



UNCOVERING THE CHALLENGES OF FEEDING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OF PANABO CITY DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the challenges encountered in the implementation of the feeding program in an elementary school in the Division of Panabo City. Specifically, it examined the challenges encountered, the strategies implemented to address these challenges, and the educational insights drawn from the implementers of the feeding program. The study utilized in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) with teachers and feeding coordinators. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through inductive coding. Findings revealed several challenges, including funding constraints, operational challenges, logistical difficulties, delivery and procurement issues, and environmental disruptions. To address these concerns, schools implemented strategies such as collaborative governance, organized program management, adaptive practices, and community participation. The study also found that the feeding program contributed positively to students' concentration, attendance, classroom behavior, participation, and overall development. Teachers likewise integrated nutrition education into classroom activities to promote healthy habits among learners. The study concluded that despite implementation challenges, the feeding program remains beneficial in supporting learners' nutrition, academic engagement, and holistic development. Strong stakeholder collaboration, effective management, and community support were identified as essential factors in sustaining the feeding program.

KEYWORDS: *Feeding Program; Qualitative Research; Thematic Analysis; Nutrition; Academic Achievement; Stakeholder Collaboration*

INTRODUCTION

As a teacher observing school realities, I have seen how feeding programs help learners who come to school hungry, tired, and unable to focus. School feeding programs are not only about giving food; they also support learners' health, attendance, classroom behavior, and readiness to learn. However, the implementation of the feeding program remains challenging, especially when schools experience limited resources, delayed funding, inadequate facilities, and weak monitoring systems. In Panabo City Division, these concerns make it important to understand the real experiences of teachers and feeding coordinators who manage the program every day. Thus, uncovering the challenges of feeding program implementation becomes necessary to improve both nutrition support and educational participation among learners.

In global contexts, school feeding programs continue to face difficulties related to food supply, infrastructure, funding, and trained personnel. In Rwanda, Ke et al. (2023) noted that unaffordable food prices, inadequate cooking supplies, and insufficient food quality affected program delivery. In India, Hoque (2023) reported that the Mid-Day Meal Scheme encountered problems such as lack of kitchens, weak access to clean water, and inconsistent food quality. In Nigeria, Agu et al. (2023) emphasized that irregular funding, limited planning, poor sanitation facilities, and lack of nutrition training weakened the implementation of school feeding initiatives. These international experiences show that feeding programs require stable resources, proper facilities, and strong management systems to become effective.

In the Philippines, similar concerns are evident in the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program. Oflaria (2023) explained that inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, and uneven stakeholder involvement reduce the effectiveness of feeding program delivery. Rivera (2017) also identified delayed fund releases, limited kitchen facilities, weak parental participation, and minimal weight gain among beneficiaries as recurring concerns. These findings show that although the program has strong educational and nutritional value, its success depends on how effectively schools manage resources, stakeholders, documentation, food preparation, and learner participation.

In Mindanao and in Panabo City Division, feeding program implementation is also affected by logistical, operational, and coordination issues. Divino (2025) reported that schools may lack kitchen facilities, food preparation tools, and consistent monitoring systems. The Department of Education-Panabo City (2025) likewise identified delays in fund release, difficulty in food distribution, and weak coordination among school heads, health personnel, and stakeholders. These conditions may affect the continuity, quality, and safety of the feeding program. Hence, there is a need to listen to the experiences of implementers who directly manage the program in actual school settings.



The research gap lies in the limited localized evidence that explains the specific school-level challenges encountered in feeding program implementation. Many studies discuss national or regional trends, but fewer focus on the actual experiences of teachers and feeding coordinators in Panabo City Division. This lack of local qualitative insight limits the ability of school leaders and policymakers to design responsive interventions based on the realities of implementers. Therefore, this study addresses the gap by examining the challenges, strategies, and educational insights drawn from the implementation of the feeding program in the local school context.

