

HEAD TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE STATUS OF MEAL SERVICES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

Meal services in schools aim at enhancing the nutritional status of the school child and subsequently prevent malnutrition. It contributes greatly to reducing drop outs and increases enrolment in schools, a major objective of Universal Basic Education (UBE). The study investigated the head teachers perception of the status of meal services in primary schools in Enugu State. The study also discussed the implications of school meal services for meeting the challenges of UBE. The study adopted a survey design and used a multistage sample of 240 out of the 1150 head teachers in Enugu State. Multistage sampling technique was done in two stages which involved purposive and systematic random sampling for participant's selection. Instrument for data collection was a 19-item questionnaire, with four weighted response options. Validation of the instrument was established through three experts, two health education lecturers and one measurement and evaluation lecture, from Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Sequel to their approval it was pilot tested. Its reliability coefficient yielded 0.85 using the Cronbach alpha method. Data analysis was done using mean with standard deviation and the t-test. Results indicated that the head teachers perception of the status of meal services in the primary schools was low and hence non-functional irrespective of location. Implications of the finding for UBE challenges were articulated before making recommendations. The recommendation among others include that nutritionists should be posted to every primary school for regular supervision and monitoring of meals served to the pupil if the services are available.

Introduction

Education is globally recognized as an instrument of social and economic reconstruction. It is in pursuit of this goal that the 9-year basic education scheme was launched on 30th September, 1995 (Federal Ministry of Education, 1999). The scheme aims at leading the learner to acquire appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative

and life-skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning as a basis for scientific and reflective thinking. For this aim to be achieved measures have to be taken to establish a conducive, emotional and physical environment within the school setting. One of such measures could be maintenance of a healthful school living.

Healthful school living as conceived by Grace (1993) was that aspect of school health education programme which ensures the provision of safe physical structures, accident prevention and safety education, safe water supply, adequate waste disposal, good interpersonal relationship and meal services. Meal services are the nutritional care provided in the school to ensure that every child has at least a meal in the school per day (Akinsola, 2006). The aim is to ensure that the school child has at least a balanced meal once a day. The role of meal services in the achievement of the objectives of Universal Basic Education (UBE) is cardinal. Onyika (2004) believed that meal services did not only attract children's interest to school, they provide better nutrition for the pupils and also ensure good health because of the vitamin and other nutrients there in. Orji (2005) observed that school meal services reduce truancy, lateness, phobia and loitering exhibited by little children. It is also believed that, since meal services provide nutrients, one may agree that the children's energy is sustained. This is essential with such children who do not eat before coming to school and those who walk along distances from home to school. Increase in enrolment and reduction in illiteracy levels has remained major objective of the UBE programme (Tagbo, 2005). Oforka (2009) revealed that school meal services are capable of achieving the objectives of the programme. Furthermore, Tagbo (2005) established that the provision of balanced meal per child each day would address the problem of under nutrition among the children. This will in turn control the incidence of drop outs due to diseases

caused by malnutrition. Similarly, meal services are in tandem with Goal 1 and 2 of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and National Development Roadmap (NDR). Meeting the challenges of hunger eradication (Goal 1) through meal services in the school will stand the child on a stable footing to achieving the MDGs objectives of Universal Primary Education (Goal 2) which is contained in the UBE scheme.

Basic Education has been conceptualized by Obanya (1999), as the level, type and form of learning needed to build firm roots for literacy and numeracy to inculcate basic life skills of learning. Olatunji and Olatunji (2009) described basic education as that education given to children between aged 6 and 11 years. It is a very crucial stage because it is the foundation on which the success or failure of the rest of the education system is built (FRN, 2004). Consequently, the provision of balanced meal services becomes a challenge to the UBE scheme, because poor health would impede the child's academic progress hence the need for adequate nutrition. It is based on this background that it has become necessary to determine the perception of the status of meal services among the head teachers in primary schools in Enugu State.

Provision of school meals require in addition conducive physical and socio-economic environment. Meal services are required in the school to augment the inadequate meals in some homes. This study intends to address the perception of the status of meal services among the head teachers in primary schools in Enugu State.

The purpose of the study was to determine the perception of the status of meal services among the head teachers in primary schools in Enugu State.

Specifically, the study sought to:

Determining the perception of the head teachers on the status of meal services in primary schools in urban and rural areas in Enugu State.

Research Question:

One research question was posed to guide the study

1. What is the level of perception of the urban rural head teachers on the status of meal services in primary schools in Enugu State..

Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 significant level formulated to guide the study:

Ho: There is no significant difference between the mean rating of head teachers in Urban and rural primary schools regarding their perception of the status of meal services in primary schools in Enugu state.

