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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Community Support on School Feeding Programs to Enhance Learning Outcomes for Primary Schools' Pupils with Intellectual Impairments in Tabora District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of community support for school feeding programs on learning outcomes of pupils with intellectual impairments in primary schools in Tabora District, Tabora Region-Tanzania. The study was guided by Joyce Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (1990s). The study employed mixed research approach with explanatory sequential design. The sample size of the study was 153 respondents selected using purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling techniques to ensure representativeness. The data was collected using questionnaires, interview and focus group discussion. The analysis of data was done using SPSS version 26 for quantitative data while qualitative data were thematically analysed. The study revealed that community support significantly enhances school feeding programs, leading to improved nutrition, concentration, attendance, and learning outcomes for pupils with intellectual impairments, though inconsistent engagement and limited awareness remain challenges. Teachers and participants emphasized the need for stronger collaboration and targeted education to increase parental involvement and program inclusivity. It was recommended that schools and stakeholders should organize regular awareness campaigns and workshops to educate communities about the specific needs of pupils with intellectual impairments to foster meaningful support. Additionally, strengthening partnerships between communities and government agencies is essential to ensure sustainable funding, transparent resource allocation, and effective program monitoring.

Keywords: Community support; school feeding programs; learning outcomes; pupils with intellectual impairments

INTRODUCTION

Community involvement is essential in improving educational outcomes for pupils with intellectual impairments, especially through support for school feeding programs. Such programs ensure that learners receive adequate nutrition, which is fundamental to their cognitive functioning, concentration, and overall ability to engage in learning activities. The collaboration among parents, government agencies, local organizations, and NGOs fosters a holistic support system that provides both material and emotional resources critical for these pupils' academic success (Nadeem et al., 2023; Gonzaga et al., 2024). By contributing to school feeding initiatives, communities help reduce absenteeism caused by hunger and malnutrition, thereby enabling pupils with intellectual impairments to participate more fully in classroom activities.

Pupils with intellectual impairments encounter a multitude of obstacles, including difficulties in communication, social integration, and learning, which are further exacerbated by nutritional deficits and social stigma (Sonia & Devi, 2023; Farida & Sekiswa, 2024). In rural Tanzanian contexts such as Tabora District, these challenges are pronounced due to limited access to specialized learning resources and assistive devices (Ronald et al., 2023; Ozkeser, 2019). School feeding programs supported by the community provide a critical intervention by ensuring that these pupils have the energy and health needed to engage in learning activities. Proper nutrition contributes to improved cognitive function and reduces fatigue, which directly influences attendance rates and academic performance (Bagadood, 2022; Paramole et al., 2024). Furthermore, these programs often serve as an entry point for integrating pupils with intellectual impairments into the school community, helping to combat isolation and emotional difficulties.

Globally, community involvement in school feeding programs has demonstrated positive impacts on inclusive education, particularly for pupils with intellectual impairments. In Denmark, active participation from families and local organizations has fostered supportive, inclusive classrooms that promote both academic and social development through nutrition and awareness campaigns (Tideman et al., 2023; Moesby-Jensen & Bonfils, 2023). Similarly, China's collaboration between parents, schools, and community groups has facilitated access to essential resources, addressing misconceptions about intellectual impairments and enhancing learning environments (Peng & Rahman, 2024; Babik & Gardner, 2021). Thailand and Ghana have also seen benefits where community partnerships contribute to curriculum development, training, and funding that underpin successful school feeding initiatives for inclusive education (Klibthong & Agbenyega, 2022; Naami & Mort, 2023). In Kenya, despite challenges, efforts to integrate community service learning within the Competency-Based Curriculum highlight the importance of empowering communities to support feeding programs and educational participation (Kenya Institute of Special Education, 2023; Oranga et al., 2022).

