

**EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS IN FEEDING PROGRAM OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOL: A NARRATOLOGY APPROACH****Jesenex Jacob L. Malabago**

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**ABSTRACT**

This narratology study described the lived experiences of learners in the feeding program of the government school. In-depth interviews (IDIs) provided the needed information, which aims to comprehend the lived experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits of the learners enrolled in the program and to know how these experiences provide insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries. This study also emphasized the valuable insights that can guide future government program implementation, especially in the Department of Education (DepEd) for the benefit of its learners. The thematic analysis produced three "key" themes representing learners' lived experiences: Satisfaction with the Feeding Program, Improvement in Academic Performance, and Health and Nutrition Benefits. Other two "key" themes representing insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation: Suggestions for Improvement and Attendance and Participation were explored. Including detailed explanations of each subject and participant quotes. These include General Satisfaction, Specific Positive Feedback, Better Grades, Improved Classroom Participation, Feeling of Fullness, More Food Varieties, Continuation of Program and Reduced Absenteeism.

**Keywords:**

Lived experiences, Feeding program, Learners' perspectives, Program effectiveness.

**INTRODUCTION****Background of the Study**

The feeding program in government schools aims to address the nutritional needs of students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, to enhance their learning outcomes and overall well-being. Providing nutritious meals significantly improves students' cognitive abilities, attention span, and overall well-being. (Namunyola & August, 2023). However, understanding its impact on learners' lived experiences remains underexplored.

This study seeks to fill this gap by employing a narratology approach to delve into the stories, perspectives, and narratives of learners participating in the feeding program. By examining the lived experiences of these learners, this research aims to uncover nuanced insights into the program's effectiveness, challenges faced by learners, and potential areas for improvement, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on education and social welfare policies.

**Statement of the Problem**

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of the learners in the feeding program of the government school and give insights into the program's effectiveness. The study attempted to answer the following questions: What is the profile of the participants? What are the lived experiences of learners enrolled in the feeding program? including the challenges and perceived benefits, how do these experiences provide insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries?

**Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of learners in the feeding program of government schools and provide insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program. These objectives are:

- To Identify and document the profile of the learners enrolled in the program.
- To describe the daily experiences of learners participating in the feeding program, focusing on both the challenges they face and the perceived benefits they receive.

- To Evaluate the School Feeding Effectiveness

### Significance of the Study

Exploring the lived experiences of learners in the feeding program of the government school holds significance across multiple dimensions. It provides invaluable insights into realities, offering crucial data for policymakers and educators. This data serves as a compass for shaping policies focused on improving the implementation of government education programs that will lead to a great impact on the lives of the learners. The results of the study could provide valuable information and insights into the following:

- **Schools Division Office** - The result of the study will serve as the basis for the SDO to check if the program was effectively and efficiently implemented and to develop a plan to improve it.
- **Public Elementary School** - Public elementary school will use the study findings to make policy decisions related to school feeding program maintenance and management. This feedback can help policymakers and educators prioritize and allocate resources effectively.
- **Future Researcher**: - This will serve as a springboard for further in-depth analysis

### Scope and Limitation

The study focuses on exploring the lived experiences of learners participating in government school feeding programs using a narratology approach. It aims to capture the personal stories and perspectives of students to understand the impact of these programs on their lives.

The primary participants are students enrolled in government schools who are part of the feeding program. The research is confined to government schools within a specific schools division ensuring that the findings are relevant to the context of that area.

This study covers the 2024-2025 academic year, this time-bound scope helps in understanding the immediate and short-term impacts of the program on learners.

This study uses narratology that collects qualitative data. The study uses this method to gather rich, detailed accounts of students' experiences, emphasizing their personal and emotional responses to the feeding program. Key themes include nutritional benefits, academic performance, social interactions, and psychological aspects. The study explores how these aspects are influenced by participation in the feeding program.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Related Literature and Studies

This chapter discusses the school feeding programs implemented as a strategy to combat malnutrition, improve educational outcomes, and support vulnerable children from low-income backgrounds. Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impacts of these programs on students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being.

#### Nutritional Benefits:

Proper nutrition is critical for the cognitive and physical development of children. Studies show that school feeding programs can significantly improve students' nutritional status, leading to better growth metrics and reduced incidences of anemia and other nutrition-related deficiencies (Adelman et. al., 2008). Nutritional improvements are linked to enhanced cognitive abilities, including memory, attention, and problem-solving skills (Jomaa, et. al., 2011).

