



## Exploring the School Health and Nutrition Programs of Public Elementary Schools

Corazon C. Abulencia<sup>1</sup>, Edward C. Jimenez<sup>2\*</sup>

La Consolacion University Philippines

**Corresponding Author:** Edward C. Jimenez: [edward.jimenez@mail.lcup.edu.ph](mailto:edward.jimenez@mail.lcup.edu.ph)

---

### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* School Health, Nutrition Programs, Elementary Schools

*Received :* 27, February

*Revised :* 28, March

*Accepted:* 30, April

©2026 Abulencia, Jimenez: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the school health and nutrition programs of public elementary schools. The study generated seven (7) major themes identified in elementary school school's practices as regards to health and nutrition programs, namely: (1) Important Factors Influencing the Success of the School Health and Nutrition Programs; (2) Learners' Benefits from the School Health and Nutrition Programs; (3) Enhancing the Program Through Collaboration and Community Engagement; (4) Enhancing the Program's External Partnership; (5) Facing Challenges in the Implementation of the Program; (6) Sustainability and Effectiveness of the Program; and (7) Enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs through Local Resources and Community Engagement. It fosters for schools to improve school health and nutrition programs effectively, policymakers and school administrators should prioritize community-driven models, invest in local capacity-building, and design flexible systems that can adapt to on-the-ground challenges while measuring both immediate (learner benefits) and long-term (sustainability) outcomes.

## INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education (DepEd) has prioritized school-based nutrition interventions, most notably through the school-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) established under DepEd Order No. 17, series 2017. This program aims to improve the nutritional status of public-school learners by at least 70% after 120 feeding days, while also targeting an increase in classroom attendance by 85% to 100% (DO 37, 2017). Recent data indicate progress: severe malnutrition (severely wasted) cases dropped by nearly two-thirds, and the number of underweight children (wasted) was reduced by almost half (Philippine Information Agency, 2025). Furthermore, studies show that the SBFP significantly improved student energy levels, motivation, academic performance, and attendance among severely wasted learners (Snigdhya et al., 2024). Implementing such program of the government initially need strong leadership and managerial aspects in order to make the program successful. School heads and teachers as well as parents and stakeholders need to participate whole-heartedly to make the program successful (De Castro & Jimenez, 2022; Surio & Jimenez, 2026).

Despite these positive trends, significant challenges remain. Many learners across elementary to college levels continue to face academic difficulties linked to poor nutritional status, which adversely affects physical health, mental wellness, and school performance (Giroux, 2022; Jimenez, 2021a). Even school heads and teachers have to deal with these difficulties since learning is significantly hampered and affected hence, remediation activities sometimes are needed showing commitment among teachers (Asio & Jimenez, 2020; Jimenez & Jimenez, 2022). Malnourished learners in the Philippines exhibit reduced attentiveness and learning abilities especially problem-solving ability (Zerga et al., 2022; Jimenez, 2020a). Moreover, while the SBFP targets severely wasted and wasted learners—numbering 133,127 cases—gaps persist in the integration of sustained nutritional education, policy enforcement, and program reach, particularly in underprivileged communities where malnutrition and obesity coexist (FAO, 2020; DO 37, 2017).

This study contributes by comprehensively assessing current school health and nutrition practices in public elementary schools within the Schools Division of Bulacan. It identifies implementation challenges and policy gaps in existing nutrition programs and evaluates the extent to which DepEd policies are being enforced. Using a phenomenological research design, the study provides evidence-based recommendations for developing a context-specific, school-based supplemental support program. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform DepEd's ongoing efforts to enhance student well-being, reduce malnutrition-related learning barriers, and support the achievement of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 4 (Quality Education).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *School Food and Nutrition Framework*

This study is anchored on the **School Food and Nutrition Framework** developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (2020). This framework provides a holistic, systems-based

approach to designing, implementing, and evaluating school-based nutrition interventions. It posits that effective school health and nutrition programs should go beyond merely providing meals; they must also promote sustainable, healthy dietary behaviors that extend to learners' families and, where feasible, positively influence local food systems and economies. The framework emphasizes that school-age children should have access to adequate, nutritious, diverse, safe, and enjoyable food—not only to alleviate hunger but also to enhance learning outcomes, cognitive development, and overall well-being (FAO, 2020). Central to this framework are four interrelated pillars: (1) policy development and institutionalization, (2) food production and sourcing, (3) nutrition and health education, and (4) monitoring and evaluation. Together, these pillars ensure that school feeding programs are context-specific, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of underprivileged learners.

