



## Older Pupil's Views on the Ghana School Feeding Programme: A Case of Yikpee D/A Primary School in Lawra District of the Upper West Region

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 12 July 2015;

Received in revised form:  
22 August 2015;

Accepted: 8 September 2015;

#### Keywords

School feeding Programme,  
Hunger,  
Older pupils,  
Policy intervention.

### ABSTRACT

Previous studies on Ghana's school feeding programme have largely taken a quantitative approach in assessing and analyzing its impact on increases in enrolment, attendance, retention, short-term health and nutritional benefits. This study employed qualitative instruments, using a semi-structured interview guide and observation checklists on five pupils in one school Yikpee D/A Primary School in order to fill the gap in the quantitative studies as well as look at the views of older students on the School Feeding Programme. The results showed that older pupils often came from poor and illiterate families, -whose parents were peasant farmers and that for those children, their decisions to enroll in school were informed by a desire for gainful employment, escape from farming and the ability to read and write in the future. It was also revealed that it was not the food per se that attracted these children to school; but the fact that the school was viewed to be a welcoming place for learning and opportunity for them to achieve their future goals. Although the pupils were in favour of the feeding programme, they wished it stopped because it distracted their attention in class. The study has thus put forward some policy recommendations on the school feeding programmes which include the need to seek the views of target beneficiaries on whether, where and when to implement the programme as a policy intervention before final decisions are made to cover all neighbouring schools.

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### Introduction

Hunger is one of the world's major problems as the 2007 Global Hunger Index illustrate; the problem has assumed an alarming scale in 36 countries: 25 of these countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa, 9 in Asia, 1 in the Middle East and Latin America respectively (Wiesmann, Sost, Schöninger, Dalzell, Kiess, Arnold, & Collins, 2007). Poverty is the main cause of hunger as the poor have limited or no access to important resources and is therefore denied an opportunity to shape their lives proactively. Poverty, together with hunger, results in a continuous struggle for survival with no hope for the future. The youngest members of a family are the most susceptible victims when poverty strikes. Poverty is also the main cause of millions of preventable child deaths each year and leads to tens of millions of children going hungry, missing school or being exploited in hazardous child labour (UNICEF, 2000). Therefore a nation's developmental state and future can be measured based on the well-being of her children.

In Ghana, averagely, a child enters the first year of primary school at the age of six; few go to primary one at the age of five. About 30% of these children would have had access to kindergarten or nursery education for at least one year (Ministry of Education, 1995). There are some children who before enrolling in primary one, would have had early education on a continuum from one to three years. Yet, the majority of children will enter the first year in the primary school with no prior exposure to early education (ibid).

Late entry into school is a widespread phenomenon in developing countries. In Ghana, basic education includes 2 years of Kindergarten, 6 years of Primary School and 3 years of Junior High School spanning the age group of 4 to 15 years.

Furthermore, the official primary school-age is 6 to 11 years and the official age for starting grade one or class one is 6 years (Adamu-Issah, Elden, Forson & Schrofer, 2007). But usually the normal age for each class is plus or minus 1 year.

Fentiman, Hall, & Bundy (1999), through their own data collection in Ghana, found that in addition to a child's poor health status and distance to school, parents' perception of school readiness was also an important determinant of late enrolment. Through focus group discussions and interviews, they further found that some parents did not send their children to school, because they erroneously thought the child was too young even when the child was of school age. The authors suggested that parents' perception of a child's school readiness is shaped not only by the child's poor physical development, due to lack of nutrition, but also due to lack of certain social and cognitive skills. With an increase in age-related tasks assigned by parents in rural Ghana, when the child is not capable of performing these activities, parents may not believe the child is ready to be sent to school. This research therefore explored the views of older pupils who enrolled and attended school because the school offered a feeding programme. The older pupils here were those children outside the normal age cohort in class one (6-7 years old) enrolled in the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) schools.

### Statement of the Problem

Poverty remains particularly high in the rural areas and in Ghana's three northern regions, between 80.8 and 92.6 percent of the people are thought to live below the poverty levels (GPRS, 2003). World Food Programme (WFP) Ghana, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) in 2007 to contribute to the rapid expansion

of the national school-feeding programme. The WFP/GSFP collaboration is concentrated in Ghana's three regions of the north, which are beset with the highest levels of poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, and maternal and child mortality nationwide, as well as low primary enrolment rates (Lambers, 2009). It is no doubt that since the introduction of the feeding programme in the Yirkee D/A Primary School in the Lawra District has led to some significant improvements in enrolments with visible "appearance" of older pupils who hitherto weren't in school, now making frantic efforts at getting enrolled and staying in school. Is it right to jump to the conclusion that these older pupils too were enticed to attend school because of the introduction of the feeding programme? This is what this research seeks to unearth.