Tanzania's inclusive education policies emphasize community involvement as a cornerstone for supporting pupils with intellectual impairments (MoEST, 2021). The Education and Training Policy (2023) and the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2021–2026) advocate for coordinated efforts among families, community groups, and education stakeholders to provide inclusive support services, including school feeding programs (Eden et al., 2024). However, in practice, many communities, particularly in Tabora District, face barriers such as low awareness about intellectual impairments, economic hardships, and prevailing stigma, which limit meaningful engagement (Eden et al., 2024). Strengthening community awareness and advocacy is necessary to overcome these challenges and mobilize local resources to sustain school feeding programs. When communities are actively involved, pupils' attendance, academic success, and social-emotional well-being improve significantly, underscoring the importance of such collaboration (Mushi et al., 2023; Paramole et al., 2024).

Despite national policy frameworks, the enrolment of pupils with intellectual impairments remains low and inconsistent in Tabora District, reflecting gaps in the implementation of inclusive education and associated feeding programs (Eden et al., 2024). Limited community participation exacerbates these gaps, as families and local groups often lack the knowledge and economic capacity to support their children's education fully (Asiimwe & Nabitake, 2023). Addressing stigma through community education and increasing resource allocation for school feeding programs are critical strategies to boost attendance and learning outcomes for these pupils (Kassim, 2019). Moreover, sustained community engagement promotes nurturing home environments and encourages regular school attendance, which are essential for pupils' academic progress and social integration (Mushi et al., 2023). Therefore, this study aimed to examine the effect community support for school feeding programs on learning outcomes of pupils with intellectual impairments in primary schools in Tabora District, Tabora Region-Tanzania.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Joyce Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (1990s). The theory highlights the interconnected roles of home, school, and community in supporting pupil learning and development, is highly relevant to understanding the impact of community support for school feeding programs on pupils with intellectual impairments. The theory emphasizes that when families, schools, and

communities collaborate, they create a stronger support network that enhances learning outcomes, particularly for students needing extra care outside the classroom. Epstein's framework of six types of involvement community cooperation, at-home learning, communication, parenting, volunteering, and decision-making provides a useful lens for examining how community participation in feeding programs can offer essential resources such as inclusive practices, emotional support, and social integration opportunities for these pupils (Goodall, 2022; Epstein & Sheldon, 2022). This collaborative approach aligns with findings that community engagement in school feeding initiatives improves attendance, concentration, and overall well-being, which are critical for pupils with intellectual impairments to reach their full potential. However, the theory's application also acknowledges challenges such as varying levels of family and community involvement due to socioeconomic or cultural barriers, and potential imbalances in decision-making power, which may affect the effectiveness of such programs. Overall, Epstein's theory underscores the importance of strong, cooperative partnerships among schools, families, and communities to maximize the benefits of school feeding programs for pupils with intellectual impairments.

Empirical Literature Review

Community support for school feeding programs plays a crucial role in enhancing learning outcomes for pupils with intellectual impairments by encouraging regular attendance, improving concentration, and promoting overall well-being. When communities actively engage in these programs, they contribute to creating a stable and supportive educational environment that benefits pupils' academic performance. Arafin (2024) highlights the importance of school lunch programs in Bangladesh, noting their role in improving children's health, nutrition, and academic success by reducing classroom hunger and fostering healthier eating habits. These programs not only increase enrolment and attendance, particularly among disadvantaged students, but also yield broader social benefits such as economic growth, sustainable food systems, and gender empowerment. However, challenges related to program sustainability, food quality, and funding necessitate continuous evaluation and policy refinement.

Several empirical studies from Africa reinforce the positive impact of school feeding programs on educational outcomes. Alowonle (2024) examined the effects of the School Feeding Program and community perceptions on academic performance among elementary students in Ondo State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey and ex-post facto design with 732 participants, the study found that school feeding and community perception together explained 61% of the variance in academic achievement, highlighting the importance of community-government collaboration. Similarly, Nkop and Mboho (2024) investigated the association between school feeding and student retention and test performance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Their findings confirmed significant improvements in retention and class test scores but no notable effect on completion rates or overall academic achievement, emphasizing the need for nutrient-rich meals to boost cognitive function.