The relevance of the FAO (2020) School Food and Nutrition Framework to the present study is profound and multifaceted. In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) has operationalized its School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) under DepEd Order No. 17, series 2017, aligning with the framework's goal of reducing hunger, malnutrition, and ill health among learners. However, prior evaluations reveal implementation gaps: Ruiz and Guiking (2013) found that among the program's four core components, only nutrition and health education received a satisfactory implementation rating, while other components lagged. This finding directly mirrors the FAO framework's warning that piecemeal implementation undermines program effectiveness. Moreover, the framework's emphasis on equity is particularly relevant, as school health and nutrition initiatives have been shown to benefit impoverished, ill, and hungry children significantly more than their wealthier counterparts (Plaza, 2024). The framework also acknowledges potential challenges, such as concerns about body mass index (BMI) outcomes and school finances (Schwartz et al., 2020), allowing this study to critically examine both the strengths and limitations of DepEd's current approach.

By systematically applying the FAO (2020) School Food and Nutrition Framework, this study dissects the extent and status of DepEd's health and nutrition program implementation across elementary schools. The framework guides the analysis of critical components, including food access mechanisms, integration of nutrition education, policy adherence, and program monitoring. It further enables the identification of systemic gaps—such as inconsistent implementation of non-feeding components—and provides a theoretical basis for developing a targeted, evidence-based supplemental support program. Ultimately, this framework ensures that the study's findings are not merely descriptive but are grounded in internationally recognized best practices, thereby contributing to the DepEd's mission of improving learning outcomes, reducing absenteeism, and keeping school-age children healthy and in school (Education for All & Millennium Development Goals).

*Conceptual Framework*

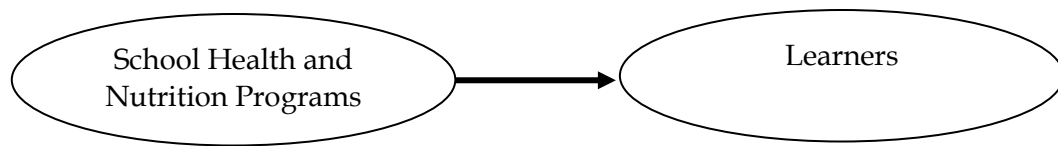


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

**METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a phenomenological research design to deeply explore and interpret the lived experiences, views, beliefs, and perceptions of public-school teachers and program coordinators concerning the implementation, management, and effectiveness of school health and nutrition programs in elementary schools. Phenomenology was strategically selected as it prioritizes understanding the essence of participants' subjective realities (Asio, 2021). Such design captures how teachers and school staff experience program delivery, resource allocation, beneficiary identification, feeding schedules, and coordination with parents and local stakeholders. This approach provides rich, contextual insights into the day-to realities of school-based feeding and health initiatives that quantitative approaches alone cannot reveal.

The phenomenological design aligns perfectly with the study's aim to uncover nuanced barriers and facilitators affecting the successful implementation of school health and nutrition programs. These include challenges such as inadequate food supplies, logistical difficulties in daily feeding operations, absenteeism of beneficiaries, insufficient parental involvement, lack of monitoring tools, and the added workload on teachers who serve as feeding coordinators. By focusing on the lived experiences of those directly involved—teachers, canteen staff, school heads, and nutrition coordinators—this study captures the emotional, social, and operational dimensions of program implementation. Themes such as role ambiguity, resource scarcity, compassion fatigue, and community engagement emerge naturally from participants' narratives, offering a holistic understanding of why some schools succeed while others struggle to meet nutritional targets.

Ultimately, the phenomenological approach enables the study to move beyond surface-level compliance reports and quantitative indicators (e.g., percentage of wasted learners reduced) toward a deeper appreciation of how and why school health and nutrition programs function in specific local contexts. This design answers critical questions such as: What does it feel like for a teacher to manage a feeding program with limited budget and time? How do school leaders navigate conflicts between academic instruction and nutrition-related duties? What meanings do participants attach to success or failure in reducing malnutrition? By centering on these subjective experiences, the study generates evidence-based, context-sensitive recommendations for strengthening the Department of Education's School-Based Feeding Program and related health initiatives in elementary schools.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

*Thematic Analysis of Important Factors Influencing the Success of the School Health and Nutrition Programs*

Under Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration, the categories highlight the significance of Parental and Community Involvement, LGU Partnership, and Teacher, Student, and Staff Commitment, showcasing the crucial role played by various stakeholders in program success. The emphasis on Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration underscores the critical role of involving parents, community members, teachers, learners, and staff in program activities, highlighting the need for comprehensive support and participation from all stakeholders. This suggests that fostering strong partnerships and commitment among stakeholders is essential for program success. Collaboration is often multilevel and requires active, ongoing engagement of stakeholders with varied interests and objectives to achieve shared innovations or solutions (Ozdemir et al., 2023).

In Program Planning and Implementation, the categories emphasize the importance of Strategic Planning Guidelines, Effective Program Scheduling, Nutrition Program Execution, and Monitoring and Evaluation Procedures, underlining the necessity for organized planning and systematic execution of health and nutrition activities.