#### Educational Outcomes:

Feeding programs have been associated with higher school attendance, lower dropout rates, and improved academic performance. Bundy et al. (2009) found that well-nourished children are more likely to attend school regularly and perform better academically. The provision of meals can alleviate short-term hunger, allowing students to focus better on their studies (Kristjansson et al., 2016).

#### Social and Behavioral Impacts:

The social benefits of school feeding programs include enhanced social cohesion and reduced stigma associated with food insecurity. Children who participate in these programs often exhibit improved social interactions and reduced behavioral issues (Gelli, et. al., 2007). The communal aspect of shared meals can foster a sense of community and belonging among students (Winicki & Jemison, 2003).

#### Psychological Well-being:

Adequate nutrition is crucial for maintaining mental health and emotional stability. Research indicates that school feeding programs can reduce anxiety and stress related to food insecurity, contributing to better mental health outcomes for students (Belot & James, 2011). This psychological stability is essential for students to thrive both academically and socially.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Methods Used**

Using a qualitative research methodology, this study highlighted and explored the lived experiences of learners in feeding program of the government school. The study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a narratology approach. This approach focuses on understanding and interpreting the narratives and stories of individuals to gain insights into their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The qualitative design is chosen to provide a rich, detailed, and nuanced understanding of the impact of the feeding program on learners (Creswell, 2013).

### **Theory Base**

This study is anchored to the Theory of Integrated School Feeding Program Impact (ISFPI) This approach is well-documented and supported by several international initiatives For instance, Project Concern International (PCI) that give an effort to improve student nutrition and academic performance (PCI, 2021). ISFPI posits school feeding programs (SFPs) multifaceted impact on students' nutritional status, academic performance, social interactions, and psychological well-being. The theory integrates insights from educational, nutritional, social, and psychological domains to provide a comprehensive understanding of how SFPs contribute to the holistic development of learners, particularly in low-income settings.

### **Data Analysis**

As the interview was conducted, it was recorded, transcribed, and reviewed. The researcher read the transcripts several times, took notes, and then used those notes to look for any recurring themes or ideas. Subsets of concepts known as categories were identified and finally included in the context of the main themes. Constan (2002). The researcher organized and linked the codes into a conceptual framework that identifies vital, emergent themes in the life stories of the participants as well as across the data. The study was given appropriate time for analysis and transcription.

### **Source of Data**

In-depth interviews with students enrolled in the feeding program serve as a primary data source as interviews provide detailed narratives and personal insights into the students' experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits of the program (Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009).

Adhering to the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of Republic Act No. 10173, commonly referred to as the "2012 Data Privacy Act," the researchers ensured compliance with ethical standards. Before commencing interviews, participants were provided with an informed consent form, affirming their voluntary participation in the study. A meticulously crafted interview guide, developed by the researcher, served as a structured framework for data collection. Throughout the study, strict confidentiality measures were upheld, with sensitive information such as participants' identities, ages, and residences safeguarded. To preserve anonymity, participants were anonymized and identified solely by the designation "P" (Participant) followed by a sequentially assigned number corresponding to their involvement in the study (e.g., P1, P2, and so forth).

### **Data Gathering Instrument**

The use of guide questionnaires in data gathering for exploring the lived experiences of learners in the government school feeding program provides a structured yet flexible approach to collecting qualitative data. This method ensures that all relevant topics are covered while allowing participants to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words Creswell, J. W. (2013)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Profile of the participants in the study**

This study was conducted by 10 learners in one of the government elementary schools. As shown in Table 1, The researcher was able to interview 5 males and 5 females, in terms of ages, 3 participants are 10 years old or

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below, 4 participants are 10-12 years old, and 2 participants are above 12 years of age. Regarding their weight, 3 participants belong to 21-22kg, 5 participants belong to 23-25 kg and 2 participants belong to 25kg above. In terms of height, particularly in meters, 3 participants are in the range of 1 – 1.30 meters, 5 participants belong to 1.30-1.40 meters and 2 participants belong to 1.40 meters and above.