The study therefore sought to: Identify the background and decisions made by older pupils who enrolled and attended school because the school was a beneficiary of the feeding programme and their views sought regarding the introduction of this school feeding programme.

### **Developments of School Feeding Programmes**

#### **A review of the literature**

According to Ahmed (2004), School Feeding Programmes (SFPs) are common in both developing and developed countries and the objectives of such programmes are to provide meals or snacks to reduce short-term hunger in the classroom so that students can concentrate and learn better and also to attract children to school and have them attend regularly. Adelman, Gilligan and Lehrer, (2007) and; Levinger, (1986) indicated in their write up stating the following as objectives of school feeding programmes (SFP). First, SFPs can motivate parents to enrol their children and see that they attend school regularly. Second, SFPs can improve the nutritional status of school age children over time, and alleviate short-term hunger in malnourished or otherwise well-nourished school children. Third, SFPs can improve cognitive functions and academic performance by means of reduced absenteeism and increased attention and concentration due to improved nutritional status and reduced short-term hunger. Indirectly, by increasing the amount of food available to the household, SFPs could improve the nutritional status of household members who are not in school, especially when SFPs entail take home rations. There is evidence from a number of countries that school feeding programmes have fulfilled some or all of these objectives (ibid). The Ghana School Feeding Programme

The Children's Act of the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana 1998, states that, "No person shall deprive a child access to education, immunization, adequate diet, clothing, shelter, medical attention or any other thing required for his/her development" (Children's Act 560, 1998. p.8). Food is instrumental in forming a foundation on which children's educational career can be built. This is why there have been various agitations from the initiatives for the inclusion of all schools in the School Feeding Programme (Dampson & Noi-Okwei, 2009).

The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy II identifies education as key to production of the requisite human capital needed to achieve middle-income status by 2015. This, combined with an effort to align herself with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All objectives, enthused the Government of Ghana to launch a nationwide school feeding programme in 2005. The GSFP is a practical quick-impact approach to achieving the MDGs, especially with regard to poverty and hunger, universal primary education and under-five mortality (SEND-GHANA, 2009).

To realize the development potential of the Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF), the GSFP commenced with 10 pilot schools, drawn from each region of the country. By August 2006, it had been expanded to 200 schools covering 69,000 pupils in all 138 districts at that time. At the end of December 2006, the programme was in 598 schools with a total population of 234,800. In March, 2007, 975 schools were covered benefiting 408,989 pupils daily (GoG, 2009). According to GOG (2009), it was expected that by 2010, 1.04 million pupils will be fed daily. The basic concept of the GSFP is to provide pupils with one hot nutritious meal, prepared from home-grown foodstuffs on every school going day (SEND- GHANA 2009). Amevor, (2008) asserts that the 2008/2009 academic year saw the GSFP operating in 987 kindergartens and 13,246 primary schools nationwide with 477,714 pupils benefiting from it. The GSFP has the potential of reducing hunger and malnutrition, increase school enrolment and retention, and boost domestic food production. Ghana's net primary school enrolment rates for boys therefore increased from 60% in 2004-2005 to 84% in 2007-2008 and that of enrolment of girls increased from 58% in 2004-2005 to 82% in 2007-2008 (Coghlan, 2009).

#### **Methodology**

This qualitative case study was important to gain an in-depth understanding of the views older pupils had regarding a school feeding programme school. In this study, an observation checklist and a semi-structured interview guide were the main instruments used for data collection.

#### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The sample used in this study was: five pupils, two classroom teachers and the head teacher. The sampling technique used in this research was "purposive". The Yirkee D/A primary school in the Lawra District was selected purposively because it is one of the first schools out of four in the district to have started the Ghana School Feeding Programme in 2006. This school gave an invaluable insight to the enrolment pattern over time and equally enriched the study with in-depth information on their perceptions.

The total numbers of older pupils in Yirkee D/A primary were forty six (46) out of which, five were selected. These pupils were identified to be older than the rest in the class and enrolled after the introduction of the feeding programme. This information on the older pupils was obtained from the head teacher and the school admissions register which contained records on their dates of birth. The pupils were purposively selected by dint of their age and availability on the day of the interview as well as their willingness to be interviewed. The oldest pupils were chosen from class one to five. Two teachers, including the head teacher were sampled from the school and interviewed.

The observations and interviews were transcribed and coded to discern meaning. The observations and interviews were put into themes and reported just the way the pupils responded.

#### **Findings and Discussions**

The objective of the study was to identify the background and decisions made by older pupils who enrolled and attended school because the school was a beneficiary of the feeding programme and their views sought regarding the introduction of this school feeding programme.

