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PROMOTING CHILD NUTRITION THROUGH SCHOOL-BASED FEEDING PROGRAMS: CHALLENGES AND INSIGHTS OF COORDINATORS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the lived experiences of ten (10) public elementary and junior high school feeding coordinators in Marilog District, Davao City, in promoting child nutrition through school-based feeding programs. Using a qualitative phenomenological design and Colaizzi's method. Lived experiences revealed: Teachers' Active program management; Learner engagement; Learner Acceptance and Food Preferences; Inclusive and Supportive Feeding Environment. Coping mechanisms included: resource maximization; collaborate with stakeholders; time management and innovation; and personal commitment and resilience, showing how programs are sustained despite limited resources and logistical challenges. Insights emphasized the value of parent and community involvement, nutrition education, capacity building, and effective planning and facilities. The findings underscore that teachers are frontline implementers and advocates for child nutrition, offering practical recommendations for improving program efficiency. Policymakers can leverage these findings to design more sustainable, inclusive, and context-specific nutrition initiatives. Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were observed. Moreover, the study offers evidence-based guidance to strengthen program implementation and sustainability, contributing to UNSDG 2 (Zero Hunger), UNSDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and UNSDG 4 (Quality Education).

I.INTRODUCTION

Ensuring adequate child nutrition in schools is fundamental to promoting learners' physical growth, cognitive development, and academic success. School-based feeding programs play a critical role in addressing short-term hunger and undernutrition, particularly in public schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Adequate nutrition is closely associated with improved concentration, classroom participation, and overall academic performance, making it an essential component of quality education. At the forefront of these initiatives are school-based feeding coordinators, who translate policy directives into practice and manage the daily implementation of nutrition programs.

Globally, malnutrition continues to affect millions of school-aged children, limiting educational attainment and long-term development. Studies in India show that undernourished learners experience reduced attention and lower academic achievement (Singh & Purohit, 2021). In Indonesia, inadequate school nutrition has been linked to absenteeism and decreased motivation among rural learners (Rahman et al., 2022). Similarly, research in Vietnam indicates that while feeding programs improve attendance and performance, sustainability challenges persist due to funding limitations and weak stakeholder coordination (Nguyen & Hoang, 2023). These findings suggest that beyond policy design, effective implementation and sustained local support are critical to program success.

In the Philippines, child malnutrition remains a pressing concern despite the Department of Education's School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP). Evidence from urban communities, such as Tondo, Manila, shows that persistent hunger negatively affects learners' focus, participation, and classroom behavior (De Jesus & Santos, 2022). Inconsistent funding, inadequate facilities, and limited parental engagement further disrupt program continuity, requiring coordinators to devise temporary solutions to sustain operations (Garcia et al., 2023). Logistical barriers, including delayed deliveries and insufficient food storage facilities, also affect program efficiency (Villanueva & Ramos, 2024). These challenges underscore the importance of capable and adaptive coordinators who manage daily operations under resource-constrained conditions.

In geographically isolated areas such as the Marilog District, sustaining feeding initiatives presents additional difficulties. Remote locations, limited access to supplies, and constrained community resources intensify the demands on coordinators, who often balance instructional, administrative, and program management responsibilities. Despite the recognized impact of feeding programs on learner outcomes, limited research has explored the lived experiences of coordinators responsible for implementing these initiatives in rural settings.

Understanding their challenges, coping strategies, and insights is essential for developing context-responsive policies and strengthening program sustainability. By examining the experiences of school-based feeding coordinators in Marilog District, this study provides empirical evidence to inform improvements in implementation practices, resource management, and stakeholder collaboration in rural school communities.

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Purpose of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of elementary and junior high school feeding coordinators in Marilog District, Division of Davao City, as they implemented school-based feeding initiatives. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Describe their day-to-day roles and responsibilities in managing feeding programs;
2. Examine the challenges encountered in resource management, logistics, and stakeholder coordination; and
3. Identify coping mechanisms, adaptive strategies, and insights that may strengthen program implementation.

By foregrounding coordinators' experiences, this study aims to inform policy refinements, capacity-building initiatives, and context-sensitive strategies that enhance child nutrition and educational equity in geographically isolated schools.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of feeding coordinators implementing school-based feeding programs?
2. How do feeding coordinators cope with the challenges encountered in program implementation?
3. What insights do feeding coordinators offer to strengthen school-based nutrition initiatives?

