

School Feeding Programme and Learner Persistence in Education in Public Primary Schools in Narok West Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: Every child has a right to education. A child enrolled in a school is expected to complete studies and achieve their full potential. However, thousands of primary-aged children in Narok West Sub County remain out of school. The school feeding program, aimed at mitigating hunger and poverty, has not fully addressed the issue. The study therefore investigated school feeding program on learner persistence in education in public primary schools in Narok West sub-county, Kenya. The study assessed the influence of the availability of food varieties. The study was guided by human needs theory of Abraham Maslow g. The study used a descriptive survey design. The target population was 720 teachers distributed in 75 schools in four zones. The sample size was 216 (30.0%) teachers and 23 (30.0%) schools. Proportionate simple random sampling was used to select the schools and the teachers to participate in the study per zone. Piloting the research instruments was done in Four schools in Narok South. Data was collected using questionnaires for teachers and interview guide for the head teachers. To achieve validity, the study conducted a comprehensive literature review to align research instruments with established theories, pilot-tested the instruments to identify and revise ambiguous items, and used established scales validated in previous research. The reliability of the questionnaires was assessed using Cronbach Alpha coefficient resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.809 for the entire scale, indicating acceptable reliability. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics that included frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation aided by statistical package of social sciences (SPSS). Pearson correlation coefficient, Linear regression and ANOVA was used to test the relationship between variables. Data was presented in the form of tables and graphs. The study found that the availability of food varieties ($M=3.68$) had a positive and statistically significant relationship with learner persistence ($M=4.22$), $F(1,202)=7.871$, $p=.006$, with a regression coefficient of $B=0.201$. This implies that greater food variety enhances learner persistence in school. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and WFP should ensure schools receive sufficient, nutritious, and diverse meals provided consistently to promote learner persistence in education.

Keywords: School Feeding Programme, Learner Persistence and Food varieties.

1.0 Background to the Study

School feeding programmes are important interventions for improving learners' participation and persistence in education, particularly in food-insecure communities where hunger may contribute to absenteeism and school dropout. Globally, millions of children remain excluded from education, with poverty and food insecurity being among the barriers limiting regular school participation (UNESCO, 2021; WFP, 2023). Provision of school meals can reduce hunger while creating an incentive for learners to attend and remain in school, especially among vulnerable households (World Bank, 2022). The nutritional benefits of school feeding are also influenced by the availability and variety of foods provided, since diverse meals can contribute to improved dietary adequacy, health, concentration and school participation (Bundy et al., 2018). The WFP (2021) identifies school feeding as an important social protection intervention that can simultaneously address food insecurity and educational participation. Evidence further indicates that well-designed feeding programmes can improve attendance, enrolment and retention among children in disadvantaged communities (Alderman & Bundy, 2012). In Kenya, such interventions are particularly relevant in areas experiencing food insecurity, where inadequate access to nutritious and varied foods may undermine learners' ability to attend school consistently.

Globally, school feeding programs have become vital tools for promoting education and nutrition. In Brazil, the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) is a government-led initiative that guarantees daily school meals and varieties food to over 40 million students, using food from local farmers (FAO, 2022). Similarly, India's Mid-Day Meal Scheme one of the world's largest serves nutritious meals to more than 100 million children daily to combat hunger and improve educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2023). These programs, like Kenya's, aim to tackle poverty, hunger, and education inequality simultaneously. The continued expansion and reform of school feeding initiatives globally underscore their importance in supporting learner persistence, especially in vulnerable communities.

In Brazil, the feeding scheme is incorporated as one of the pillars of the Zero Hunger Strategy targeting

the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Sidaner et al., 2020). Apart from all these objectives, the SFPs are also designed to create wealth for rural inhabitants (Martens, 2019). Brazil's National School Feeding Program, established in 1954, is one of the world's largest and most successful school feeding initiatives. The program provides nutritious meals to over 40 million students daily, ensuring that at least 15% of their daily nutritional needs are met while they are in school. It emphasizes the inclusion of fresh, locally sourced foods, with a mandate that a minimum of 30% of the food purchased for school meals comes directly from family farming. This approach not only supports student health and learning but also stimulates local economies and promotes sustainable agricultural practices (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2021; World Food Programme [WFP], 2022).