Further research underscores the benefits of school feeding on student behaviour and attendance in different contexts. Laurence and Andala (2023) explored the impact of a school food program on student discipline in Rwanda's Nyarugenge District, reporting that the program accounted for nearly 65% of the variance in student behaviour improvements. Key factors included timely food distribution, meal frequency, community involvement, and monitoring, leading to recommendations for standardized program implementation and increased parental engagement. In Kenya, Kitivui (2018) found that the frequency, quality, and quantity of school meals significantly influenced preschool enrolment and attendance in Mwingi Central Sub-County. While frequent meals reduced absenteeism and better food quality increased enrolment, the nutritional adequacy of the meals remained a concern, prompting calls for enhanced meal quality and expanded government support.

In Tanzania, Kamnyungu (2019) demonstrated that school feeding programs in Musoma Rural District significantly boosted attendance and academic performance among pupils, with better outcomes observed in schools implementing these programs. The study advocated for program expansion but acknowledged the need to consider external factors such as teaching quality and socio-economic conditions to fully understand academic results. Overall, these studies collectively affirm that school feeding programs, supported by community involvement and sound policies, are instrumental in improving attendance, behaviour, retention, and academic performance, though further experimental research is necessary to establish causal relationships and optimize program

design.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed research approach underpinned by pragmatism. The research adopted an explanatory sequential design, beginning with the collection and analysis of quantitative data through questionnaires administered to 90 teachers, 8 head teachers, 6 Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and 1 District Primary Education Officer (DPEO), selected using purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling techniques to ensure representativeness and diversity. The qualitative component involved conducting semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with parents. The data collection instruments used included questionnaires, interview guides, and focus group discussion guides, all of which underwent validity assessment through face and content validity methods, with expert reviews providing feedback for refinement. The reliability of the quantitative instruments was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.891, indicating high internal consistency. For data analysis, quantitative data were processed using SPSS version 26, employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and graphical representations, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes, which were then integrated with the quantitative findings through triangulation. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, including obtaining research permits from relevant authorities, securing informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity by assigning unique identifiers and storing data securely, and adhering to research ethics principles such as voluntary participation, privacy, and proper attribution of sources to avoid plagiarism. This comprehensive approach ensured the validity, reliability, and ethical integrity of the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Effect of Community Support for School Feeding Programs on Learning Outcomes for Pupils with Intellectual Impairments

The researcher intended to investigate the impact of community support for school feeding programs on learning outcomes for pupils with intellectual impairments. The teachers were given questionnaires comprising statements relating to the objective. Moreover, there was an interview and focus group discussion, which was carried out with various participants. Thus, Table 1 presents the findings.

Table 1 presents teachers' views on the impact of community support for school feeding programs on learning outcomes for pupils with intellectual impairments. The responses are categorized into five Likert scale statements ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree. Each statement gives information on specific areas of community support for school feeding programs.

Community Involvement in School Feeding Programs

The majority of teachers 42, 46.7%) agreed and 11 (12.2%) % strongly agreed, acknowledged that community involvement ensures pupils receive nutritious meals regularly. However, 16 (17.8%) disagreed, and 7 (7.8%) strongly disagreed, while 14 (15.6%) remained undecided. This suggests that while community participation in school feeding programs is generally seen as helpful, there are still gaps in consistency or reach. It also indicates the need for strengthening community engagement to make school meals more reliable and accessible across schools. The qualitative response highlights that while community involvement in school feeding programs positively impacts pupils' attendance and concentration, inconsistent engagement often due to poverty or lack of awareness limits its reach, emphasizing the need for greater sensitization and coordination to strengthen support. Moreover, an interview response from one of the interviewees shows that:

> Community involvement in school feeding programs has made a big difference in my school, especially where parents and local leaders actively contribute food items or small financial support. In these areas, pupils consistently attend, and I notice better concentration in class. However, this support is not the same everywhere; some communities are still not fully engaged due to poverty or lack of awareness. I believe that with more sensitization and coordination, more community members will understand the importance of these programs and take part in supporting them (Interview H5, July 2025).