The urgency of this study comes from the continued need to protect learners from hunger, poor nutrition, and reduced classroom participation. When feeding programs are interrupted by lack of funds, weak facilities, delayed delivery, or environmental disruptions, learners may lose important support that helps them concentrate and remain engaged in school. Understanding these issues can help schools strengthen planning, coordination, stakeholder participation, and contingency measures. Thus, the study carries social value because it can guide educators, administrators, community partners, and policymakers in improving the delivery and sustainability of school-based nutrition interventions.

This study was anchored on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs by Abraham Maslow (1943), Program Implementation Theory by Nilsen (2015), and Systems Theory by Bertalanffy (1968). Maslow's theory explains that learners' physiological needs, including food and nutrition, must be addressed before they can fully engage in higher-level learning. Program Implementation Theory explains how interventions succeed or fail depending on context, organizational capacity, stakeholder engagement, and implementation processes. Systems Theory explains that feeding programs operate through interconnected parts such as funding, food supply, manpower, preparation, distribution, and monitoring. Together, these theories support the study by showing that feeding programs are both nutritional and educational systems that require coordinated support.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover the challenges of feeding program implementation in an elementary school in Panabo City Division. I used a phenomenological approach to understand how teachers and feeding coordinators experienced the program, responded to implementation difficulties, and reflected on its educational value. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study gathered narratives on financial, operational, logistical, procurement, and environmental concerns. It also examined the strategies used to sustain the program and the insights drawn regarding nutrition, attendance, behavior, and holistic learner development.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore the challenges encountered in the implementation of the feeding program in Panabo City Division. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to gather rich and descriptive information from the lived experiences of teachers and feeding coordinators. Through phenomenology, the study focused on how implementers understood the difficulties, strategies, and educational meanings connected with the feeding program. Thus, the approach provided a deeper understanding of the operational, emotional, and school-based realities of program implementation.

The researcher observed ethical standards by ensuring social value, informed consent, voluntary participation, privacy, confidentiality, justice, transparency, participant safety, and community involvement. Before data collection, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Their identities were protected through codes or pseudonyms, and all interview transcripts, recordings, and related documents were securely stored in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The researcher also ensured that interview settings were safe, private, and comfortable for the participants.

The study involved eleven (11) teacher-implementers and feeding coordinators from selected elementary schools in Panabo Central District under the Schools Division of Panabo City. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because they had direct experience in implementing the feeding program. The data were gathered through five (5) in-depth interviews and six (6) focus group discussions. The participants were directly involved in food preparation, supervision, documentation, coordination, monitoring, or other program-related tasks, making them appropriate sources of information for the study.

The main research instrument was a validated semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended and probing questions about the challenges, strategies, and educational insights related to feeding program implementation. Experts in research and education reviewed the guide to ensure clarity, relevance, content adequacy, consistency, and suitability for the participants. After securing the required permissions from the Graduate School, ethics committee, Schools Division Office, and school authorities, the researcher coordinated with the participants regarding the interview schedule. With permission, responses were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed through thematic content analysis.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through inductive coding. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts to identify significant statements, meaning units, and recurring patterns. Related codes were clustered into themes that answered the three research questions. To strengthen credibility, the researcher used data triangulation by comparing information from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant narratives, and school-related records. This process ensured that the findings reflected the shared realities of those directly involved in the implementation of the feeding program.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results generated from the data gathered. It is sequenced based on the objectives of the study as presented in the first chapter.

Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of the Feeding Program

Results revealed that funding constraints were among the most serious challenges in implementing the feeding program. Participants explained that limited financial resources affected the availability of nutritious meals, kitchen equipment, cooking materials, and other supplies needed for daily feeding operations. Some implementers shared that the allocated budget was not enough to provide varied and sufficient meals for all beneficiaries, which forced schools to simplify menus or depend on external support. This finding supports Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which explains that learners' basic need for food must be addressed before they can concentrate on higher-level learning tasks. Hence, financial support remains essential in sustaining feeding activities and protecting learners' readiness to learn.