In Ghana, the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) was introduced to address poverty, household food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition while supporting school participation and local food production (Shaibu & Al-Hassan, 2020). The programme provides daily meals to learners, particularly in underserved communities, with the aim of improving enrolment, attendance, concentration and retention. Evidence from school feeding interventions indicates that the provision of regular and nutritionally adequate meals can contribute to improved learner participation, with potential benefits for girls and children in rural communities (World Food Programme [WFP], 2022). Similarly, South Africa introduced the Primary School Feeding Programme in 1994, which later became the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), to provide nutritious meals to learners in disadvantaged public schools. The programme seeks to reduce short-term hunger, improve concentration and enhance learners' capacity to participate effectively in education (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2011). The NSNP has also incorporated nutrition education and school gardening to promote food security and healthy eating habits, while its large-scale coverage demonstrates the role of school feeding in supporting educational participation among vulnerable learners (Department of Basic Education, 2022; WFP, 2023).

In Kenya, the School Feeding Programme (SFP) was officially initiated in 1980 as a collaborative effort between the Government of Kenya and the World Food Programme (WFP), initially targeting arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) where food insecurity was most severe (WFP, 2020). According to the School Feeding Program Training Handbook (2006), the key objectives of the program are to: improve enrolment and attendance rates in primary schools, reduce dropout rates caused by hunger, narrow gender disparities in education, enhance children's capacity to concentrate by alleviating short-term hunger, and improve the nutritional and health status of learners from low-income families. The program currently operates under the National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK) and has evolved into a Home-Grown School Feeding Program (HGSFP), which sources food locally to support community economies while feeding school children. It is primarily implemented in disadvantaged counties, including semi-arid and marginal regions like Narok West Sub-County.

Narok County, particularly Narok West Sub-County, continues to experience challenges related to school enrolment, attendance and learner persistence, with poverty, food insecurity and recurrent droughts affecting children's participation in education. Reports have identified hunger and food shortages as important factors contributing to children remaining out of school in the region (Kenyan News, 2021). In response, school feeding programmes have been implemented through collaboration between government and development partners to reduce short-term hunger and encourage regular school attendance. Evidence from West Pokot indicates that the Home-Grown School Meals Programme improved enrolment and daily attendance, particularly among girls and children from marginalized communities (Ministry of Education, 2019; World Food Programme [WFP], 2020). Similarly, school feeding interventions supported by WFP in drought-prone counties such as Turkana and Garissa have helped sustain school participation during periods of food insecurity (FAO, 2022). In Narok West, however, persistent food scarcity and poverty may continue to undermine learners' attendance, retention and participation. Although school meals are intended to improve nutrition and educational participation, limited research has examined how specific programme components, including food variety relate to learner persistence in public primary schools (Bii & Cheboi, 2020).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Every child has a right to education, and adequate nutrition is essential for concentration, cognitive development, physical health, emotional stability, classroom participation, attendance and continued school participation. Well-fed learners are more likely to remain in school, progress through grades and complete primary education, while inadequate feeding may contribute to fatigue, poor health, absenteeism, weak academic engagement and dropout. In Narok County, particularly Narok West Sub-County, food insecurity remains a significant barrier to school persistence because the area is semi-arid and experiences challenges that affect learners' regular attendance and completion. Education records from 2025 indicate that Narok West Sub-County had the lowest school attendance and completion rates in Narok County, with a reported dropout rate of 38%. Although school feeding programmes have been implemented to enhance learner persistence, school

dropout remains a concern despite these interventions. The limited research on the effectiveness of school feeding in promoting learner persistence in the sub-county creates a need to examine the programme's contribution to educational participation. Therefore, the study assessed the influence of food variety, feeding frequency, food quality and food quantity in school feeding programmes on learner persistence, with findings expected to inform policies for improving retention and successful completion in food-insecure regions.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objective:

- i. To establish the availability of food varieties in the school feeding Programme and learner persistence in public primary schools in Narok West Sub-County, Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

The study reviewed literature on the School Feeding Programme and Learner Persistence in Education in Public Primary Schools in Narok West Sub-County, Kenya. Further the study reviewed literature on the availability of food varieties in the school feeding Programme and learner persistence in public primary schools in Narok West Sub-County, Kenya. The theoretical framework for the study is also provided.