This shows that community involvement has a positive impact, but is not yet widespread. Where present, it improves learning by ensuring children are fed and focused. Schools and authorities need to strengthen community awareness and partnerships to reach more pupils. This can make feeding programs more

sustainable and inclusive for all learners, including those with intellectual impairments. This suggests that community involvement positively influences pupil well-being and learning, but its limited reach hinders full impact. Strengthening community awareness and partnerships is crucial for expanding sustainable feeding programs that support all learners, including those with intellectual impairments. This aligns with Arafin (2024), who found that school lunch programs in Bangladesh improve children's health, nutrition, and academic outcomes by reducing hunger and fostering better concentration, attendance, and engagement, especially among disadvantaged students.

Table 1. Teachers' responses on the impact of community support for school feeding programs on learning outcomes for pupils with intellectual impairments (n=90)

Statement	SD		D		U		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Community involvement in school feeding programs ensures that pupils receive nutritious meals regularly.	7	7.8	16	17.8	14	15.6	42	46.7	11	12.2
The availability of community-supported school feeding programs has improved the concentration and participation	5	5.6	7	7.8	17	18.9	49	54.4	12	13.3
Community initiatives help ensure food security for pupils, reducing absenteeism and dropout rates.	8	8.9	7	7.8	14	15.6	46	51.1	15	16.7
Community supports school feeding programs by contributing resources such as food items or financial assistance.	5	5.6	13	14.4	27	30	40	44.4	5	5.6
Teachers and school staff observe increased engagement and motivation in learning due to the availability of community-backed feeding programs.	3	3.3	9	10	18	20	46	51.1	14	15.6
Community partnerships with government agencies strengthen the sustainability of feeding programs for pupils.	2	2.2	5	5.6	20	22.2	49	54.4	14	15.6
The involvement of community members in school feeding programs fosters a sense of responsibility and inclusivity in supporting pupils with intellectual impairments.	8	8.9	8	8.9	18	20	40	44.4	16	17.8

(Key: SD-strongly disagree, D-disagree, U-undecided, A-agree, SA- strongly agree)
Source: Field Data (2025)

Improvement in Concentration and Participation

A high percentage of teachers 49, 54.4%) agreed and 12 (13.3%) strongly agreed, believed that the availability of community-supported school feeding programs has improved pupil concentration and participation in class. Only 7 (7.8%) disagreed and 5 (5.6%) strongly disagreed, while 17 (18.9%) were undecided. These findings highlight the positive impact of proper nutrition on classroom engagement and support the continuation and expansion of feeding initiatives backed by the community. This corresponds with Nkop and Mboho (2024), who found that while school feeding programs significantly improved student retention and test performance, they did not notably affect completion rates or overall academic achievement. These findings also agree with Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence (1990s), which emphasizes the interconnected roles of family, school, and community in supporting a child's development. The community-supported school feeding programs exemplify how collaboration among these spheres can address basic needs, thereby creating a more conducive environment for learning and improving pupils' classroom engagement and participation.

Reduction in Absenteeism and Dropout Rates

More than two-thirds of teachers 46, 51.1%) agreed and 15 (16.7%) strongly agreed that community-driven feeding initiatives contribute to food security, which helps reduce absenteeism and school dropouts. A smaller group 8 (8.9%) strongly disagreed, and 7 (7.8%)

disagreed, did not see this effect, and 14 (15.6%) were undecided. This shows that majority of respondents agrees that feeding programs are effective in keeping children in school, especially for vulnerable groups. Likewise, one of the respondents added that:

> In my school, where the community supports feeding programs, I have seen a clear drop in absenteeism and dropout rates. When children are assured of a meal at school, even those from struggling families come regularly and stay focused. The feeding program provides stability and routine for many pupils, especially those with intellectual impairments. The challenge is that not all communities contribute equally, so some schools still face high absenteeism (Interview H3, July 2025).