The findings also showed that operational challenges were experienced because teachers and feeding coordinators handled multiple responsibilities at the same time. Aside from teaching, they were expected to prepare, distribute, supervise, monitor, and document feeding activities. Participants described the lack of manpower, limited time, and overlapping tasks as major sources of pressure. These experiences reflect Role Strain Theory by Goode (1960), which explains how individuals experience difficulty when several duties compete for their time and energy. Therefore, feeding program implementation requires clear task distribution, sufficient personnel, and administrative support to avoid overburdening teachers.

Moreover, the study revealed logistical difficulties that affected the quality and efficiency of the program. Inadequate kitchen facilities, limited storage areas, lack of utensils, insufficient food preparation tools, and inefficient distribution systems disrupted the smooth flow of feeding activities. Participants noted that the lack of refrigerators and storage facilities could affect food safety, while limited space delayed preparation and distribution. This finding supports Systems Theory by Bertalanffy (1968), which emphasizes that a program functions effectively only when all parts of the system work together. Thus, logistical readiness is necessary to ensure safe, timely, and organized feeding operations.

Delivery and procurement issues also emerged as major concerns. Participants reported that delayed food deliveries, transportation problems, supplier issues, and scheduling constraints often interrupted the feeding schedule. When ingredients arrived late, meal preparation and distribution were affected, making program implementation inconsistent. These findings are consistent with supply chain perspectives which emphasize that coordination among suppliers, transport systems, and schools is necessary for uninterrupted program delivery. Hence, feeding programs need reliable procurement systems, clear communication with suppliers, and backup plans to avoid service disruption.

The study further revealed environmental and program interruption challenges. Typhoons, floods, heavy rains, disease outbreaks, and class suspensions affected feeding activities and program continuity. Schools had to adjust schedules, distribute dry rations, or use emergency food stocks when regular feeding was not possible. These findings show that feeding programs are vulnerable to external conditions beyond the control of implementers. Therefore, preparedness, flexible planning, and emergency response systems are necessary to protect learners' access to nutritional support during disruptions.

Strategies Implemented to Address the Challenges of the Feeding Program

Results revealed that collaborative governance was one of the most important strategies used to address implementation challenges. Teachers, school administrators, parents, local government units, barangay officials, and community members worked together to sustain feeding activities. Participants explained that shared responsibilities, open communication, and coordinated decision-making helped schools manage limited resources and operational demands. This finding supports Stakeholder Theory by Freeman (1984), which explains that organizational success depends on the active cooperation of those involved. Hence, feeding program implementation becomes stronger when different stakeholders treat the program as a shared responsibility.

The findings also showed that program management strategies helped organize feeding operations. Schools used committees, task assignments, schedules, coordination meetings, monitoring systems, and careful budgeting to make implementation more orderly. Participants emphasized that proper scheduling helped align feeding activities with class routines, while clear task distribution helped reduce confusion among implementers. These practices support the principles of planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling in administrative management. Thus, systematic program management improved efficiency and helped schools continue feeding activities despite limited resources.

Adaptive management also emerged as a major strategy. Schools adjusted schedules, modified procedures, improvised resources, prepared contingency plans, and used available supplies carefully when shortages or disruptions occurred. Participants described how they rescheduled feeding activities during class suspensions and used alternative resources when food or materials were delayed. This finding shows that flexible leadership and responsive decision-making are important in sustaining feeding programs. Therefore, implementers need the capacity to adjust quickly to changing conditions while still protecting the main purpose of the program.



Community participation and sustainability were also emphasized by the participants. Parents, volunteers, alumni groups, barangay officials, NGOs, local organizations, and private donors contributed manpower, food items, financial assistance, and logistical support. Volunteer systems and fundraising activities reduced the burden on teachers and strengthened resource mobilization. This finding supports Social Capital Theory by Bourdieu (1986), which explains that social networks can provide valuable resources for collective goals. Hence, community participation helps transform the feeding program from a school-only responsibility into a community-supported intervention.