2.1 Concept of School Feeding Program

School feeding programmes are interventions that provide meals or food to school-going children to reduce hunger, improve nutrition, enhance concentration, and promote school attendance and retention, particularly in food-insecure communities (World Food Programme [WFP], 2019). The programmes may involve meals provided directly at school or take-home rations linked to school attendance, serving both nutritional and educational purposes (WFP, 2018). In Kenya, school feeding initiatives have operated for several decades, with the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme introduced to provide locally sourced meals while supporting attendance, retention and local agricultural production (Ministry of Education, 2019, 2020). Evidence indicates that school feeding programmes can improve attendance and retention, especially in arid and semi-arid areas where household food insecurity can discourage regular school participation (Mwangi et al., 2020). The programmes may also benefit vulnerable learners, including girls, by reducing barriers associated with poverty and household responsibilities (WFP, 2020). However, challenges such as inconsistent food supplies during droughts and inadequate educational resources can limit programme effectiveness (UNICEF, 2021; WFP, 2019). Therefore, the effectiveness of school feeding programmes depends not only on the provision of meals but also on their reliability, nutritional adequacy and integration with broader educational interventions.

2.2 Food Varieties and Learner Persistence in Education

Availability of diverse food varieties in school feeding programmes is important in supporting learner persistence because adequate and varied nutrition can improve attendance, concentration, participation and continued school attendance, particularly in food-insecure areas such as Narok West Sub-County (Ministry of Education, 2021; World Food Programme [WFP], 2022). In Kenya, many schools rely heavily on maize-and-beans meals such as githeri, which may provide energy but offer limited dietary diversity, while some schools supplement these meals with maize- or sorghum-based porridge (Mwangi et al., 2020; Bii & Cheboi, 2020). The National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy emphasizes the provision of diverse, locally available foods to improve learners' nutritional status (Ministry of Education, 2021). Evidence also suggests that varied and appealing meals can increase meal acceptability and encourage regular school attendance (Adelman et al., 2019). In Ghana, schools providing meals containing diverse food groups have reported improved attendance and learner engagement compared with schools offering repetitive meals (Aurino et al., 2023). Similarly, evidence from Ethiopia indicates that providing meals containing multiple food groups is associated with lower dropout rates (Gelli et al., 2019). Research in Uganda has also linked the inclusion of protein-rich foods and fresh vegetables with improved learner concentration and retention (Nankya et al., 2021).

In some East African contexts, school meals are predominantly based on staple foods such as maize and beans, and repetitive menus may contribute to meal fatigue, absenteeism and school dropout (Omwami, 2020). In Tanzania, Kimathi et al. (2022) reported that repeated meals could discourage some learners from attending school consistently. Conversely, school feeding programmes in countries such as Brazil and India have incorporated more diverse foods, including locally sourced products, with reported benefits for learner participation and educational outcomes (Buhl, 2020). These findings suggest that food variety may influence learners' willingness to attend school regularly and remain engaged in learning. However, food diversity should be considered alongside the quality, quantity and consistency of meals because diverse foods may not sustain learner participation when meals are inadequate, poorly prepared or irregularly provided (Kremer et al., 2021).

Despite evidence linking food variety with learner persistence, important gaps remain in existing research. Much of the available literature focuses on short-term outcomes such as attendance rather than the sustained influence of food variety on retention and completion (Kimathi et al., 2022). Existing studies also give limited attention to cultural food preferences, seasonal food availability, meal satisfaction, gender differences and the contribution of local communities and small-scale farmers to sustainable school feeding programmes. These issues are particularly relevant in food-insecure rural settings such as Narok West Sub-County, where environmental and socio-economic conditions may influence the availability and acceptability of different foods. Therefore, further research is necessary to establish how the availability of food varieties in school feeding programmes relates to learner persistence while considering the local context.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Abraham Maslow's Human Motivation Theory (1943) provides a relevant framework for explaining how the availability of food varieties in school feeding programmes may influence learner persistence in education. The theory proposes that human needs are arranged hierarchically, with physiological needs such as food and water forming the foundation for motivation and effective functioning. In public primary schools in Narok West Sub-County, the availability of diverse foods can help satisfy learners' basic nutritional needs and reduce hunger during school hours. Varied meals can provide different nutrients, energy and nourishment necessary for learners' physical health, concentration and active participation in classroom activities (Bundy et al., 2018). When learners' nutritional needs are adequately met, they may be better able to attend school regularly and remain engaged in learning. Conversely, limited food variety may result in inadequate nutrient intake, fatigue and reduced participation, which can negatively affect learner persistence. Therefore, the first objective is anchored in Maslow's theory by examining whether the availability of diverse food varieties in school feeding programmes contributes to satisfying learners' physiological needs and supporting their continued participation in education.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of school feeding programmes on learner persistence in public primary schools in Narok West Sub-County, Kenya, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population comprised 75 public primary schools, 75 head teachers and 720 teachers, giving a total of 795 respondents. Proportionate stratified random sampling was used across the four wards, namely Siana, Mara, Ilmotiok and Naikarra, resulting in a sample of 23 schools and 216 teachers, while the sampled schools' head teachers participated in interviews. Data were collected using teachers' questionnaires and head teachers' interview guides, with the instruments structured according to the four study objectives. Content and face validity were enhanced through expert review, while piloting was conducted in four schools in Narok South Sub-County involving 24 teachers and four head teachers. The reliability test produced an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.809, with all scales recording coefficients above the acceptable threshold of 0.70. Data collection involved obtaining authorization from Maasai Mara University, NACOSTI and the Narok West Sub-County Director of Education before administering the instruments over four weeks. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, Pearson correlation and regression analysis in SPSS version 28, while qualitative data from interviews were thematically analyzed and used to complement the quantitative findings.