<b>GENDER</b>	
MALE	5
FEMALE	5
<b>AGES</b>	
10 yrs old below	3
10 yrs old – 12 years old	4
12 years old above	2
<b>WEIGHT</b>	
21kg – 22kg	3
23kg – 25 kg	5
25 kg Above	2
<b>HEIGHT(METERS)</b>	

1-1.30 meter	3
1.30 – 1.40 meter	5
1.40 meter above	2

In this section, the answers to the qualitative research questions are discussed. Interviews were conducted, and texts were transcribed. Steps are being followed and that is becoming acquainted with the transcripts of the collected and recorded responses, translating transcripts into English while keeping the original transcript's ideas. Furthermore, several decisions had to be made on which data were relevant to the three research questions and, therefore, and then the elimination of unrelated data as the entire approach was centered around the study's objective. The generated data is compiled into a theme. Three topics emerged from the thematic analysis of the lived experiences of learners in the feeding program of the government school. The themes were (1) Satisfaction with the Feeding Program, (2) Improvement in Academic Performance, and (3) Health and Nutrition Benefits. For the themes that also emerge in the Insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries were (1) Suggestion for Improvement and (2) Attendance and Participation.

### **Lived experiences of learners enrolled in the feeding program including the challenges and perceived benefits.**

Presented in Table 2 are the themes and sub-themes of the lived experiences of learners in one of the selected government elementary school on feeding programs as well as the supporting statements on the issues during the interview.

In this study, I looked for patterns, core ideas, and themes. These patterns were used to generate codes that gave a clearer emphasis on the common experiences of the learners. All issues are summarized and categorized and do the manual coding. The responses of the participants were extracted from the results of the interview. The thematic analysis was based on the responses of the participants' interviews which were transcribed verbatim.

With the data gathered from the interview, the transcripts were used for the extraction of major themes. Three themes were drawn out from the interview conducted by the learners/beneficiary: Satisfaction with the Feeding Program, improvement in Academic Performance, and Health and Nutrition Benefits. With this, sub-themes emerge General Satisfaction, Specific Positive Feedback, Better Grades, Improved Classroom Participation, Feeling of Fullness, and sharing with family.

#### **Themes 1: Satisfaction with the Feeding Program**

This is one of the three themes that emerged as regards the lived experiences of the learners enrolled in the feeding program during the interview. Based on the data gathered, the results revealed the following sub-themes: General Satisfaction and Specific Positive Feedback.

General Satisfaction. Based on the data gathered, one of the emerging sub-themes found in the study is General Satisfaction. The participants pointed out that having a feeding program has a great impact on their lives as learners. We are so contented and satisfied, that we have no problem regarding the feeding program. The following are their responses:

*"ok kaayo sir wala koy reklamo sa feeding Program" (Participant 1)*

*"kuntento nako sir" (Participant 2, Participant 9, Participant 10)*

*"wala koy problema sir" (Participant 3)*

*"kuntento ko sa feeding program sir" (Participant 8)*

Those statements were confirmed during an interview with participant 1, 2, 9, 10, 3 and 8 who said that they were satisfied, contented, and had no problem regarding the feeding program. Being satisfied and contented is the best feedback to someone's program.

Specific Positive Feedback. This is another sub-theme that emerged in the live experience of learners in the feeding program. Participants pointed out the excitement and the effectiveness of the program. Below are the statements pointed out by the participants:

*"Excited mi sir" (Participant 4)*

*"Effective ang feeding program sa school para sa akosa sir" (Participant 7)*

The statement above was affirmed during the interview of Participants 4 and 7 who stated the excitement and effectiveness of the program. One of the best indicators of the success of any program is the excitement shown by the involved.

### **Themes 2: Improvement in Academic Performance**

Another theme was generated in the lived experience of the learners in the feeding program. Based on the data gathered during the interview of the participants revealed the following sub-themes: Better Grades and Improved Classroom Participation.

Better Grades. Based on the data gathered, participants during the interview expresses their lived experience in the feeding program. The participants state the progress of their grades and their activeness in the school. Below is the shared statement of the participants:

*"nitaas akosa grado sir" (Participant 2, Participant 8)*

*"always ko active nitaas akosa grade" (Participant 3)*

*"ok akosa grado sir, nitaas akosa grade" (Participant 8)*

The statement above was affirmed during the interview of Participants 2, 8, and 3 who stated the progress of their grades and their activeness in the classroom. Having a good grade can motivate the learners.

Improved Classroom Participation. Based on the data gathered, participants during the same interview expresses their lived experience in the feeding program. The participants state their capability to answer when asked by their teacher. Below is the shared statement of the participant:

*"maka answer ko kng tawagon ko sa teacher sir" (Participant 4)*

The statement above was affirmed during the interview of Participant 4 who stated the capability to answer when asked by the teacher. Being able to participate in the classroom lesson is a boost to self-confidence.