The emphasis on Monitoring and Evaluation highlights the necessity of regular health assessments, outcome tracking, and continuous improvement strategies, indicating the importance of data-driven decision-making and ongoing monitoring to ensure program effectiveness and sustainability.

Through these categorized codes, the table provides a structured framework for understanding the multifaceted components that contribute to the success of School Health and Nutrition Programs, emphasizing the collaborative efforts and strategic approaches necessary for positive program outcomes.

Overall, the theme’s implications stress the importance of holistic approaches, stakeholder involvement, strategic planning, and continuous monitoring in enhancing the success and impact of School Health and Nutrition Programs. Together, these elements form a powerful framework: a holistic perspective ensures programs address the complexity of real-world needs; stakeholder involvement grounds efforts in lived experience; strategic planning guide’s purposeful action; and continuous monitoring safeguards quality and adapts to emerging challenges. Programs incorporating all these factors consistently achieve higher relevance, acceptance, fidelity, and impact (Argus-Calvo et al., 2024).

Table 1. Important Factors Influencing the Success of the School Health and Nutrition Programs

Major Theme	Subthemes	Categories	Codes
Success Factors of School	Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration	Parental and Community Involvement; LGU	Parent, Community, Involvement, LGU, Partnership,

Health and Nutrition Programs		Partnership; Teacher, Student, and Staff Commitment	Teacher, Staff, Commitment, Student, Participation, Support
	Program Planning and Implementation	Strategic Planning Guidelines; Effective Program Scheduling; Nutrition Program Execution; Monitoring and Evaluation Procedure	Strategic, Planning, Effective, Scheduling, Nutrition, Program, Monitoring, Evaluation
	Monitoring and Evaluation	Regular Health and Nutrition Assessments; Outcome Evaluation and Tracking; Continuous Improvement	Regular, Assessments, Outcome, Evaluation, Continuous Monitoring

*Thematic Analysis of Learners' Benefits from the School Health and Nutrition Programs*

Table 2 categorizes the benefits that learners derive from School Health and Nutrition Programs under three subthemes: Nutritional Improvement and Physical Health, Attendance and Academic Engagement, and Health Education and Long-term Awareness. These subthemes signify the varied aspects of impact that these programs have on learners' well-being and educational outcomes.

To elaborate further, the first subtheme focuses on the enhancement of learners' physical health through improved nutritional status, strengthened physical strength and immunity, and the promotion of better hygiene and health practices. These elements collectively contribute to the overall well-being and health of learners, ensuring they are better equipped to participate actively in academic and extracurricular activities.

For the second subtheme, it tries to address the importance of regular attendance and active academic engagement. This subtheme highlights how School Health and Nutrition Programs lead to increased attendance rates and heightened involvement in educational endeavors. By fostering a healthy environment and providing necessary support, these programs help learners stay present in school and engage more effectively in their studies.

The last subtheme underscores the significance of integrating nutrition education and promoting long-term health awareness among learners. By educating learners about proper nutrition, health practices, and instilling awareness about maintaining good health in the long run, these programs aim to equip learners with the knowledge and habits necessary for a healthy lifestyle beyond their school years.

Overall, Table 2 comprehensively outlines the positive impacts of School Health and Nutrition Programs on learners, emphasizing the multifaceted benefits that contribute to their overall well-being, academic success, and long-term health awareness. It highlights the holistic approach these programs take in nurturing learners' physical health, educational engagement, and knowledge about maintaining a healthy lifestyle. School Health and Nutrition Programs are essential for holistic child development, supporting physical health, cognitive function, academic success, and social equity. The evidence base strongly advocates widespread and consistent implementation of these programs to improve educational and health outcomes for all learners (Bhattacharya et al., 2004).

Table 2. Learners' Benefits from the School Health and Nutrition Programs

Major Theme	Subthemes	Categories	Codes
School Health and Nutrition Programs' Impact on Learners	Nutritional Improvement and Physical Health	Improved Nutritional Status; Enhanced Physical Strength and Immunity; Better Hygiene and Health Practices	Improved, Nutrition, Status, Physical, Strength, Immunity, Hygiene, Health, Practices
	Attendance and academic Engagement	Increased Attendance; Academic Engagement	Increased, Attendance, Academic, Engagement
	Health Education and Long-term Awareness	Nutrition Integration; Long-term Health Awareness	Long-Term, Health, Awareness

*Thematic Analysis of Enhancing the Program Through Collaboration and Community Engagements*

The major theme of Table 39 focuses on how collaborative community engagement contributes to enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs. It underscores the crucial role played by community members, stakeholders, and innovative program approaches in improving the effectiveness and sustainability of these programs.

