water and salaries for the cooks (United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA), 2009; Aliyar et al., 2015; Espejo, 2009). The National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy, 2017-2022 mandates the head teachers to, amongst other things, play an oversight role in the implementing of HGSFP at the school level (Republic of Kenya, n.d). This significant responsibilities that school head teachers play in the HGSFP implementation process resulted in the need for this study to assess the challenges they are encountering.

Some studies have identified challenges facing HGSFP. A study conducted by Olubayo (2015) in Emuhaya, identified managerial incompetency; funding; accountability and lack of adequate planning; lack of community participation; monitoring and evaluation systems as the main challenges in school feeding. Munuhe (2014) in her study on challenges facing School Feeding Programme (SFP in Kajiado County) found out that, poor management, funding, lack of political will and harsh climatic conditions influenced the implementation of school feeding programmes. Awour (2016), in her study in Machakos County reported that funding, monitoring and evaluation and utilization of funds inhibited successful implementation of school feeding programmes. The above studies mainly focused on the managerial issues, none focused on the challenges associated with specific roles assigned to school head teachers who are mainly involved in the implementation of HGSFP. This study tried to fill this research gap by first it assessing the role of school head teachers in the implementation of HGSFP. Secondly, exploring on the challenges school head teachers encountered in execution of their roles in the implementation of the HGSFP, a case of Makueni County.

The findings of this research may be helpful to the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, non-governmental organizations, the World Food Programme, school management committees, and parents in enhancing the County's school food programme. Understanding the roles and challenges faced by school head teachers in implementing the HGSFP paves way for policymakers to more effectively collaborate with them and create a successful school feeding programme. This study results adds to the limited studies on Homegrown School Feeding Programme since its inception in Kenya (2009). The results of this study act as a reference material for researchers on areas related to school feeding.

2. Methods

2.1 Study location and respondents

The study was carried out in Makueni County. The County covers an area of 8,034.7 Km² and lies between Latitude 1° 35' and 30° 00' South and Longitude 37°10' and 38° 30' East. The County borders several counties, which include Kajiado to the West, Taita Taveta to the South, Kitui to the East, and Machakos to the North. The County is currently divided into six constituencies and nine Sub-Counties. Among the Sub Counties is Makindu situated in the low potential areas of the County. In consultation with the Makueni County officer in charge of school feeding, Makindu sub-county was purposively selected for this study. It was the only sub county with a running HGSFP at the time of this study. Out of 56 public primary schools in Makindu Sub-County, 27 schools were implementing HGSFP while 29 schools were not implementing the programme. The inclusion criteria for this study were all school head teachers in all (27) schools implementing HGSFP in Makindu Sub-County. However only three school head teachers voluntarily agreed to participate in this study, and therefore purposively sampled.

2.2 Materials and instrument

Semi-structured interview guides were designed to help conduct Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with school head teachers. Validity of the interviews was ensured through use of principal researcher, a well-trained and skilled moderator facilitated the interviews that were free from personal bias. The school head teachers being primary stakeholders in the implementation of HGSFP were considered to possess valid information. The other technique used was to restrict the amount of information shared with the respondents to make sure that the research was not biased with preconceived notions of the respondents. The validity of the interview guides was established using a panel of experts that reviewed the questions. The statements that did not go well with the subject of the study were removed. Initial results after researcher had interpreted and condensed, were shared with the participants to see if they still ring true and whether they still recognize the results as authentic.

Reliability of the data was established based on stability of participants' responses. Researcher took direct notes during the interviews with research participants. After the fieldwork was complete, expanded typed notes were prepared. This included comments and quotes arising from interviews and were enhanced by use of the recording equipment and transcription software.

