

Improving Dining Hall Attendance among Female Students in Public Co-Educational Secondary Boarding Schools in Ghana – The Case of Aggrey Memorial Secondary School

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Abstract

Management of Ghanaian public secondary boarding schools, particularly the co-educational ones is often faced with the problem of irregular attendance of female boarding students to the dining hall. Attendance to the dining hall is important because it ensures that the student is well fed and also benefits from the socialization and other experiences that attending dining hall sessions regularly bring.

This action research was undertaken to identify and put in place specific strategies that will encourage regular dining hall attendance of female boarding students of one public co-educational secondary school where the problem has been reported to exist. The intention was to use the findings and recommendations as a guide to management of schools who are experiencing a similar problem. A sample of 152 female second and third year boarding students of Aggrey Memorial Secondary School in Cape Coast, Ghana, was picked for each of the two tests, that is, the pre-intervention and the post-intervention tests. The sample was made up of 66 second year and 86 third year students. Both pre-intervention and post-intervention data were gathered using the same self-administered questionnaire. The pre-intervention test gathered evidence to ascertain the level of the problem whilst the post-intervention test demonstrated the extent to which interventions identified and applied helped to ameliorate the situation. Data gathered at both stages were converted into frequencies and percentages for analysis. The pre-intervention test revealed irregular attendance to dining sessions due to reasons which students saw as unattractive conditions in the dining hall. Post-intervention test saw a remarkable improvement in the situation. The study concluded that an attempt to make the dining hall a more pleasant and comfortable place to eat and socialize will encourage students to be more regular as required.

Keywords: *Co-educational boarding schools, female student, dining hall attendance*

Introduction

Most boarding schools in Ghana are above the basic school level. The school is required to provide three meals a day to students, and the menu is based on recommendations made by people familiar with dietetics, usually the domestic bursars and their assistants whose role at the schools is to ensure that within the constraints of funds, balanced meals are provided to students. Normally, schools are not able to provide luxurious meals but rather well balanced meals that will provide all the nutrients necessary for growth and good health in order for the students to benefit fully from the education being provided them.

The primary purpose of school feeding programmes is to provide food in order to allay hunger and improve the total energy and nutritional status of students. Being assured of his or her meals every day, students are enabled to settle down to learn, undistracted by hunger or the time to go to search for food to buy or even to cook. Another valuable role of the school dining hall session is its integral part of the total education programme of the school. Students are introduced to new foods, encouraged to overcome shyness and discomfort when eating with other students of the same or opposite sex, and also learn all kinds of table manners. In the typical African society where people normally eat with their fingers, using the appropriate cutlery correctly to eat a particular meal can initially be a real source of anxiety to the student

who comes from a typical traditional home. Undoubtedly, therefore, dining hall sessions are very important in the school system.

Students' irregular attendance to the dining hall is however, one problem facing most boarding school authorities today. It is to be expected that an assembly of people from different families and cultural background such as is found in the boarding house will reflect varied food habits.

The varying nature of people's food habits makes the task of designing a group-feeding programme that will be suitable to all members of the group very difficult. This probably is the reason why students have all kinds of reservations about food service at school and are generally reluctant to eat regularly in the dining hall. Nonetheless, it is very important that all students eat from the dining hall. As Runyan (1976) notes, school-feeding programmes are a valuable educational experience, which students in the boarding house should benefit from.

Statement of the problem

Quite a good number of female boarding students in Aggrey Memorial Secondary School do not attend dining hall sessions regularly. The consequences are:

1. Students' incessant desire for more money to buy food and other items which has led to frequent thefts in the dormitories.
2. Parents are under constant pressure to satisfy student's frequent demands for pocket money and food items.
3. An increase in the worrying incidence of students spending money meant for school fees.
4. Waste of food served in the dining hall as students do not turn up to eat.

Purpose of the study

This study seeks to find out how best to improve dining hall attendance among female students in Aggrey Memorial Secondary School. The common excuse that students give for not going to dining is that the food is bad. This research is intended to find out whether there are other factors that account for the poor dining hall attendance among female boarding students of Aggrey Memorial Secondary School and to identify appropriate measures to adopt to address the problem.

Research questions

The research sought answers to the following questions.

1. How regularly do female boarding students attend dining sessions?
2. Do conditions prevailing in the dining hall encourage and attract students to go there regularly to eat meals served?
3. Would girls be punctual to the dining hall if they hear the dining bell at the girls' section?
4. Would certain planned changes instituted in the dining hall improve girls' dining hall attendance?