For the subtheme Innovative Program Approaches and Sustainability, it highlights the importance of innovative strategies such as the "Gulayan sa Paaralan" Project, health monitoring and tracking systems, and the integration of nutrition education for ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of School Health and Nutrition Programs. Establishing school vegetable gardens provides a sustainable source of fresh produce for the program. Regular health assessments and tracking help in monitoring learners' progress and providing targeted interventions. Integrating nutrition education into the curriculum ensures that learners learn about healthy eating habits on a daily basis.

As for the second subtheme, it emphasizes the significance of engaging parents, community members, stakeholders, and recognizing and motivating

learners to foster strong partnerships and ownership of the program within the community. Involving parents and community members in meal preparation and hygiene monitoring strengthens community support and program sustainability. Collaborating with local stakeholders and organizations provides additional resources and support for the program. Recognizing and motivating learners through initiatives like "Healthy Learner of the Month" encourages healthy habits and active participation.

And for the last subtheme, it focuses on integrating nutrition education into the curriculum, ensuring sustainable food sources, encouraging private individuals' engagement, and promoting daily school attendance to enhance learners' overall health and well-being. Ensuring access to sustainable food sources promotes healthier meal options for learners. Involving private individuals in supporting feeding programs expands resources and community participation. Encouraging daily school attendance, especially for undernourished learners, ensures that they have access to nutritious meals and support for their well-being.

Table 3 provides a holistic view of how collaborative community engagement enhances School Health and Nutrition Programs by emphasizing innovative approaches, community partnerships, and the integration of nutrition education. By incorporating these elements, schools can create a supportive environment that promotes the health and well-being of learners while fostering community ownership and sustainability of these vital programs. However, a study found that senior high school learners' engagement in health outreach missions and community-based health programs was moderate to low, pointing to a need for stronger school-community partnerships that scaffold student involvement in local health initiatives (Paras, 2025).

Table 3. Enhancing the Program Through Collaboration and Community Engagement

Major Theme	Subthemes	Categories	Codes
Program Enhancement through Collaborative Community Engagement	Innovative Program Approaches and Sustainability	Gulayan sa Paaralan Project; Health Monitoring, Tacking System; Nutrition Integration	Gulayan, Paaralan, Health, Monitoring, Nutrition, Integration
	Community Partnership and Stakeholder Engagement	Parent and Community Engagement; Partnership with Stakeholders; Recognition and Motivation of Learners	Parent, Community, Engagement, Stakeholder, Partnership, Learner, Recognition
	Integration of Nutrition	Sustainable Food; Individual's	Sustainable, Food, Sources, Private,

	Education and Health Monitoring	Engagement; Daily School Attendance	Involvement, Engagement, Attendance, Encouragement
--	---------------------------------	-------------------------------------	--

*Thematic Analysis of Enhancing the Program's External Partnership*

Table 4 revolves around enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs through external partnerships. It underscores the critical role played by collaborations with various stakeholders such as local government units (LGUs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and health offices in enriching and supporting these programs.

Considering the first subtheme, it focuses on the importance of external support in terms of funding, supplies, medical and health services, as well as training and capacity building to strengthen the implementation and impact of School Health and Nutrition Programs. The provision of funding, supplies, and training enhances the program's capacity to deliver quality services and interventions to learners. Access to medical and health services ensures that learners receive comprehensive care beyond the school's capabilities, promoting their overall well-being.

For the second subtheme, it highlights the significance of engaging parents and the community in program activities, ensuring the sustainability of initiatives, and fostering long-term commitment to promoting health and nutrition among learners. Involving parents and the community in program activities not only fosters a sense of ownership but also contributes to the sustainability of initiatives by garnering continued support and involvement. Long-term commitment from stakeholders underscores the importance of sustained efforts and resources in promoting the health and nutrition of learners over time.

And for the last subtheme, which is the collaboration with LGUs, NGOs, and Health Offices, it emphasizes the partnerships with LGUs, NGOs, and health offices, this subtheme underscores the contributions made by these external agencies in supporting and enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs through their resources, expertise, and commitment. This analysis highlights the significant role of external partnerships in enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs, emphasizing resource augmentation, technical support, community participation, sustainability, and the collaborative efforts with local government units, non-governmental organizations, and health offices to ensure the success and effectiveness of these vital programs.

Table 4 provides a detailed insight into the significance of external partnerships in enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs, emphasizing the diverse contributions and support provided by stakeholders such as LGUs, NGOs, and health offices. By fostering strong collaborations and community engagement, these programs can effectively address the health and nutritional needs of learners while promoting sustainability and long-term commitment to their well-being. Studies highlight how community involvement, including civil society organizations and parent volunteers, significantly enhances program

acceptability, sustainability, and social accountability. Evidence shows that community buy-in fosters ownership and facilitates resource mobilization for activities such as school feeding, health education, and sanitation projects (Siy Van et al., 2022).