### **Themes 3. Health and Nutrition Benefits**

Another theme generated in the lived experience of the learners in the feeding program. Based on the data gathered during the interview the participants revealed the following sub-themes: Feeling of Fullness and Sharing with Family.

Feeling of Fullness. Based on the data gathered, participants during the interview expressed their lived experience in the feeding program. The participants stated the fullness they felt and being away from common sickness. Below is the shared statement of the participants:

*"Nakatabang sir sa akosa pag eskwela kay busug ko muandto sa school" (Participant 1)*

*"Wala ko nag luya2 sir sukad ngapil ko sa feeding program" (Participant 3)*

*"Effective ang school feeding sir nakapa busug sa akosa" (Participant 10)*

The statement above was affirmed during the interview of Participants 1, 3, and 10 who stated that they were full and away from common sickness. Being satisfied and full from the food that you consume can give energy and activeness affecting the social well-being of the learners by engaging in more activities toward their classmates.

Sharing with Family. Based on the data gathered, participants during the interview expressed their lived experience in the feeding program. The participants stated that they were able to share their extra food from the feeding program with their family allowing them to ease the stress and anxiety of knowing that they can help their family through this effort. Below is the shared statement of the participants:

*"Nakashare pod ko sa akoo mga manghud" (Participant 1)*

The statement above was affirmed during the interview of Participant 1 who stated that they share extra foods from the feeding program with their family. With this effort it can affect their psychological wellness by knowing that they can provide food to their family through this feeding program, it can ease the stress and anxiety of having a scarcity of food in their house.

**Table 2. Themes and Sub-themes emerged from the lived experiences of learners in one of the selected government elementary school**

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	SUPPORTING STATEMENT
1. Satisfaction with the Feeding Program	1. General Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"ok kaayo sir wala koy reklamo sa feeding sa fp" (Participant 1)</li> <li>"kuntento nko sir" (Participant 2, Participant 9, Participant 10)</li> <li>"wala koy probema sir" (Participant 3)</li> <li>"kuntento ko sa feeding program sir" (Participant 8)</li> </ul>
	2. Specific Positive Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Excited mi sir" (Participant 4)</li> <li>"effective ang feeding program sa school para sa akoo sir" (Participant 7)</li> </ul>
2. Improvement in Academic Performance	1. Better Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"nitaas akoo grado sir" (Participant 2, Participant 8)</li> <li>"always ko active nitaas akoo grade" (Participant 3)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"ok akoo grado sir, nitaas akoo grade" (Participant 8)</li> </ul>
	2. Improved Classroom Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"maka answer ko kng tawagon ko sa teacher sir" (Participant 4)</li> </ul>
3. Health and Nutrition Benefits	<p>Feeling of Fullness</p> <p>Sharing with Family</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"nakatabang sa akoo sir sa akoo pag eskwela kay busug ko muandto sa school" (Participant 1)</li> <li>"wala ko nag luya2 sir sukad ngapil ko sa feeding program" (Participant 3)</li> <li>"effective ang school feeding sir nakapa busug sa akoo" (Participant 10)</li> <li>"Nakashare pod ko sa akoo mga manghud" (Participant 1)</li> </ul>

**Insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries**

Presented in Table.3 are the themes and sub-themes of the insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries as well as the supporting statements on the issues during the interview. With the data gathered from the interview, the transcripts were used for the extraction of major themes based on recurring ideas and also for the identification of sub-themes as well as the supporting statements for the derivation of the themes. Two themes emerged as to the Insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries These themes are Suggestions for Improvement and Attendance and Participation, also the sub-statements that came out include the following: More Food Varieties, Continuation of Program and Reduced Absenteeism

**Themes 1: Suggestions for Improvement**

This is one of the two themes that emerged as regards the insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries during the interview. Based on the

data gathered, the results revealed the following sub-themes: More Food varieties and Continuation of the program.

More Food Varieties. Based on the data gathered, participants during the interview expressed their insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries. The participants suggest that it is better to have an additional variety of foods. Below is the shared statement of the participants:

*"unta dugangan ang pagkaon sir. Champurado" (Participant 1)*

*"mudugan unta ug pan sir" (Participant 2)*

The statement above was affirmed during the interview of Participant 1 and 2 who stated that it is better if there is an additional variety of food. The effectiveness of a program may be distinguished by requesting more from the participants involved on it.

Continuation of Program. Based on the data gathered, participants during the interview expressed their insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries. The participants stated that it should be done continually. Below is the shared statement of the participants:

*"ipadayung ang feeding program." (Participant 3)*

The statement above was affirmed during the interview of Participant 3 who stated that the feeding program must be done continually. The participant who suggests the continuation of a particular program is the best indicator of the effectiveness of the said program.