4.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the study findings in line with the research objective. Before presenting the results, the adequacy of the response rate for the study was assessed and presented in the following section.

4.0 Response Rate

The study targeted 23 public primary schools in Narok West Sub-County, from which 23 head teachers and 216 teachers were sampled, giving a total target of 239 respondents. Twenty head teachers participated in the interviews and 204 teachers returned properly completed questionnaires. The head teachers returned a response rate of 87.0%, the teachers returned 94.4%, and the aggregate response rate for the study was 93.7%. This return is well above the threshold of 70% that is widely regarded as adequate for survey-based educational research, and it is also above the 80% benchmark associated with minimal risk of non-response bias in institution-based surveys (Wu et al., 2022). The high return may be attributed to the researcher's use of drop-and-pick administration, the support extended by school administrators, and the direct relevance of the school feeding programme to the daily work of the respondents.

4.1 Learner Persistence in Education

Before the four objectives were tested, the study established the descriptive profile of the dependent variable, learner persistence, which was operationalized through indicators of regular attendance, full-day retention, reduced absenteeism, reduced dropout and active classroom engagement. Teachers' responses on these indicators are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Teachers' Responses on Learner Persistence in Education

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Cumulative	
						D	A
The feeding programme reduces absenteeism	3 (1.5%)	3 (1.5%)	13 (6.3%)	91 (44.6%)	94 (46.1%)	6 (3%)	185 (90.7%)
Availability of food enhances full-day learner retention	3 (1.5%)	6 (2.9%)	22 (10.8%)	86 (42.2%)	87 (42.6%)	9 (4.4%)	173 (84.8%)
The feeding programme has contributed to lower dropout rates	5 (2.5%)	13 (6.4%)	24 (11.7%)	92 (45.1%)	70 (34.3%)	18 (8.9%)	162 (79.4%)
School meals enhance learners' active engagement	7 (3.4%)	7 (3.4%)	20 (9.9%)	77 (37.7%)	93 (45.6%)	14 (6.8%)	170 (83.3%)
School meals enhance learners' regular attendance	4 (2.0%)	4 (2.0%)	13 (6.3%)	75 (36.8%)	108 (52.9%)	8 (4%)	183 (89.7%)
Mean(M)=4.22	SD=0.66						

Source: Researcher, 2026

The findings in Table 1 indicate that school feeding was strongly perceived to support learner persistence among the 204 respondents. Regarding reduced absenteeism, 185 (90.7%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 6 (3.0%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and 13 (6.3%) were neutral. Similarly, 173 (84.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that food availability enhanced full-day learner retention, compared with 9 (4.4%) who disagreed or strongly disagreed and 22 (10.8%) who were neutral. On reducing dropout, 162 (79.4%) agreed or strongly agreed, while 18 (8.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and 24 (11.7%) were neutral. These results suggest that teachers generally perceived school meals as contributing positively to attendance, retention and reduced dropout, although the responses on dropout were comparatively more cautious, reflecting the influence of other factors such as poverty, migration and early marriage (Mainje & Matumba, 2024).