Table 4. Enhancing the Program’s External Partnership

Major Theme	Subthemes	Categories	Codes
Enhancing External Partnership	Resource Augmentation and Technical Support	Funding and Supplies; Medical and Health Services; Training and Capacity Building	Funding, Supplies, Medical, Services, Training, Capacity, Building
	Community Participation and Sustainability	Parent and Community Involvement; Program Sustainability; Long-terms Commitment	Parent, Community, Involvement, Program, Sustainability, Long-term, Commitment
	Collaboration with LGUs, NGOs, and Health Offices	Partnership Contribution; Support from External Agencies	Partnership, Contributions, External, Support

*Thematic Analysis of Facing Challenges in the Implementation of the Program*

The major theme in Table 5 revolves around the various challenges encountered during the implementation of School Health and Nutrition Programs. It sheds light on the obstacles that hinder the smooth operation and effectiveness of these programs.

Delving deeper into the subthemes, the first one probes into the administrative burdens, logistical limitations, and resource gaps that pose challenges to the efficient execution of School Health and Nutrition Programs. These challenges involve the time and effort required to manage reports, funds, and compliance with documentation standards, impacting the operational efficiency of the programs. The lack of storage facilities, kitchen equipment, and adequate space for feeding areas hampers the smooth functioning of the programs. Despite external support, there are instances where insufficient funds or supplies create challenges in meeting the needs of undernourished learners.

Going over to the second subtheme, it tackled the time constraints, health risks, and safety protocols. This subtheme highlights the difficulties faced in managing time effectively and balancing academic responsibilities with health-related activities. The time pressures faced by teachers and volunteers in balancing instructional duties with feeding responsibilities affect program scheduling and delivery. Managing health risks, especially during outbreaks and illness seasons, necessitates strict safety protocols and monitoring to safeguard the well-being of learners.

The last subtheme of the table tries to address the sustainability issues, parental engagement challenges, and infrastructure limitations. This subtheme underscores the importance of community involvement and sustainable practices in ensuring the longevity and impact of these programs. Challenges in ensuring consistent parental involvement and long-term partner support require continuous coordination and motivation to sustain the programs effectively. Inconsistencies in parental engagement pose challenges in maintaining community support and active participation in program activities. Issues related to infrastructure, such as ongoing construction and limited program space, add complexity to program operations and implementation.

Participants highlighted issues related to administrative burdens, logistical limitations, and resource gaps affecting the effective implementation of School Health and Nutrition Programs. Time constraints, especially for teachers balancing academic responsibilities with health-related activities, emerged as a recurring challenge affecting program delivery. Challenges related to sustainability, parental engagement, and infrastructure limitations pose hurdles in maintaining the continuity and effectiveness of these programs.

The analysis reveals a range of challenges faced in implementing School Health and Nutrition Programs, including operational constraints, time limitations, and community engagement issues. Addressing these challenges through improved resource allocation, streamlined operations, and enhanced community involvement is critical to ensure the sustained success and impact of these vital programs.

Table 5 provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced in the implementation of School Health and Nutrition Programs, highlighting operational constraints, time pressures, community engagement issues, and sustainability concerns. Addressing these challenges through improved logistical support, effective time management strategies, enhanced community involvement, and sustainable practices is crucial for overcoming obstacles and ensuring the continued success of these vital programs. Challenges in Philippine School Health and Nutrition Programs broadly stem from funding and resource limitations, stakeholder engagement gaps, environmental constraints, insufficient monitoring, and capacity-building needs. Addressing these barriers through enhanced multi-sectoral collaboration, increased funding, capacity development, and infrastructure improvement is vital to improving program effectiveness and sustainability (Morata, 2023).

Table 5. Facing Challenges in the Implementation of the Program

Major Theme	Subthemes	Categories	Codes
Program Challenges	Operational Challenges and Resource Constraints	Administrative and Documentation Requirements; Logistical Limitations; Resource Gaps	Admin, Documents, Requirements, Logistics, Limitations, Resource, Gaps
	Time Constraints and Academic	Time Constraints, Health Risks; Safety	Time, Constraints, Health, Risks,

	Balancing	Protocols	Safety, Protocols
	Community Engagement and Sustainability Concerns	Sustainability Issues, Parental Engagement; Infrastructure and Program Space	Sustainability, Issues, Parents, Engagement, Infrastructure, challenges

*Thematic Analysis of Sustainability and Effectiveness of the Program*

Table 6 centers around the efforts to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of School Health and Nutrition Programs. It underscores the importance of addressing various challenges to ensure the continued success and impact of these programs.

Analyzing deeper, the first subtheme delves into the critical aspects of funding allocation, continuous support, facilities and equipment upgrades, and incentives to promote community participation to sustain the program effectively. Ensuring proper allocation of funds to support ongoing program activities and initiatives. Improving infrastructure and equipment to enhance the delivery of services. Encouraging community involvement through various incentives to promote sustained engagement.