## **Themes 2: Attendance and Participation**

This is the second theme that emerged as regards the insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries during the interview. Based on the data gathered, the results revealed the following sub-themes: Reduced Absenteeism.

Reduced Absenteeism. Based on the data gathered, participants during the interview expressed their insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries. The participants stated the lessening of their absence is now low. Below is the shared statement of the participants:

*"wala na kaayo koy absent sir" (Participant 5)*

The statement above was affirmed during the interview of Participant 5 who stated that his absences is lessening. The participant who shows development of their performance is a great indicator of the effectiveness of a particular program.

**Table 3. Themes and sub-themes that emerge from the experiences that provide insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries**

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	SUPPORTING STATEMENT
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1. Suggestions for Improvement	1. More Food Varieties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unta dugangan ang pagkaon sir. Champurado" (Participant 1)</li> <li>• "mudugan unta ug pan sir" (Participant 2)</li> </ul>
	2. Continuation of Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "ipadayung ang feeding program." (Participant 3)</li> </ul>
2. Attendance and Participation	1. Reduced Absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "wala na kaayo koy absent sir" (Participant 5)</li> </ul>

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Lived experiences of learners enrolled in the feeding program including the challenges and perceived benefits

There are three themes generated from the analysis of the data research question in the lived experiences of learners enrolled in the feeding program including the challenges and perceived benefits they are as follows:

#### Satisfaction with the Feeding Program.

The feeding program has a high level of satisfaction as most participants expressed a statement like "ok kaayo sir wala koy reklamo sa feeding sa fp" and "kuntento nko sir" reflect a general contentment among students. As positive feedback indicates, the program meets its primary objective of providing adequate meals to the students. Additionally, the specific positive feedback from participants, such as feeling "excited" about the program and finding it "effective," further emphasizes its perceived value.

#### Improvement in Academic Performance

A significant theme is the observed improvement in academic performance. Statements like "nitaas akoo grado sir" and "always ko active nitaas akoo grade" suggest that the nourishment provided by the program helps students stay focused and perform better academically as participants noted an increase in their grades and better classroom participation. Improved classroom participation, as indicated by a participant's ability to answer questions confidently, is another positive outcome.

#### Health and Nutrition Benefits

The feeding program's impact on students' health and nutrition is another critical theme. A statement like, "nakatabang sa akoo sir sa akoo pag eskwela kay busug ko muando sa school" highlights the program's role in ensuring that students are not attending classes on an empty stomach. Many participants mentioned feeling fuller and more energetic, which helps them concentrate better in school. Furthermore, some participants shared that the food provided helped their families, indicating a broader community benefit.

### Insights into the effectiveness and impact of the program implementation from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries

#### Suggestions for Improvement.

While the feedback is predominantly positive, there are suggestions for improvement. Some participants expressed a desire for more food variety, with specific requests such as "unta dugangan ang pagkaon sir. Champurado" and "mudugan unta ug pan sir." These suggestions point to an opportunity for the program to diversify its menu to maintain students' interest and cater to their tastes better. Additionally, the call to

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"ipadayun ang feeding program" underscores the importance of sustaining this initiative to continue reaping its benefits.

### Attendance and Participation

The feeding program has also positively influenced attendance, with participants noting a reduction in absenteeism. The statement "wala na kaayo koy absent sir" suggests that having a reliable meal at school encourages regular attendance. This improvement in attendance is crucial, as it likely contributes to the enhanced academic performance observed.

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### CONCLUSION

The analysis of the feedback from participants indicates that the school feeding program is highly effective in achieving its goals of improving student nutrition, academic performance, and attendance. Most participants are satisfied with the program, citing benefits such as increased energy, better grades, and improved classroom participation. The program also positively impacts students' health and extends benefits to their families.

However, there are areas for improvement, particularly regarding the variety of food offered. Addressing these suggestions can enhance the program's appeal and effectiveness. Sustaining the program is essential, as indicated by the participants' requests to continue it.

Thus, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of learners enrolled in the feeding program of a government school. The findings reveal that the program significantly contributes to students' academic performance, health, and overall well-being. The suggestions for improvement from the participants underscored the importance of continually evaluating and adapting the program to better meet the needs of the learners. By incorporating these insights, policymakers and educators can ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of feeding programs in government schools, ultimately supporting the holistic development of learners.

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