2.3 Design and procedure

The principal researcher conducted face to face individual Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with individual

school head teachers. Prior plans were made by the principal researcher to obtain venues, particular dates, and specific time for the interviews. Invitation reminder phone calls were made to the sampled participants communicating date, time, venue and purpose of the meetings. They all consented verbally. The interviews commenced with welcome remarks and brief introduction of the principal researcher and participants. After which the principal researcher gave a brief overview of the topics for discussion and the objectives. The participants gave informed consent. The principal researcher created a thoughtful, permissive atmosphere, provided ground rules, and set the tone of the interviews. During the interviews, attempts were put in place to minimize the differences in the data collection processes. As outlined in the interview guide, the principal researcher used the same order to ask open-ended questions. The principal research recorded the deliberation, direct responses, took hand written notes and noted non-verbal responses. The interviews were tape-recorded and were made to last for 60 minutes. As with any qualitative inquiry, the principal researcher asked inductive follow-up questions based on participant responses, but did not introduce ideas from any previous data collection event. At the end of the interview/discussion, the principal researcher reviewed the objectives by posing summary questions to the participants. This was followed by shaking of hands and giving parting remarks of appreciation.

In total, the researcher conducted three (3) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) that is one different interview for each of the three sampled school head teachers.

Responses from key informant interviews were transcribed into a text using Google Docs Voice Typing. Upon cleaning, the datasets were exported to the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Miner Lite software for further exploration, coding, and content analysis. Common themes were coded and categorized as either; roles or challenges facing school head teachers in the implementation of HGSFP. Coded themes were reviewed and those that did not fit in the determined codes were classified accordingly. A coherent narrative that included quotes from the interviewees was then created for each theme.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 The roles of school head teachers in the implementation of HGSFP

The researcher identified three major roles of the school head teacher in the implementation of HGSFP; accounting officers, managers and procurement officers.

Accounting officers of the HGSFP: The head teachers reported they were involved in keeping track of the number of children receiving meals at their schools; the amount of government funding the institution received. They had the responsibility to account for the number of school days in a school term the meals programme was in effect; the amount of food purchased; and the price at which the foodstuffs were procured. They completed return forms and submitted them on a weekly basis to the Ministry of Education, along with copies to the county and sub-county offices. Given their office obligations, the head teachers found this to be taxing although they embraced the responsibility and were equal to the task.

Managers of the HGSFP: The school head teachers reported that they were signatories of school feeding programme bank accounts and secretaries of their respective school meal management committees. School head teachers approved and monitored the preparation of the daily rations of food within the school. School head teachers coordinated with parents who provided for water, firewood and cash to pay the cooks and guards. School head teachers were responsible for monitoring food preparation as well as meal serving.

Procurement officers; school head teachers were involved in approving budgets, requesting bids, and paying suppliers. They arranged for storage of the food they had purchased.

The above results of this study on the roles of school head teachers are consistent with what is specified in the implementation of HGSFP (United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service, 2009; Aliyar et al., 2015; Espejo, 2009). Similar findings from two studies; one in Kenya (Wakhungu and Opati, 2020) and another in South Africa (Mawela & Van den Berg, 2018), indicate that school head teachers are active in the management of the school meals programme. Head teacher's involvement in the programme could earn trust from the Ministry of Education, parents and pupils in schools and therefore contributing to the programme's success. School head teachers are trained as administrators and managers of the school system and therefore getting involved in the school meals programme may make the best out of it.

3.2 Head teachers' perceived challenges in the implementation of HGSFP

The school head teachers experienced a number of challenges, such as payment delays and unpaid bills of food supplies, having to consult the procurement office from the Ministry of Education based at the County offices. They had challenges of lengthy bureaucratic procurement procedures, insufficient funding, and inadequate food supplies. They were overwhelmed with responsibilities and high cost of living. The following are some of the quotes from head teachers highlighting various challenges in the implementation of HGSFP's.

Need for consultation on procurement procedures *"Despite having money in the school bank account, I did not buy food throughout the first month of this term because I wanted to consult the County procurement officer*

on the procurement process."

Payment delays and unpaid bills.

The head teachers reported that delays in payment on non-payment was a major challenge in the implementation of the HGSFP. This opinion was expressed as in the following statements:

"Quality service cannot be assured due to payment delays that might occasionally extend up to five months or longer, even though all service providers sign contracts guaranteeing them to deliver food on a daily basis," stated by one of the head teachers.