This implies that school feeding programs, supported by the community, play a key role in keeping pupils in school. They reduce hunger-related absenteeism and help create a stable learning environment, especially for vulnerable learners. However, unequal community involvement means some pupils still miss out. Strengthening local engagement can make these benefits more consistent across all public primary schools. This result is supported by Alowonle (2024), who asserted that school feeding programs improve attendance, retention, and learning results, as evidenced by the findings, which showed that school feeding and community perception strongly predicted 61% of the variance in students' academic achievement.

Community Support for Feeding Programs

Regarding direct contributions from parents and caregivers, 40 (44.4%) agreed and 5 (5.6%) strongly agreed that they support feeding programs by providing food or financial assistance. However, a notable 27 (30%) were undecided, and 13 (14.4%) disagreed, while 5 (5.6%). This indicates that while some families are actively involved, others may face economic challenges or lack awareness, limiting their participation. More sensitization and support could help increase family involvement. Supporting this, Laurence and Andala (2023) demonstrated that adopting school feeding programs had a substantial positive impact on student discipline. Key factors included timely food distribution, meal frequency, community involvement, and effective monitoring. The study highlighted that school lunches notably improve student behaviour and discipline, including increased rates of assignment submission.

During the focus group discussion, many parents expressed a willingness to support school feeding programs in small ways, such as bringing food items or helping with meal preparation, but noted challenges like lack of information on how to contribute and financial constraints. Some parents shared that seeing the positive effects of feeding programs such as improved school attendance and alertness in their children motivated them to provide more support. They agreed that clearer guidance and more active involvement from schools would encourage greater parental participation, even if contributions were modest. This highlights the need for better communication between schools and families to empower parents within their means, thereby strengthening partnerships that are crucial for the consistency and success of feeding programs, especially for pupils with intellectual impairments who rely on routine and proper nutrition. Supporting this, Kitivui (2018) found that meal frequency, quality, and quantity significantly influenced enrolment, attendance, and absenteeism, though the study also identified the need to improve food satisfaction to maximize benefits. Challenges such as irregular funding, inadequate facilities, insufficiently trained staff, cultural food preferences, and limited community engagement further affect program effectiveness. Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (1990s) underscores that student success is enhanced when families, schools, and communities actively collaborate; in feeding programs, improved communication and school engagement foster parental involvement, thereby boosting attendance and student well-being.

Increased Engagement and Motivation

A significant majority of 46 (51.1%) agreed and 14 (15.6% strongly agreed) reported observing increased motivation and learning engagement among pupils due to community-backed feeding programs. Very few teachers disagreed 9 10%), 3 (3.3%) strongly disagreed, and 18 (20%) were undecided. Majority highlights that nutritious meals provided through community support help create a better learning environment and positively influence student behaviour and performance. Meanwhile, one of the interviewees asserted that:

> In my ward, where the community helps with feeding programs, pupils are more active and pay more attention in class. Children who get food at school have more energy and can focus better, especially those who may not eat well at home. For pupils with intellectual impairments,

> having regular meals at school helps them feel calm and ready to learn. Children who are not hungry enjoy school more and want to keep coming (Interview W3, July 2025).

This shows that when pupils are well-fed through community-supported programs, they become more interested and active in learning. Regular meals help them stay focused and happy in school. This is even more important for pupils with intellectual impairments, who need a stable routine. Feeding programs supported by the community can make learning better for all pupils. This reflects Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (1990s), which emphasizes that when families, schools, and communities collaborate closely, students benefit through improved attendance, behaviour, and academic performance. Kamnyungu (2019) supports this, showing that schools with feeding programs report higher enrolment, attendance, and achievement than those without.