II.REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Feeding Coordinators' Experiences in Implementing School-Based Feeding Programs

Feeding coordinators serve as frontline implementers of school-based feeding programs, often balancing instructional responsibilities with nutrition-related duties. Globally, studies show that coordinators experience increased workload, physical exhaustion, and emotional strain when feeding responsibilities are added to their primary roles (Boakye & Nyarko, 2022). In resource-limited settings, coordinators frequently assume multiple roles—including planning, monitoring, food preparation, and documentation—despite limited training and logistical support (Sok & Tan, 2023; Santoso et al., 2022).

In the Philippines, the SBFP heavily relies on coordinators' commitment and adaptability. Research indicates that coordinators often supplement limited resources using personal funds and informal support networks to sustain feeding operations (Cruz & Valencia, 2023). Administrative demands, particularly documentation and reporting requirements, further intensify workload pressures, especially in schools with limited digital infrastructure (Fernandez & Lim, 2021; Padilla & Santos, 2022). These structural constraints highlight the dual instructional and caregiving roles coordinators assume in promoting child nutrition.

Despite systemic limitations, coordinators demonstrate resilience and creativity. Innovative practices such as schedule adjustments, partnerships with local stakeholders, and school gardening initiatives support program sustainability (Villareal & Ramos, 2021; Ortega et al., 2023). Emotional investment in learners' well-being also motivates coordinators to continue their involvement, although prolonged strain may contribute to burnout and feelings of undervaluation (Navarro & Eugenio, 2022; Domingo & Carreon, 2023).

Coping Mechanisms in Sustaining Feeding Programs

To manage resource shortages and workload demands, coordinators employ various coping strategies. Financial improvisation, collaboration with colleagues, and role-sharing sustain program continuity (Estrada & Domingo, 2022; Miranda & Dizon, 2023). Time management strategies, such as restructuring lesson schedules and integrating supervision into instructional activities, help balance feeding and academic responsibilities (Bernal & Solis, 2023).

Community engagement serves as a critical support mechanism. Coordinators often mobilize parents, local government units, and NGOs to supplement manpower and resources (Bonifacio & Guevarra, 2022). In geographically isolated areas, such partnerships significantly influence program sustainability (Melendrez & Galvez, 2023). Fundraising initiatives and social media campaigns have also emerged as alternative strategies to address funding gaps (Ocampo & Vergara, 2021).

Innovations in food production, including school and container gardening projects, further contribute to sustainability while reinforcing experiential learning (Urbiztondo & Palomares, 2022; Garces & Villacorta, 2021). Efficiency strategies in documentation, such as shared tools and informal coordination systems, also help meet accountability requirements (Alcantara & Lopez, 2022). Beyond structural strategies, intrinsic motivation, peer support, and personal coping practices sustain coordinators' resilience in fulfilling feeding responsibilities.

Insights for Strengthening School-Based Nutrition Programs

Feeding coordinators view school-based nutrition programs as integral to holistic education. They advocate for integrated approaches that combine nutrition education, family engagement, and institutional support (Mani & Bose, 2022; Lim et al., 2023). Embedding nutrition concepts within subjects like Science and Technology or Livelihood Education enhances contextual learning and promotes long-term behavioral change (Torres & Gutiérrez, 2024).

Institutional support—including structured schedules, adequate facilities, and professional development—is critical for program success (Patel & Singh, 2023). Coordinators emphasize food sustainability initiatives, such as school gardening, which link nutrition with environmental awareness and learner participation (Bautista & Reyes, 2023). Parent-school collaboration reinforces healthy habits beyond the classroom (Fernandez & Arriola, 2022). Technology integration is also highlighted as a tool for monitoring, communication, and transparency (Lee & Samson, 2023). Additionally, inclusivity, psychosocial support, and student leadership are key components, ensuring programs

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nurture both physical and emotional well-being (Kimura & Delgado, 2023; Gomez & Torres, 2021).

Coordinators further advocate for greater involvement in policymaking, asserting that their lived experiences provide valuable insights for developing context-responsive and sustainable nutrition policies (Pradhan & Uy, 2025).

Synthesis

Existing literature demonstrates that feeding coordinators play a pivotal yet demanding role in sustaining school-based feeding programs. While they exhibit resilience, innovation, and strong moral commitment, they also encounter structural challenges related to workload, funding, and administrative demands. Coping mechanisms such as collaboration, community engagement, and creative problem-solving sustain program continuity, yet systemic support remains essential. Limited studies have focused specifically on coordinators' lived experiences in geographically isolated districts, highlighting the gap this study addresses.

Theoretical Lens

This study was primarily anchored on **Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)** (Bandura, 1986, 2021), which posits that human behavior results from the reciprocal interaction of personal factors, behavioral patterns, and environmental influences. Within school-based feeding programs, coordinators' actions are shaped not only by institutional guidelines and resources but also by their beliefs, motivations, and perceived self-efficacy.