Method

The study was a cross-sectional survey carried out in Enugu State. Enugu state had 17 Local Government Areas with corresponding 17 Local Government Education Authorities (LGEA). The population of the study was 1150 head teachers in all the public primary schools in Enugu State. Purposive, systematic multistage sampling methods was used to select 240 (102 urban and 138 rural) head teachers in primary schools for the study. Eight out of 17 Local Government Areas in Enugu State were

selected purposively to represent both urban and rural areas. The proportionate sampling technique was used to draw 30 head teachers from the 8 local government area. Instrument for data collection was a 19-item questionnaire structured by the researcher with response option of Very High Status (VHS) High Status (HS) Low Status (LS) and Very Low Status (VLS). These responses were weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The validity of the instant was established through the judgement of two health education lecturers and one measurement and evaluation. Sequel to their approval it was pilot tested. Its reliability coefficient yielded 0.85 using the Cronbach Alpha correlation statistics. Data were collected by the researcher with the help of four research assistants. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the head teachers during their various respective local governments' week meetings and collected on the spot. The 240 copies of the questionnaire were duly completed and returned giving a 100% return rate. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation, any mean score of 2.50 and above were regarded as high status (HS) while mean response below 2.5 were regarded as low status (LS). The t-test was employed to test the only null hypothesis at .05 level of significance.

Results

In presenting the findings relevant to the study, the answers to the research question were provided using mean and standard deviation. This is followed by testing the postulated hypothesis using the t-test.

Research Question 1: What is the perception of the urban rural head teachers on the status of meal services in primary schools in Enugu State?

deviation of the respondent's responses on the perception of urban and rural head teachers on the status of meal services in primary schools in Enugu State.

Table 1: Mean scores and standard

S/N	Items	N = 102		N = 138	
		urban head teachers		rural head teachers	
		X	SD	X	SD
1	How often are meals served in your school?	2.40	0.63	2.32	0.58
2	How often do you ensure that people take one at least one balance meal at school	1.96	0.89	1.88	0.69
3.	How often do pupils take fruits and vegetables at school?	2.51	0.55	2.60	0.52
4.	How often do you serve varieties of foods in your school?	2.32	0.76	2.41	7.51
5.	How often do pupils take juice as an appetizer in school?	1.83	0.77	1.79	0.79
6.	How often is glass of milk served to pupils at school?	1.79	0.66	1.88	0.87
7.	How often do pupils reject meals served in the school?	2.20	0.43	2.31	0.49
8.	How often do you ensure that nutritious food is served in the school?	2.30	0.66	1.86	0.69
9.	How often do qualified nutritionists inspect food served in the school?	1.40	0.55	1.56	0.63
10.	How often do Government officials monitor the adequacy of meals in school?	1.96	0.58	1.98	0.51
11.	How often are food handlers in school subjected to medical examinations?	2.02	0.88	2.10	0.69
12.	How often do you supervise food sold in your school?	2.49	.78	2.12	0.89
13.	How often do you supervise the sanitary conditions of the environment where meals are prepared?	2.41	0.77	2.38	0.82
14.	How often do you inspect places where food is stored?	1.96	0.65	1.88	0.59
15.	How often do pupils accept meals served in the school?	2.61	0.73	2.54	0.86
16.	How often is health education on food hygiene organized for food vendors in school?	1.96	0.83	2.01	.56
17.	How often do you ensure that food vendors use potable food warmer?	2.31	0.68	2.42	0.89
18.	How often do you monitor meals served in school to ensure quality standard and required temperature?	2.31	0.71	2.42	0.66
19.	How often are pupils given health instruction about food hygiene in school?	3.01	0.56	2.83	0.66
	Grand Mean	2.19	0.69	2.17	0.66

Table 1 above shows that responses of urban and rural head teachers indicate a high status on items 3, 15 and 19 with mean scores and standard deviation of $X = 2.51$, $SD = 0.55$; $X = 2.61$, $SD = 0.73$ and $X = 3.01$, $SD = 0.56$ respectively. The responses attract low status on the rest of the items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 18 with mean scores below the cut off point of 2.50.

The table also reveals a low status of meal services with grand mean score of 2.19 and standard deviation of 0.69 for

urban head teachers and grand mean score of 2.17 and standard deviation of 0.65 for rural head teachers in Primary Schools in Enugu State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of head teachers in urban and rural Primary Schools regarding their perception of the status of meal services in Primary Schools in Enugu State.