Strengthening Program Sustainability

When asked if community partnerships with government agencies strengthen the sustainability of school feeding programs, 49 teachers (54.4%) agreed and 14 (15.6%) strongly agreed, indicating strong support for collaboration. Only 5 (5.6%) disagreed, 2 (2.2%) strongly disagreed, while 20 (22.2%) remained undecided. These results show the importance of shared responsibility between communities and public institutions in maintaining and expanding feeding initiatives. The qualitative response emphasizes that sustainable school feeding programs rely on strong collaboration between the community and government, reducing dependence on external donors and fostering shared responsibility to ensure consistent and long-term support. Correspondingly, one of the interviewees claimed that:

> We need strong support from the community and the government to keep school feeding programs going. When parents, local leaders, and non-government organizations work together, it becomes easier to provide food regularly. Some schools depend too much on donors, which is not always reliable. We are encouraging more local partnerships so feeding programs can continue without outside help (Interview D1, July 2025).

This illustrates that lasting school feeding programs need help from both the community and government. Schools can keep giving meals when people work together locally even when donations stop. It also means pupils, especially those with special needs, can rely on getting food every day. Strong local support makes feeding programs more stable and helpful for learning. Local and government initiatives must be carefully planned and engineered to ensure sustainability, including consistent funding, community engagement strategies, and policies that support long-term program management. Andala (2023) supports this view, noting that community involvement and government collaboration are key contributors to the successful and sustainable implementation of school feeding programs.

Inclusion of Pupils with Intellectual Impairments

Regarding whether community involvement in feeding programs promotes responsibility and inclusion for pupils with intellectual impairments, 40 (44.4%) and 16 (17.8%) respondents strongly agreed, while 8 (8.9%) disagreed, 8 (8.9%) strongly disagreed, and 18 (20%) were undecided. This indicates growing recognition of the importance of inclusivity, though further education and awareness are needed to ensure feeding programs effectively cater to all learners, especially those with special needs. An interviewee emphasized that inclusive feeding programs demonstrate community care for every child, but noted that some communities still lack understanding of how to support children with intellectual impairments properly (Interview D1, July 2025). Similarly, parents in a focus group shared that feeding programs help their children feel calm, happy, and included, yet expressed concerns about occasional exclusion or unequal treatment (FGD 1, July 2025). These findings highlight the critical role of community involvement in fostering belonging and responsibility, while underscoring the ongoing need for awareness to support equitable inclusion. This aligns with Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, which stresses collaboration between families, schools, and communities to support all learners (Epstein, 1990s), and Kamnyungu's (2019) emphasis on inclusive community participation enhancing care for pupils with special needs. Increasing education within these interconnected spheres is essential for ensuring feeding programs promote fairness and inclusion for every child. Nonetheless, teachers were supposed to provide measures to improve community support for school feeding programs on enhancing learning for pupils with intellectual impairments in public primary schools.

Teachers indicated that improving community support

for school feeding programs to enhance learning for pupils with intellectual impairments requires greater awareness and education about their needs. Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (1990s) explains that student success is maximized when families, schools, and communities work collaboratively and communicate effectively. Parents often want to help but lack clear information on how to contribute effectively and understand how their support benefits their children's learning and health. Clear communication between schools and the community is essential to encourage active participation and ensure resources are fairly distributed to reach all learners, including those with special needs. Organizing regular workshops, meetings, and awareness campaigns can guide community members on the importance of nutrition and the role that feeding programs play in improving attendance and concentration. Strengthening partnerships between parents, local leaders, schools, and government will help make feeding programs more sustainable and inclusive, creating a supportive environment where pupils with intellectual impairments can academically and socially thrive.

Additionally, Parents participating in the focus group discussion expressed a strong willingness to support school feeding programs. Still, they highlighted a lack of understanding regarding the specific needs of pupils with intellectual impairments. They noted that it is challenging to provide appropriate contributions without clear guidance from schools. One parent mentioned, "We want to help, but we do not know what kind of support is needed for children with intellectual impairments" This indicates a gap in communication and education about the importance of tailored support for these pupils. Arafin (2024) further emphasizes that well-designed school feeding initiatives offer broader social benefits such as economic growth, sustainable food systems, and gender empowerment. Still, their success depends on continuous evaluation of program viability, food quality, and financing factors that also influence effective community involvement.