A central construct of SCT is **self-efficacy**, defined as an individual's belief in their capacity to execute actions required to achieve specific goals. Feeding coordinators with strong self-efficacy are more likely to mobilize resources, collaborate with stakeholders, and persevere despite logistical and administrative constraints. Modeling, reinforcement, and shared learning strengthen coordinators' confidence and program delivery.

Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001) complements SCT by framing coordinators' adaptive responses to adversity. Resilience emphasizes the capacity to maintain or regain functioning despite stressors. Coordinators frequently face resource shortages, heavy workloads, and limited institutional support. Their ability to reorganize schedules, seek partnerships, and innovate reflects resilient adaptation rather than mere policy compliance.

Together, SCT and Resilience Theory provide an integrated framework to interpret coordinators' lived experiences, guiding analysis of their strategies, adaptation, and leadership in geographically isolated school contexts.

III.METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative **phenomenological design** to explore the lived experiences of feeding coordinators in Marilog District. Phenomenology is suitable for understanding how individuals interpret and give meaning to shared experiences. The design enabled an in-depth exploration of how coordinators balanced instructional responsibilities with nutrition-related duties in geographically isolated schools.

Participants and Sampling

Ten (10) elementary and junior high school feeding coordinators participated, selected via **purposive sampling** based on:

1. At least three years of experience implementing the SBFP
2. Active involvement in meal preparation, monitoring, reporting, or coordination

Selecting experienced participants ensured that the data reflected informed, practice-based perspectives on program implementation, challenges, and sustainability.

Data Collection

Data were collected through one-on-one **semi-structured interviews** in private school areas. Each lasted 45–60 minutes, audio-recorded with consent, and supplemented with field notes to capture non-verbal cues. The interview guide focused on:

1. Lived experiences in implementing the feeding program
2. Challenges encountered
3. Coping mechanisms
4. Insights for strengthening nutrition initiatives

All interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher acted as the primary instrument, facilitating interviews respectfully and building rapport to encourage honest responses. Reflexivity was practiced throughout to minimize bias.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using **Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method**:

1. Reading transcripts multiple times
2. Extracting significant statements
3. Formulating meanings
4. Clustering meanings into themes
5. Developing an exhaustive description

Line-by-line coding identified recurring patterns. Themes were refined through constant comparison. Verbatim excerpts preserved authenticity.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba's criteria ensured trustworthiness:

- **Credibility:** member checking, prolonged engagement
- **Transferability:** rich contextual descriptions
- **Dependability & Confirmability:** audit trail, reflexive journaling, peer debriefing

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was secured from the **Schools Division Superintendent of Davao City**. Participation was voluntary with informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained via

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pseudonyms and secure storage in compliance with the **Data Privacy Act of 2012**.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents a narrative synthesis of the study's findings on the lived experiences of school-based feeding coordinators in Marilog District, Division of Davao City. It discusses the challenges coordinators face, their coping strategies, and insights for program improvement, integrating these findings with relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. By analyzing the data through a thematic and interpretive lens, the discussion highlights the complex interplay of personal, social, and institutional factors that influence program implementation and sustainability.

Challenges in Implementing School-Based Feeding Programs

Feeding coordinators encountered multiple challenges in implementing school-based feeding programs, primarily arising from resource limitations, logistical constraints, and institutional factors. Financial inadequacy was a persistent concern, as limited budgets restricted the quality, variety, and frequency of meals provided to learners. These constraints often necessitated coordinators to seek alternative sources of support, including donations or contributions from parents and community members. Such findings echo prior research indicating that underfunding and reliance on ad hoc resources can compromise program effectiveness and sustainability (Garcia et al., 2023; Villanueva & Ramos, 2024).

Logistical difficulties further complicated program execution. Coordinators frequently contended with delayed deliveries, insufficient storage, and limited manpower, requiring them to adjust feeding schedules and manage multiple operational tasks simultaneously. These challenges were particularly pronounced in geographically isolated schools, where access to supplies is limited and transportation difficulties exacerbate delays. The experiences of coordinators in Marilog District reflect global observations that logistical inefficiencies can hinder program implementation and affect learner engagement (Nguyen & Hoang, 2023; Rahman et al., 2022).

Institutional limitations also shaped the coordinators' experiences. Ambiguous policies, excessive documentation requirements, and limited administrative support created additional burdens, highlighting the dual instructional and caregiving roles that teachers must assume when implementing feeding programs. This aligns with findings from previous studies emphasizing that teachers often navigate both educational and nutrition-related responsibilities under constrained conditions (Fernandez & Lim, 2021; Padilla & Santos, 2022). Together, these challenges illustrate the multifaceted nature of program implementation, wherein coordinators must negotiate environmental, operational, and systemic pressures to maintain continuity and effectiveness.