Table 2: t-test comparison of the head teachers perception of the status of meal service in Primary Schools in Enugu State

Variable	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-table
Urban	102	2.19	0.69	238	0.22	1.96
Rural	138	2.17	0.66		0.22	

The t-test comparison was calculated to determine whether there were any significant difference in the perception of head teachers from urban and rural primary schools on the status of meal services in Enugu State. The result reveals that there is no significant difference in the mean perception responses of head teachers from urban and rural primary schools. It is indicative from the data that the t-cal of 0.22 is less than the t-table value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance. Therefore, head teachers in urban primary school did not differ from head teachers of rural primary schools on the way they perceived the status of the meal services in primary schools in Enugu State. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0) was not

rejected.

Discussion

Research question one revealed that the head teachers perceived the status of meal services in the Primary Schools in Enugu State to be of low status. This finding agreed with Asogwa and Igbokwe (2010) who established that the status of meal services as a healthful school living programme in Teacher Training Institute in Enugu State was low status. However, this study contradicted Oforka (2009) who had earlier established provision of meal services for all classes in Primary Schools in Enugu State. One may nurse the feeling that the trial programme of school meal plan in schools around 2009, which failed may have accounted for the finding of Oforka (2009).

Hypothesis One revealed that meal services in the Primary Schools in the state are in a far cry from the desired status. Although, it was evident that health education on food hygiene was sometimes given. Opportunity for ensuring the utilization of the acquired knowledge was not created in the school. A functional meal services is expected to provide such opportunities. Also this study established that medical examinations and health inspection of food handlers (vendors) in the school were at a low level. This is evident in the respondents' rating. This showed that these important aspects of meal services were either done seldom or never at all. Akintola (2006) suggested that before food vendors were allowed to sell food in the school, they must be subjected to screening for infectious diseases, such as typhoid and tuberculosis. In addition to freedom from infectious disease, meal services in the school should be monitored to ensure that the food provided are not only rich in the required nutrients but of high quality. It is in recognition of this caution that Tagbo (2005) recommended provision of one balanced meal per child per day would help solve the problem of under nourishment and underweight in our school children. Unfortunately, the present study established non functionality in this area of meal services. Ensuring balance in the composition of meals served at school was required to augment the inadequacy in the children's meals at home, especially those in the rural areas.

It is clear from the study that, the provision of meals services in the public

primary schools in Enugu State is not carried out. Inadequate provision of nutritious meals is capable of impacting negatively on the process of teaching and learning. This goes to suggest that it constitute a challenge to be met with in the journey to achieve meal adequacy objectives of UBE.

Since both Head teachers in urban and rural primary schools indicated that there was no significance difference among head teachers on the perception of the status of meal services in Primary Schools in Enugu State, it goes to suggest that meal services are not adequately implemented in our Primary Schools or that children were not served meals at all in schools.

Implications of the Study

One of the major objectives of UBE is to increase enrolment and reduce illiteracy level. Adequate meal services in the school are capable of achieving these objectives. Hence non-functionality in meal services in the school becomes a serious challenge to be met with UBE. Absence of meal services in the school could lead to disease that might promote drop out, counterproductive to the UBE objective of increase in enrolment. Again, when it was realized that primary school children were vulnerable to diseases especially malnutrition (Obionu, 2001), and Tagbo (2005) had observed that provision of one balanced meal per child per day would address the problem of under nourishment, underweight and keep children in school. Then, low status of meal services as established by this study, constituted a big challenge to UBE. Furthermore,

meal services were known to minimize truancy, lateness, school phobia, loitering (Orji, 2005), and sustaining the energy of the school may produce a contrary behaviour in the school child, against the objective of UBE. The implication is that a conducive, physical and emotional environment needed for teaching and learning will become a mirage. Tagbo (2005) argued that, the educational progress of every child depended on good health, and that neither teaching nor learning could go on in the absence of good health. The objectives of UBE may be seriously hampered or not achieved at all if the status of the meal services in the primary schools remained low.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it was observed that the respondents perceived the status of meal services in primary schools in Enugu State to be of low status. This may be attributed to the failure of school meal plus programme of 2009. Consequently, both the head teachers in urban and rural areas perceived the status of meal services in Enugu State in the same way. A look at the findings on the study and objectives of UBE, absence of meal services in the public primary schools in Enugu State will constitute a big challenge to UBE.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Nutritionists should be posted to every Primary School for regular supervision and monitoring of meal served to the pupils

2. Government should ensure that food containing all the food nutrients are supplied to the schools and served to the children.
3. A well sponsored and organised food vendor services should be put in place in the schools and the nutritionist supervise the meals served on quality and quantity.
4. Meal services in schools should become functional and sponsored by government as in Botswana where food is offered to children during morning break and lunch.

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