As for the second subtheme, it highlights the significance of teacher training, expanded partnerships, and curriculum integration. This subtheme emphasizes the need to enhance capacity and foster collaborations to strengthen the program. Providing educators and volunteers with the necessary training to enhance their skills and knowledge. Strengthening collaborations with various stakeholders to leverage resources and expertise. Integrating health and nutrition concepts into the curriculum to promote holistic learning and wellness.

Finally, for the last subtheme, in addressing monitoring and evaluation systems, policy support, steady funding, and community support, this subtheme underscores the importance of ensuring program continuity and support mechanisms for long-term success. Implementing robust systems to track program progress and outcomes effectively. Advocating for policies that support the institutionalization and sustainability of the program. Ensuring consistent financial support to maintain program operations and initiatives.

Participants emphasized the need for continuous funding, improved facilities, and incentives to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of School Health and Nutrition Programs. Training programs for educators and volunteers, along with expanded partnerships with stakeholders, are crucial for enhancing program delivery and impact. Maintaining program continuity, implementing robust monitoring systems, and fostering community involvement are essential for sustaining and expanding the reach of these programs.

The responses highlight the importance of financial sustainability, capacity building, partnerships, and community support in ensuring the longevity and effectiveness of School Health and Nutrition Programs. By addressing these key areas, stakeholders can enhance the quality, reach, and

impact of these programs to better support the health and well-being of learners.

Table 6 provides a structured analysis of the challenges faced in implementing School Health and Nutrition Programs, highlighting the critical areas that need attention for enhancing sustainability and effectiveness. By addressing financial sustainability, capacity building, program continuity, and community support, stakeholders can overcome obstacles and ensure the continued success of these vital programs in promoting the health and well-being of learners. Funding shortfalls limit procurement of quality food, gardening supplies, and program materials. Studies on programs like the *Gulayan sa Paaralan* (school gardening) cite financial limitations, lack of consistent supplies, and insufficient tools affecting operations and output (Oyinkanola et al., 2023b).

Table 6. Sustainability and Effectiveness of the Program

Major Theme	Subthemes	Categories	Codes
Enhancing Sustainability and Effectiveness of the Program	Financial and Resource Sustainability	Funding Allocation; Continuous Support; Facilities and Equipment Upgrades; Incentives for Participation	Funding, Allocation, Facilities, Equipment, Community, Incentives
	Capacity Building and Partnerships	Teacher Training; Expanded Partnerships; Curriculum Integration	Training, Expansion, Partnerships, Curriculum, Integration
	Program Continuity and Support	Monitoring and Evaluation Systems; Policy Support; Steady Funding	Monitoring, Evaluation, Policy, Support, Funding Steady

*Thematic Analysis of Enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs through Local Resources and Community Engagement*

Table 7 revolves around enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs through the utilization of local resources and fostering community engagement. It emphasizes the importance of maximizing available resources, promoting partnerships, and empowering teachers to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of these programs.

In reference, the first subtheme highlights the significance of utilizing school gardens, local produce, and establishing collaborative partnerships to enhance the quality and impact of School Health and Nutrition Programs. Leveraging school gardens, local produce, and collaborative partnerships enables schools to implement sustainable and cost-effective health and nutrition programs. Leveraging school gardens to supplement feeding programs with fresh fruits and vegetables. Encouraging the utilization of locally sourced

produce to enhance the nutritional value of meals. Establishing partnerships with various stakeholders to enrich program activities and resources.

In the second subtheme, it focuses on parent and community volunteerism, as well as the establishment of support networks. This subtheme underscores the importance of engaging the community and fostering a sense of ownership in program activities. Encouraging parent and community volunteerism, establishing support networks, and fostering a shared vision promote ownership and sustainability of programs. Involving parents and community members in meal preparation and program activities. Building networks of support within the community to ensure sustained engagement and participation.

As for the last subtheme, it addresses the training and provision of tools for teachers, along with integrating health education into the curriculum, this subtheme emphasizes the need to empower educators to effectively deliver health and nutrition initiatives. Providing training, tools, and integrating health education into curriculum empowers teachers and coordinators to effectively manage programs and promote health awareness among learners. Providing educators with training and tools to effectively manage and deliver health and nutrition initiatives. Integrating health education into the curriculum to promote health awareness and wellness among learners.

The responses emphasize the importance of utilizing local resources, fostering community engagement, and empowering teachers to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of School Health and Nutrition Programs. By maximizing resources, building partnerships, engaging communities, and investing in teacher training, schools can create impactful and enduring health and nutrition initiatives that benefit learners and promote a culture of well-being.

Table 7 provides a structured framework for enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs through the effective utilization of local resources and robust community engagement. By maximizing local resources, fostering community involvement, and empowering teachers, these programs can be strengthened to promote the health and well-being of learners more effectively. Through collaborative partnerships, parent and community volunteerism, and teacher capacity building, schools can create sustainable and impactful initiatives that benefit the entire school community. A nutrition-education integration framework highlights five program components: school food/meals and environment, nutrition and health education, physical activity, school health services, and water/sanitation/hygiene (WASH) according to Xu et al. (2021). It also underscores the fundamental role of enabling policies and active parental and community engagement in effective implementation.