Coping Strategies and Adaptive Practices

Despite these challenges, coordinators demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. Their strategies for sustaining feeding programs can be broadly categorized into collaborative engagement, resource improvisation, and operational adaptation.

Collaborative engagement emerged as a critical mechanism for addressing both resource and operational gaps. Coordinators actively mobilized parents, teachers, PTA members, and barangay officials to supplement manpower and contribute resources. Such collaboration distributed responsibilities across multiple stakeholders, alleviating the burden on individual coordinators while fostering a sense of shared ownership. These findings are consistent with Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the role of influence, motivation, and collective action in achieving program goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006), and align with global evidence showing that community involvement strengthens the sustainability of school feeding initiatives (Bonifacio & Guevarra, 2022; Melendrez & Galvez, 2023).

Resource improvisation was another key strategy. Coordinators creatively sourced food from school gardens, reallocated available supplies, and occasionally used informal fundraising to address gaps. These adaptive behaviors reflect high levels of self-efficacy, as described in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), whereby coordinators' belief in their capability to manage challenges motivated proactive problem-solving and innovation.

Operational adaptation was evident in coordinators' careful planning of feeding schedules, integration of supervision with instructional activities, and optimization of workflows to accommodate manpower shortages and logistical constraints. Such adaptations exemplify the principles of Resilience Theory, highlighting the capacity to maintain effective functioning despite adversity (Masten, 2001). Collectively, these coping strategies demonstrate that coordinators not only respond to challenges but also engage in proactive measures to sustain program delivery.

Insights for Strengthening School-Based Feeding Programs

The study revealed key insights for enhancing program implementation, focusing on institutional support, capacity building, policy guidance, and learner engagement. Coordinators emphasized that structured planning, teamwork, and functional facilities are critical enablers of program success. Well-organized feeding schedules, advanced menu planning, and accessible kitchen and storage facilities reduce operational disruptions, improve food safety, and optimize program efficiency. These findings support previous research highlighting the importance of effective organizational systems in school feeding programs (Patel & Singh, 2023; Bautista & Reyes, 2023).

Capacity building, particularly through training and nutrition education, emerged as essential for program effectiveness. Integrating nutrition concepts into classroom instruction and providing ongoing professional development for coordinators and volunteers strengthens both program management and learners'

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engagement in healthy eating behaviors. Such initiatives reinforce self-efficacy, promote shared responsibility, and align with evidence that education on nutrition enhances both program impact and sustainability (Torres & Gutiérrez, 2024; Fernandez & Arriola, 2022).

Stable funding and clear policy guidance were identified as foundational for program continuity. Coordinators highlighted that intermittent budgets and unclear policy frameworks undermine consistent implementation, often disrupting feeding schedules and reducing nutritional benefits for learners. Ensuring predictable funding streams, explicit implementation guidelines, and streamlined administrative requirements would support long-term program success, echoing previous studies advocating for institutional and policy alignment in school-based nutrition initiatives (Mani & Bose, 2022; Lim et al., 2023).

Learner engagement, although not directly studied, was also considered important by coordinators. Encouraging students to participate in school gardens, nutrition advocacy roles, and co-curricular feeding activities fosters ownership and reinforces healthy habits. These practices not only support nutrition outcomes but also promote experiential learning, social responsibility, and positive behavior development.

V.IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Teachers and Feeding Coordinators

- Adopt flexible menu planning, resource sharing, and peer support
- Integrate nutrition education in classrooms
- Establish peer mentoring and school-based communities of practice

Department of Education (DepEd)

- Ensure timely budgets and food supplies
- Issue clear and consistent guidelines
- Institutionalize regular training for coordinators
- Strengthen monitoring and reduce administrative burdens

School Administrators

- Create functional feeding committees
- Recognize teachers' additional responsibilities
- Allocate resources for planning and reflection
- Conduct LAC sessions and engage parents and community partners

Learners

- Involve learners in nutrition advocacy and school garden initiatives
- Integrate feeding-related activities into co-curricular programs

Future Researchers

- Explore school-based feeding in diverse contexts
- Conduct longitudinal and mixed-method studies on program outcomes
- Investigate roles of local government, NGOs, and private partners
- Apply phenomenological approaches to deepen understanding of coordinators' experiences

Concluding Statement

Overall, this study underscores the central role of feeding coordinators in sustaining school-based nutrition programs. Their resilience, leadership, and collaborative efforts are critical to overcoming systemic and contextual challenges. Supporting coordinators through training, policy clarity, and resource provision is essential for long-term program effectiveness and the nutritional well-being of learners.

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