The findings further show that 170 (83.3%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that school meals enhanced learners' active engagement, whereas 14 (6.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and 20 (9.9%) were neutral. In addition, 183 (89.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that school meals enhanced regular attendance, representing the highest level of cumulative agreement, while 8 (4.0%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and 13 (6.3%) were neutral. Overall, learner persistence recorded a high mean of $M = 4.22$ ($SD = 0.66$), indicating strong teacher perceptions and relatively limited variation in responses. This pattern agrees with evidence that school meals can produce immediate educational benefits through improved participation, enrolment and retention, although effects on learning achievement may take longer to emerge (Aurino et al., 2023; Verguet et al., 2020).

4.3 Availability of Food Varieties and Learner Persistence in Education

The first objective of the study sought to Teachers' perceptions of the availability of food varieties were captured through seven Likert-scaled items, the responses to which are consolidated in Table 2.

Table 2
Teachers' Responses on the Availability of Food Varieties in the School Feeding Programme

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Cumulative	
						D	A
Learners are provided with animal food varieties	30 (14.7%)	38 (18.6%)	41 (20.1%)	71 (34.8%)	24 (11.8%)	68 (33.3%)	95 (46.6%)
Learners are provided with plant food varieties	13 (6.4%)	6 (2.9%)	14 (6.9%)	91 (44.6%)	80 (39.2%)	19 (9.3%)	171 (83.8%)

Lack of meal variety leads to irregular school attendance	34 (16.7%)	30 (14.7%)	35 (17.1%)	53 (26.0%)	52 (25.5%)	64 (31.4%)	105 (51.5%)
Learners have no access to food varieties	42 (21.1%)	48 (23.5%)	28 (13.7%)	54 (26.5%)	31 (15.2%)	90 (44.6%)	85 (41.7%)
The feeding programme has improved retention rates	10 (4.9%)	12 (5.9%)	12 (5.9%)	90 (44.1%)	80 (39.2%)	22 (10.8%)	170 (83.3%)
Meal variety contributes to reduced dropout rates	14 (6.9%)	12 (5.9%)	15 (7.3%)	77 (37.7%)	86 (42.2%)	26 (12.8%)	163 (79.9%)
Availability of food varieties enhances learner participation	10 (4.9%)	4 (2.0%)	14 (6.9%)	72 (35.2%)	104 (51.0%)	14 (6.9%)	176 (86.3%)
Mean (M)=3.68	SD=0.68						

Source: Researcher, 2026

The findings in Table 2 indicate that the availability of food varieties in school feeding programmes was generally high but uneven across schools. For animal-source foods, 95 (46.6%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that such foods were provided, while 68 (33.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and 41 (20.1%) were neutral, suggesting inconsistent access to protein-rich foods. In contrast, plant-based food varieties received stronger support, with 171 (83.8%) respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared with only 19 (9.3%) who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Regarding the effect of limited variety on attendance, 105 (51.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that lack of variety contributed to irregular attendance, while 64 (31.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, responses on access to food varieties were divided, with 85 (41.7%) agreeing and 90 (44.6%) disagreeing, indicating differences in dietary diversity across schools. These findings suggest that school meals in Narok West are predominantly based on plant foods, while animal-source foods remain less consistently available, reflecting broader concerns about dietary diversity in low-resource school feeding programmes (Mainje & Matumba, 2024; World Food Programme [WFP], 2023).

The findings further demonstrate a strong perceived relationship between food variety and learner persistence. A total of 170 (83.3%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the feeding programme had improved retention rates, while 163 (79.9%) associated meal variety with reduced dropout rates. The strongest response was recorded for learner participation, where 176 (86.3%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that food variety enhanced participation, suggesting that teachers perceived diverse meals as important for sustaining learners' energy and engagement during school hours. Overall, the availability of food varieties recorded a mean of $M = 3.68$ ($SD = 0.63$), indicating a high level of availability but also some variation across schools. The relatively lower mean compared with other feeding programme dimensions suggests that dietary diversity remains an area requiring attention, particularly in relation to the provision of animal-source and micronutrient-rich foods. This finding is consistent with evidence that more diverse and nutritious school meals can support attention, participation and educational engagement more effectively than monotonous diets (Cohen et al., 2021; WFP, 2023).