The findings on their backgrounds were consistent. It was revealed that, older pupils were from "disadvantaged" families, that is their backgrounds were poor and incidentally with large family sizes with most of their siblings not in school. The older pupils were mostly shepherds from peasant farmer backgrounds and were mostly illiterate. Others were taken away by parents or

other “extended family relatives” to farm in different locations outside the region and were not sent to school again until they themselves enrolled at a later age when they found their way back home. This finding seems to exemplify the research finding that students from disadvantaged family backgrounds are less likely to start primary school on-time (Bommier and Lambert, 2000). There was something unique about these older pupils in terms of internal drive. Some adult members of the larger extended families posed as role models to them especially where such families had their children enrolled in school. They were however not allowed to take solitary decisions as for example Niger and Maalu were groomed and encouraged by role models who urged them to take note of and copy the good example of children from their extended families making frantic efforts to be in school and equally other children from the same village similarly making the same efforts.

In the case of other older pupils like Nonne (seventeen years), his parents had to make a choice of sending them to school or the farm, and the latter option was the obvious and this seems to be consistent with the findings of Bellamy (2005) when she indicated that millions of children were out of school because they had to work to meet their basic needs. Adelman, Gilligan, and Lehrer, (2007) also found that, cultural norms dictated that older children should provide essential labour both in the household as well as on family farms. The scenario posed here is that parents seem not to care so much about their wards schooling but rather more interested in engaging them in farming and rearing for income which to them was more lucrative. Priorities of parents reign supreme when they feel that chores have to get done. For example, Nige’s father asked him to stay at home, farm and rear animals rather than go to school. It is an assumption that, school-feeding programmes can induce parents to invest more in their children’s education than they would have in the absence of the programme. Thus, it is assumed that older pupils enrolling in school at later ages had a poor background. This meant that poverty stood the way of educating children formally in school. For example, Maalu, who also had only his mother, said his mother, could not afford his uniforms and books. Another revelation of their not being in school was that, they came from illiterate family backgrounds with most of the other siblings not in school either.

**Table 1. Enrolment figures from 2003/04 – 2010/11 academic years**

Year	Enrolment Figures Yikpee D/A Primary
2003/04	284
2004/05	311
2005/06	319
2006/07	418 start of the feeding programme
2007/08	521
2008/09	547
2009/10	569
2010/11	489

Source: Yikpee D/A Primary School Admission Register/Authors Construct (2011).

Identifying the decisions the older pupils made to get enrolled in the feeding school, they gave responses that had to do with escaping from farming with one interviewee (pupil) indicating his motivation of wanting to be a teacher in future. The idea is that, parents held on to ‘power’ and used it as a parental control measure on their children but once the child is in school, the child gained some breath of freedom. This means that these older pupils in school had a deeper understanding of what they wanted to gain from school, and they did all things possible to ensure they succeeded. These numerous older

pupils’, who could be found in primary school, had enrolled on their own initiative and they claimed that for them older pupils, the feeding programme was not the primary motive that attracted them to school, but rather a learning environment was availed them.

The views sought regarding the introduction of the school feeding programme findings revealed that some older pupils did not like the idea of the feeding programme because it distracted them, thereby impeding learning. When cooking was done for the day, the attention of the pupils was distracted, in that it was drawn towards where the meals were being prepared. Older pupils recognized the distraction caused to others and in my observation; I did not see older pupils looking through the window towards the direction where the meals were prepared. Nige also said, “The feeding programme should be stopped because it distracts me especially when cooking is taking place and we are in the classroom learning. The aroma of the food makes me unable to concentrate unless after feeding.” However, he usually did not look outside when cooking was done. Bangne concurred “The feeding programme should be stopped because it distracts our attention in class. When we are in class you will see pupils peeping in the direction of the kitchen and not concentrating on the lesson. Also after eating they make a lot of noise in the class, at times too they will not come in after eating their meals unless the prefects and teachers chase them in.”

**Table 2. Age distribution of pupils’ sampled for the study at Yikpee D/A Primary School**

Enrolment/Age	67	60	62	64	60	58
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Age						
10	1	-	-	-	-	-
11	1	0	-	-	-	-
12	2	0	11	-	-	-
13	1	0	4	0	-	-
14	1	2	3	0	0	-
15	1	2	2	4	3	0
16	0	1	1	1	4	5
17	0	0	0	1	2	11
18	0	0	0	0	0	3
19	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	7	5	21	6	9	20

Source: Yikpee D/A Primary School Admission Register/Authors Construct (2011).