Overall, the strategies used by schools showed that successful feeding program implementation depends on collaboration, organized management, flexibility, and community support. Although funding, workload, logistics, procurement, and environmental disruptions created difficulties, schools were able to continue the program through shared effort and adaptive practices. These findings suggest that a sustainable feeding program requires not only food supplies but also strong relationships, clear systems, and responsive leadership.

Educational Insights Drawn from the Implementation of the Feeding Program

Results revealed that nutrition was closely connected to academic achievement. Participants observed that learners who received proper meals showed better concentration, increased attentiveness, and stronger participation in classroom activities. They shared that students performed better when they were properly nourished and less distracted by hunger. This finding supports the idea that feeding programs help meet basic physiological needs, allowing learners to become more prepared for academic tasks. Therefore, feeding programs should be viewed not only as health services but also as educational support mechanisms.

The findings also showed that the feeding program supported educational participation. Learners became more motivated to attend school regularly when meals were available, and some participants observed reduced absenteeism among beneficiaries. This suggests that feeding programs can serve as an incentive for school attendance, especially among learners from households with limited food security. When learners are present and physically ready to participate, they gain more opportunities to engage in classroom learning. Hence, feeding programs contribute to both access and retention in education.

Another insight drawn from the implementation was the improvement of positive classroom behavior. Participants observed that well-fed learners became calmer, more focused, and more socially engaged with peers. Regular participation in the feeding program helped lessen hunger-related irritability and supported emotional stability during class. These observations suggest that nutrition can influence not only academic performance but also classroom climate and learner behavior. Thus, feeding programs can indirectly support classroom management and socio-emotional development.

Health education integration also emerged as an important insight. Teachers incorporated nutrition concepts, proper hygiene, healthy food choices, and wellness practices into classroom activities and feeding routines. Through this integration, learners were not only fed but also taught why proper nutrition matters. The feeding program became an opportunity to build awareness of healthy habits and responsible food choices. Therefore, the program can be strengthened when feeding activities are connected with classroom-based nutrition education.

The study further revealed a holistic development perspective. Participants recognized that the feeding program supported learners physically, emotionally, socially, and academically. It improved nutrition, encouraged attendance, strengthened classroom participation, promoted positive behavior, and developed awareness of healthy living. These findings show that feeding programs contribute to whole-child development by addressing both immediate hunger and broader educational needs. Overall, the insights of implementers emphasized that school feeding programs are valuable interventions for learner welfare, academic engagement, and community-supported education.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings revealed that feeding program implementation in Panabo City Division encountered financial, operational, logistical, procurement, and environmental challenges. These conditions imply that schools need stronger financial support, better facilities, sufficient manpower, and clearer monitoring systems. The success of the program cannot depend only on the dedication of teachers and coordinators. Instead, it requires institutional support that provides stable resources, safe preparation areas, efficient delivery systems, and clear procedures for implementation.

In addition, the strategies used by implementers imply that collaboration and shared responsibility are essential in sustaining feeding programs. Parents, school heads, teachers, local government units, barangay officials, and community partners all have important roles in maintaining continuity. Stronger partnerships can reduce operational burdens and improve resource mobilization. These findings emphasize that school-based feeding initiatives become more sustainable when supported by organized school-community networks.

The educational insights drawn from the study imply that feeding programs contribute beyond nutritional improvement. They also support attendance, concentration, classroom behavior, participation, health awareness, and holistic learner development. This means that school feeding programs should be integrated with educational planning and classroom support systems. When nutrition and education are treated as connected concerns, schools can better address the needs of learners, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Department of Education may continue strengthening funding allocation, monitoring systems, and technical assistance for schools implementing feeding programs. School administrators may improve organizational systems by creating clear committees, setting regular schedules, strengthening documentation, and preparing contingency plans for emergencies. Teachers and feeding coordinators may continue integrating nutrition education into classroom routines while also practicing task-sharing to reduce workload strain. Parents, barangay officials, local government units, alumni groups, and private partners may sustain volunteerism, donations, and community participation to support feeding activities. Future researchers may conduct mixed-method or comparative studies on the long-term effects of feeding programs on learners' academic performance, nutritional status, psychosocial development, and school participation.

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