4.3.1 Inferential Analysis of Availability of Food Varieties and Learner Persistence

To establish whether the observed association was statistically meaningful, composite scores were computed for availability of food varieties and for learner persistence, and a simple linear regression was conducted. The descriptive statistics for the two composite variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Availability of Food Varieties and Learner Persistence

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Availability of food varieties	204	1.14	5.0	3.68	0.63
Learner persistence	204	1.6	5.0	4.22	0.66

Source: Researcher, 2026

Table 4
Regression Model Summary and Analysis of Variance for Availability of Food Varieties Predicting Learner Persistence

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Regression	3.275	1	3.275	7.871	.006
Residual	84.052	202	0.416		
Total	87.327	203			
Model summary	R = .194	R ² = .038	Adj. R ² = .033		

Source: Researcher, 2026

Table 5
Regression Coefficients for Availability of Food Varieties Predicting Learner Persistence

Model	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	3.485	0.267	—	13.054	< .001
Availability of food varieties	0.201	0.072	0.194	2.806	.006

Source: Researcher, 2026

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 202) = 7.871$, $p = .006$, confirming that the availability of food varieties makes a significant contribution to the prediction of learner persistence. The coefficient of determination, $R^2 = .038$, indicates that dietary variety accounted for approximately 3.8% of the variance in learner persistence, and the unstandardized coefficient, $B = 0.201$, $SE = 0.072$, $\beta = .194$, $t = 2.806$, $p = .006$, shows that a one-unit improvement in the perceived availability of food varieties is associated with a 0.201-unit increase in learner persistence. The null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between the availability of food varieties and learner persistence was therefore rejected.

The modest effect size warrants careful interpretation. It indicates that while dietary variety matters, it operates as a supporting rather than a dominant determinant of persistence once the meal itself is assured, a pattern consistent with evidence that the presence of a daily meal drives participation outcomes more powerfully than its composition, whereas composition drives nutritional and cognitive outcomes (Aurino et al., 2023; Verguet et al., 2020).

4.3.2 Head Teachers' Responses on the Availability of Food Varieties

Thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with the 20 head teachers revealed that the majority of schools offered a recognizable range of foods, most commonly maize and beans, githeri, ugali, cereals and vegetables, with meat and other animal-source foods appearing only occasionally and largely depending on parental contributions or support from development partners. Head teachers consistently linked dietary variety to learner energy, attentiveness and classroom participation. One head teacher from School K observed that:

"Balanced diet ensures learners are energetic, attentive, and ready to learn throughout the day."

The same theme was independently articulated by the head teacher of School P, who emphasized the link between nutritional balance and classroom engagement in almost identical terms. A second and equally prominent theme concerned the consequences of a contraction in variety. Head teachers reported that when the menu narrowed to a repetitive staple, absenteeism rose and participation declined, and that this effect was concentrated among learners from economically vulnerable households for whom the school meal constitutes the principal meal of the day. Conversely, improvements in variety were associated with immediate recovery in daily attendance.

5.0 Conclusions

Drawing from the findings of the study, it is evident that the key components of school feeding programs availability of food varieties collectively exert a significant and positive influence on learner persistence in public Primary schools. The results affirm that when children are guaranteed access to consistent, nutritious, and sufficiently portioned meals, their school attendance and retention rates notably increase. Firstly, the availability of meals emerges as a foundational factor in encouraging daily school attendance. When learners are confident that food will be provided at school, they are more likely to attend regularly. These conclusions are consistent with a growing body of scholarly literature, which emphasizes the role of comprehensive school feeding programs in improving educational outcomes, particularly in food-insecure regions such as Narok West Sub-County. In such contexts, school meals serve not only as a nutritional intervention but also as a critical strategy for promoting access to education and enhancing learner persistence.

6.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions from the study, the following recommendations were made;

- i. The Ministry of Education and county governments should promote diverse and nutritious foods in school feeding programmes. Locally sourced foods should be prioritized to improve dietary diversity and support learner persistence.
- ii. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal studies on the effects of food variety on learner persistence and academic performance. Such studies should examine how different nutrients contribute to learners' concentration, attendance, and retention.
- iii. Schools should regularly monitor food quality, hygiene, storage, and preparation practices. Kitchen staff should also receive appropriate training to ensure that meals are safe, nutritious, and acceptable to learners.
- iv. Schools should regularly assess whether the portions provided are sufficient for learners' nutritional requirements.

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