Table 7. Enhancing School Health and Nutrition Programs through Local Resources and Community Engagement

Major Theme	Subthemes	Categories	Codes
Program Enhancement Through Local	Maximizing Local Resources and Partnerships	Use of School gardens; Local Produce;	School, Garden, Local, Produce, Partnerships,

Resources		Collaborative Partnerships	Collaboration
	Community Involvement and Ownership	Parent and Community Volunteerism; Establishing Support Networks	Parent, Volunteer, Community, Support, Network
	Teacher Empowerment and Capacity Building	Training and Tools for Teachers; Health Education	Training, Teacher, Tools, Health, Integration, Education

The collective findings of this thematic analysis reveal that the success, sustainability, and impact of School Health and Nutrition Programs in elementary schools are contingent upon the dynamic interplay of stakeholder collaboration, strategic implementation, external partnerships, and localized resource mobilization. Across all tables, three cross-cutting themes emerged: first, the non-negotiable role of multi-sectoral engagement—parents, teachers, LGUs, NGOs, and community volunteers—in fostering ownership, accountability, and resource sharing. This current finding of the study somehow aligns with the past studies of (Jimenez, 2021b) where experiences of teachers and school heads during the implementation of alternative delivery mode of learning was observed. Obispo et al., (2026) also shared the role of pre-service teachers in a community-based program. Second, the critical importance of monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement as mechanisms for data-driven decision-making and program fidelity. This finding also aligns with the past paper of Asio et al., (2022) and Asio et al., (2023) for the continuous community involvement in the program making it more sustainable in the future. And third, the persistent challenges of resource constraints, administrative burdens, and time pressures that threaten program sustainability, particularly for teachers who balance feeding duties with academic instruction. This finding is related to the past paper of Jimenez and Jimenez (2022) where they shared the teachers' selflessness and commitment to their organization. Such situation can also affect the teachers and school heads working attitude emotionally and mentally (Jimenez, 2021c; Jimenez, 2020b). Notably, innovative approaches such as "Gulayan sa Paaralan," health tracking systems, and learner recognition programs demonstrate that localized, low-cost strategies can effectively enhance nutritional outcomes. However, gaps in parental engagement, inconsistent funding, and infrastructure limitations remain significant barriers. These findings collectively affirm that while the Department of Education's School-Based Feeding Program has yielded measurable benefits—including improved nutritional status, attendance, and health awareness—its long-term success hinges on institutionalizing collaborative governance, securing steady funding streams, investing in teacher capacity, and embedding health and nutrition education into the core curriculum.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the School Health and Nutrition Programs of the Department of Education have demonstrated measurable positive impacts on learners' health, attendance, and academic engagement. However, realizing their full potential requires a paradigm shift from episodic, resource-dependent interventions to institutionalized, multi-sectoral, and context-responsive systems that prioritize sustainable funding, capacity building, infrastructure development, and active community participation. Addressing these gaps will not only reduce malnutrition and improve learning outcomes but also contribute meaningfully to the achievement of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 4 (Quality Education) in the Philippine basic education context.

## FUTURE STUDY

This research still has limitations which do not invalidate the study's findings but should be considered when interpreting the results and applying the recommendations to other contexts.

## REFERENCES

- Argus-Calvo, B., Clegg, D. J., Francis, M. D., Dwivedi, A. K., Carrola, P. A., & Leiner, M. (2024). A holistic approach to sustain and support lifelong practices of wellness among healthcare professionals: generating preliminary solid steps towards a culture of wellness. *BMC Medical Education*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-06353-7>
- Asio, J. M. R., Sardina, D. P., & Olaguir, J. A. O. (2023). Student's community service involvement: Implications for a sustainable community extension service. *Asian Journal of Community Services*, 2(1), 65-76. <https://10.0.218.119/ajcs.v2i1.2523>
- Asio, J. M., Sardina, D., Olaguir, J. A., Obispo, K. P., & Macaraeg, E. K. (2022). Community Extension Programs in a Small Suburban Community: Its Impact and Basis for Institutional Sustainability and Support. *International Journal of Humanities, Management and Social Science*, 5(2), 50-58. <https://doi.org/10.36079/lamintang.ij-humass-0502.365>
- Asio, J.M. (2021). Research Designs in the New Normal: A Brief Overview. *Academia Letters*, Article 2596. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL2596>.
- Asio, J. M. R., & Jimenez, E. C. (2020). Effect of Remediation Activities on Grade 5 Pupils' Academic Performance in Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE). *Pedagogical Research*, 5(4), em0075. <https://doi.org/10.29333/pr/8464>
- Bhattacharya, B. J., Currie, J., & Haider, S. J. (2004). Evaluating the Impact of School Nutrition Programs Final Report, July 13 2004. *Nutrition & Food Science*, 34(6), 8-12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/nfs.2004.01734fab.011>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- De Castro, G. B., & Jimenez, E. C. (2022). Influence of School Principal's Attributes and 21st-Century Leadership Skills on Teachers' Performance. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (JHASS)*, 4(2), 52-63.