The teachers interviewed confirmed these occurrences, and in my observations, I witnessed same happening as well. A teacher of the school, Madam Lewaa, expressed that she would like the programme to be stopped because of the numerous problems which emanated such as waste of instructional hours. She was however quick to add that if the problems were solved, then the programme was welcomed... provided it was not going to distract contact instruction. Conversely, the majority of both teachers and pupils also saw the feeding programme as helping alleviate short-term hunger thereby increasing concentration in class during teaching and learning. This is consistent with the findings of Del Rosso, (1999) who indicated that temporary hunger common in children, who are not fed before going to school, can have an adverse effect on learning. Also, Adelman, Gilligan, and Lehrer, (2007); Adelman et al., (2008); Ahmed, (2004), found in their nutrition research literature that short-term hunger (common in children who do not eat before going to school), can have severe adverse effects on learning and academic performances in general. Simply stated, children who are hungry have more difficulties concentrating and performing complex tasks, even if otherwise well nourished.

In all, it was only one older pupil who admitted being in school because the school was on the feeding programme. This is significant in the sense that several studies have examined the role of school feeding programmes (SFP) in stimulating enrolment and increasing attendance (WFP, 1995; 1996; Ahmed and Billah, 1994; Ragan, 2007; Amevor, 2008; Ndola, 2008). This revelation may not be for these pupils alone. It may be that other older pupils who agreed to the fact that the feeding programme was good could have been attracted to the school because of the feeding. However, the tendency of being stigmatized could have prevented them from telling their honest feelings. The argument still stands that, coming for the food is not the explicit reason why these older pupils came to school; they came to be included to learn. Levinger, (1989) concluded in a study that, SFPs should be targeted to the poor although not too poor, but stable; rural areas where enrolment and attendance were relatively low. These findings included the fact that children from better-off homes attended school more regularly, hence were less likely to be influenced by a SFP. On the other hand, where poverty and the need for child labour were particularly high, the financial value of school meals needed to be very significant to offset the opportunity cost of schooling.

In addition, some pupils talked about how other pupils from different schools were mocking them because the school offered them the feeding programme. The head teacher and some teachers on the staff also confirmed that the nearby schools do mock them because of the feeding programme, but they think it is mere jealousy. Hay, (2000) indicated in his research findings that there were some indications that school food programmes could have unintended adverse consequences, such as dependency and stigmatization. However, if some of the schools are on the feeding programme and others are not, then there is the tendency that there will be stigmatization. The other pupils in the non-feeding schools are only expressing sour grapes, because they are not on the programme. It isn't that the programme is not good.

The rationale of the school feeding programme is that, people need food, and when given they will come. In reality, the world is a complex place. The feeding programme is a signal. They are coming because the feeding programme is opening an invitation to them. Older pupils in school feeding programme schools place importance on perception, that is how others view them. These pupils stand out, and that they are aware of how others see them.

Table 1 present data on school enrolment figures from 2003/4 academic year to 2010/11 academic. It presents data three years before the start of the feeding programme and three years after the introduction of the feeding programme. The information was obtained from the log book, admission registers and class attendance registers. The results show that the school already had increases in their enrolment figures but it was more pronounced after the introduction of the school feeding programme. This means that the introduction of the feeding programme had a significant correlation with an increase in enrolment of pupils in Yikpee D/A Primary School.

Data was collected on enrolment figures of older pupils who got enrolled into primary one when they were ten years or older. Table 2 below shows enrolment figures on older pupils who got enrolled into primary one when they were ten years or older. It also shows their current class and age and the total enrolment of the class as well. The symbol "0" means those classes and age groups were not dealt with. Data was sourced from the school admissions and class attendance registers.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study made the following Recommendations

1. Policy makers on school feeding programmes should carry out needs analysis or at least seek the views of target beneficiaries before final decisions are made on whether, where and when to implement the programme.
2. Wider coverage of the Ghana School Feeding Programme should be pursued in deprived communities.

## Conclusion

The study was a qualitative one that looked at the stories behind the quantitative data of increased enrolment and attendance of older pupils. The study used a case study design to explore the views of older pupils in a Ghana School Feeding Programme school in the Lawra District of the Upper West Region. Yikpee D/A Primary School was purposively considered for the study because it was the first to have benefited from the feeding programme in the district. Observation checklist and semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data. From the data, it can be concluded that for the older pupils it was not the food per se but the school being a welcoming place for them to pursue their future plans; hence they wanted to be in school. It also came to the fore that these older pupils were born into large-sized families and it further came clear that there was something unique about them—they were the only ones who had ventured from these extended family lineages and made up their minds to enrol in school. These same older pupils also played a significant role in maintaining discipline in the school. Because they had 'outgrown' their colleagues in age and stature, authorities therefore found it expedient putting them in leadership positions (prefects) to help control pupils in school thereby playing a significant role in school management. With regard to the influence of this study on the policy, the implications are that more often than not, reforms are done for pupils without a consideration of their viewpoints. The stories of these older pupils and the larger school pupil population if sourced will help inform policy makers in taking informed decisions for them if only they are consulted.

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