Therefore, to enhance community involvement, schools should organize awareness campaigns and workshops that educate parents about the unique requirements of pupils with intellectual impairments. Providing clear information will empower parents to contribute effectively, thereby improving the learning environment for these pupils. Likewise, one of the respondents stated that:

> I have seen how community support can transform school feeding programs in my ward. Parents and local leaders who understand the importance of these programs are more likely to contribute, whether through food donations or volunteering. However, there is still a need for better communication and education about the benefits of school meals, especially for children with intellectual impairments. By organizing regular meetings and workshops, we can bridge this gap and ensure every child receives the support they need (Interview W2, July 2025).

This underscores the critical role of community engagement in the success of school feeding programs. It highlights the necessity for clear communication and educational initiatives to foster understanding and active participation. By addressing these areas, communities can work together to create a supportive environment that enhances the learning experiences of all pupils, including those with intellectual impairments. This highlights the vital importance of community engagement in the success and sustainability of school feeding programs, in line with Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence (1990s), which stresses that effective collaboration among families, schools, and communities improves student outcomes. Clear communication and ongoing educational efforts are essential to build understanding and encourage active participation from all stakeholders. Meanwhile, the interview with the respondent showed that:

> While policies are in place to support school feeding programs, the real challenge lies in consistent implementation. We must strengthen our partnerships with local communities and ensure that resources are allocated transparently. Only then can we build sustainable programs that truly benefit our students. It is about creating a system where everyone understands their role and is committed to the cause (Interview D1, July 2025).

This highlights the importance of accountability and collaboration in effectively implementing school feeding programs. It suggests that for these programs to be sustainable, there must be a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including government officials, community leaders, and parents. Transparent resource allocation and clear communication are essential to ensure that the programs meet the nutritional needs of

pupils and support their learning outcomes. Similarly, Ndayishimye and de Dieu Dushimimana (2024) found a strong positive and significant effect of parental engagement on the implementation of school feeding programs, emphasizing that timely payments from parents and close collaboration with school administration are crucial for the success of these initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that community support plays a crucial role in enhancing school feeding programs, which in turn positively affect the learning outcomes of pupils with intellectual impairments. Most teachers recognize that active community involvement ensures pupils receive regular, nutritious meals that improve concentration, participation, attendance, and reduce dropout rates. However, challenges such as inconsistent community engagement, financial constraints, and limited awareness hinder the full effectiveness and reach of these programs. Inclusive feeding initiatives that address the specific needs of pupils with intellectual impairments foster a sense of belonging and responsibility but require ongoing education and communication to increase community understanding and support. Without strong collaboration, clear communication, and sustainable resource management, the benefits of feeding programs cannot be fully realized, especially for vulnerable learners.

IMPLICATIONS

To maximize the impact of community-supported school feeding programs on pupils with intellectual impairments, it is essential to strengthen communication and collaboration among all stakeholders including schools, families, local leaders, and government agencies. Schools should organize regular awareness campaigns, workshops, and meetings to educate parents and community members about the specific needs of children with intellectual impairments and how their contributions can be most effective. This targeted education will empower parents to participate meaningfully, even within their economic constraints, enhancing program inclusivity and sustainability. Additionally, partnerships between communities and government bodies must be fortified to ensure reliable funding, resource allocation, and program monitoring, reducing dependence on external donors. Policymakers should prioritize creating clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms that facilitate transparent management and equitable distribution of resources. Finally, culturally sensitive approaches and improved food quality must be addressed to ensure meals are appealing and meet diverse dietary preferences, further encouraging regular participation. These comprehensive efforts, grounded in Epstein's theory, will help build resilient school feeding programs that support the holistic development and academic success of all pupils, especially those with intellectual impairments.

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