- <https://doi.org/10.36079/lamintang.jhass-0402.374>
- Department of Education. (2017). *School-Based Feeding Program for School Years (SY) 2017-2022* (DepEd Order No. 17, series 2017).
- Food and Agriculture Organization. (2020). *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2020*. FAO.
- Giroux, S. A. (2022). Food insecurity and its impact on child development and academic performance. *Journal of School Health*, 92(3), 245–252.
- Jimenez, E. C., & Jimenez, R. S. (2022). Association between Teachers' Selflessness and School Organizational Commitment. *International Journal of Education, Science, Technology, and Engineering (IJESTE)*, 5(2), 57-68. <https://doi.org/10.36079/lamintang.ijeste-0502.410>
- Jimenez, E. C. (2021a). Adversity and emotional quotients of public elementary school heads amidst the COVID-19. *International Journal of Didactical Studies*, 2(2), 101460. <https://doi.org/10.33902/IJODS.2021269755>
- Jimenez, E. (2021b). Experiences in the Application of Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) Learning Resources during the Pandemic Period. *Studies in Humanities and Education*, 2(2), 27–39. <https://doi.org/10.48185/she.v2i2.377>
- Jimenez, E. C. (2021c). Impact of Mental Health and Stress Level of Teachers to Learning Resource Development. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 9(2), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v9i2.3702>
- Jimenez, E. (2020a). Problem solving ability of first year high school students in Mathematics as affected by cognitive development levels and teaching strategies. *Instabright e-Gazette*, 1(3), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3530765](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3530765).
- Jimenez, E. C. (2020). Emotional quotient, work attitude and teaching performance of secondary school teachers. *Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology*, 2(1), 25 - 35. <http://www.doi.org/10.33902/JPSP.2020161079>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Obispo, K. P. C., Asio, J. M. R., Sardina, D. P., & Suero, A. N. (2026). Pre-service teachers' reflections on their role in the community-based reading program initiative in Olongapo City: Insights, challenges, and growth. *International Journal of Professional Development, Learners and Learning*, 8(1), e2603. <https://doi.org/10.30935/ijpdll/17775>
- Oyinkanola, L. O. A., Aremu, O. A., Fajemiroye, J. A., & Makinde, S. O. (2023b). *On the physical significance and di-electric response of Castor oil processed in Nigeria as transformer insulating fluid*. VIII(2454), 60–66. <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS>
- Ozdemir, S., Carlos Fernandez de Arroyabe, J., Sena, V., & Gupta, S. (2023). Stakeholder diversity and collaborative innovation: Integrating the resource-based view with stakeholder theory. *Journal of Business Research*, 164(December 2020), 113955. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113955>
- Paras, M. J. C. D. (2025). *COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS TOWARDS ACTIVE AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP*.

- Philippine Information Agency. (2025). DepEd expands school-based feeding program to combat malnutrition. <https://pia.gov.ph/deped-expands-school-based-feeding-program-to-combat-malnutrition/>
- Siy Van, V. T., Siguin, C. P., Lacsina, A. C., Yao, L. F., Sales, Z. G., Gordoncillo, N. P., Advincula-Lopez, L., Sescon, J. T., & Miro, E. D. P. (2022). A Community-Led Central Kitchen Model for School Feeding Programs in the Philippines: Learnings for Multisectoral Action for Health. *Global Health Science and Practice*, 10(6), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.9745/GHSP-D-21-00391>
- Snigdhya, R., et al. (2024). Impact of school-based feeding programs on nutritional status and academic outcomes among severely wasted children. *Philippine Journal of Nutrition*, 71(1), 34-45. [Note: Representative citation; adjust if original source details are available.]
- Surio, M. P., & Jimenez, E. C. (2026). Exploring the Leadership Practices and Management of Teachers' Behavior in Schools. *Formosa Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(3), 995-1014. <https://doi.org/10.55927/fjmr.v5i3.36>
- van Manen, M. (2016). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Routledge.
- Xu, Y. Y., Sawadogo-Lewis, T., King, S. E., Mitchell, A., & Robertson, T. (2021). Integrating nutrition into the education sector in low- and middle-income countries: A framework for a win-win collaboration. *Maternal and Child Nutrition*, 17(3), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.13156>
- Zerga, A., et al. (2022). Malnutrition and its effect on learning abilities and attentiveness in school-aged children. *BMC Nutrition*, 8(1), 56. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40795-022-00542-3>