"The issue of unpaid payments raises the likelihood that suppliers stop delivery of food stuffs". Another head teacher commented

Lengthy bureaucratic procurement procedures. The researcher concluded that the main reason for the delayed payment was the bureaucratic procedures before payments to food suppliers. All the head teachers agreed that the *"Process is too long"*.

Inadequate finances. As explained by majority of the head teachers, the feeding programme was operating on a tight budget of Kshs. 11 per child per day. As a result, food ran out before the end of the term or they had to ration the little food procured. This affected how successfully the programme ran and achieved its objectives. This was evident when one head teacher stated that, *"In my school, food is served twice a week using the smallest 250g cup because the food is not enough"*.

Inadequate food. Majority of the head teachers claimed that the school feeding programme had increased enrollment and attendance in the schools, making the food not enough for every child. According to the head teachers, blame was on the widespread poverty and hunger in the study area (Makueni County). This was confirmed in a statement made by one of the school head teachers, *"Many households prepare only one meal in a day, mainly supper, and many children attend school to receive free lunches"*

School head teachers were overwhelmed with responsibilities. In their capacity as managers of HGSFP, school head teachers approved and monitored the preparation of the daily rations of food. Through the children, they asked parents for water and firewood as well. In most cases, school head teachers were responsible for monitoring food preparation as well as serving. This posed extra work for the school's head teachers, who were also charge of the school's academic activities. Following are quotes from school head teachers expressing how they felt overwhelmed by their workload. *"The coordination of the school feeding programme is labor-intensive, which interferes with my administrative responsibilities at the school"*.

"I feel physically drained by my work in this school"

"I feel used up at the end of the day work "

"I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning to face another day on the job"

Low economic status of the parents. The head teachers claimed that a significant number of their parents were unemployed, with a big number engaging in sporadic work and small-scale business, and that expecting them to contribute money to the programme was unrealistic. One of the head teachers remarked, *"Many parents lack permanent jobs and rely on agriculture, which is seasonal."*

"You send the children home to collect Ksh 50, but most parents send them back to school the next day without the money," one head teacher said.

"There are many parents with very high outstanding balances in this school "Another teacher added

Late payment of service providers as was revealed in this study can compromise the quality and quantity of the food (Drake et al., 2016). Complex procurement procedures can result in delays in purchasing foodstuffs, as was reported by in this study, and affirmed in a South African study, (Dei, 2014). In other research (Quila & Tyilo, 2014) and this study finding, inadequate funding can lead to irregular food supplies and a lack of diversity in school meals. Due to their extensive workloads as managers and administrators of the educational system, it is conceivable that school heads may not actively participate in the feeding programme. A more effective and efficient way to achieve the school feeding programme's objectives may be to minimize school head teachers' control of daily operations of the school feeding programme.

4. Conclusion

This study came to the conclusion that the implementation and performance of HGSFP are greatly dependent on the roles played by school head teachers as accounting, procurement, and coordination officials at the school level. Understanding the challenges of facing school head teachers; unpaid food supply invoices, complex procurement procedures, a lack of funding, and the weighty responsibilities of school head teachers (in managing the HGSFP and school academic programs) can be crucial for making successful reforms in HGSFP implementation procedures.

5. Recommendations

- Policymakers of school feeding programmes should enhance programme financing; if possible seek alternative financing sources. This can be; the private sector, faith-based groups, and development

partners, in order to supplement the national budget or the budgets of vulnerable schools without parental support.

- The Kenyan government should improve in the release of funds to support the continued running of the HGSFP. This would improve on quality, quantity of food supplied as well as eliminate inconsistencies in implementing the programme across the school terms
- Policymaker of school feeding programme ought to train school head teachers' procurement processes in the implementation of the HGSFP.
- A study is required to ascertain the role and challenges that other stakeholders (parents, the government and school meal management committees) are encountering in the implementation of the HGSFP

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