Significance of the study

Poor dining hall attendance by students is often blamed on the supposedly bad food served. Due to this, strategies adopted to improve dining hall attendance of students have centered on improving the quality, variety and quantity of food provided in the dining hall. Constraints of money have made it quite difficult for these strategies to be fully implemented and/or maintained. This study aims at encouraging school authorities seeking to improve dining hall attendance of students to place more emphasis on hygiene, comfort and maintaining a relatively pleasant cooking serving and eating area. Students are likely to be attracted to a dining hall that is clean, well ventilated, odourless, with reasonably comfortable tables and chairs. An improvement in the dining hall environment will also prevent the incidence of food contamination and the spread of disease.

Delimitation

The study is an action research aimed at addressing a particular problem at Aggrey Memorial Secondary School where the researcher was the Senior Housemistress. It was therefore confined to this school alone and was even narrowed further to female boarding students, since it was observed that they normally boycotted dining hall sessions.

Limitations

It was impossible to explore certain variables that were identified. Variables like the quality, quantity and variety of meals, which were dependent on the availability of money had to be excluded. The time meals were served and also the duration of meal times could not be explored due to the large size of student population. The fixed dining hall structure and space also made exploring different numbers on a dining table impossible. The number of students per table, which students thought was too many, could only be reduced by two because there was no space in the dining hall to place more dining tables. The investigation had to be limited to food service and the dining hall environment. Results of the study could therefore be affected by these limitations.

Review of literature

The importance of nutrition

Barasi and Mottram (1987) say that when one is asked the question “why do we eat” the initial reaction may be to answer “because of hunger”, or “to keep alive” (p.1). They explain that the body has a physiological need for food, and when deprived for a short period of time various reactions produce the sensation of hunger. Oke and Ojofeitimi (1984) give a more detailed account of why food is essential to the body. They note that food contains nutrients, which are essential to the health and well being of the body. The food that is eaten is broken down in the body into a number of important constituents, which are absorbed and circulated by the blood to the various organs that need the nutrients. If good food is not eaten in the right amounts then some of these nutrients will be missing, and their continued absence may lead to clinical symptoms, which could be disastrous, if there is no intervention. They claim further that food is stored in the body to supply energy for keeping the body alive and warm and say in addition that since life is a dynamic process, the body tissues are constantly being broken down and rebuilt, and it is the food we eat that supplies the materials for this rebuilding and repair. Simply, according to Barasi and Mottram (1987), every individual uses or loses a certain amount of every nutrient daily and this amount must be replaced from daily diet or from the body has stores of that nutrient. They note that if the nutrients are taken from what the body has stored, then they must be replaced through diet otherwise the body will become weak and tired.

Fleck and Munves (1964) believe that a good diet has a tremendous bearing upon a person’s vitality, health, emotional stability, and enthusiasm for life. They claim that while one who is well-nourished generally has a good posture, firm muscles, a clear complexion and eyes that sparkle, one who is undernourished is inclined to tire easily, to be easily irritable and to worry. Such a person generally lacks stamina and is more susceptible to illness. Dennison (1987) supports this claim by saying that regular scheduled and nutrient balanced meals are necessary for one to feel physically well. In his enumeration of the benefits of an adequate diet he mentions, among other things, increased longevity, improved physical, social and mental health and consequently improved lifestyle. Dennison (1987) mentions that research scientists have found that diet influences how much one learns or can learn and that poor diet has been cited as a contributing factors in the under achievement of school children. He notes further that what is known is that good mental and social health requires a constant supply of energy and nutrition to the brain and that when the brain is deprived of these essential elements, the mental processes are negatively affected. Fieldhouse (1982) in his article “Nutrition and Education of the Schoolchild” seems to support this idea when he says

that satisfactory nutritional status allows every child to display the best performance his genetic endowment will allow. Latham (1965) proposes that children attending preprimary school institutions like day-care centre and kindergartens should receive a daily meal consisting of food rich in those nutrients likely to be deficient in the home diet. He also suggests older pre-school children school also be given a properly balanced midday meal. To him, the nutritional needs of a school child are high indeed. As it is practically impossible for a school child to obtain adequate quantities of the right foods on only one or two meals taken at home before and/or after school, it is highly desirable that the child eats some food at school. He warns that the children on an inadequate diet will not only fail to grow properly but may also develop anaemia and other signs of malnutrition, and will not be able to benefit fully from the education being provided for them.

Fieldhouse (1982) says that the omission of breakfast seems to be becoming increasingly common and regular snacking on non-nutritious foods like biscuits, cakes and sweets has become a characteristic of school going children. Runyan (1976) maintains that if public schools have managed to fit into the curriculum other subjects, such as sex education and information on drug abuse then nutrition, which is certainly equally important should also be taught.

The school feeding programme

Davis and Stone (1991) present a brief resume of the history of the school meals service in the United Kingdom. It started from before 1906 when meals were provided only to some school children on a voluntary basis by charities. In 1906, the Education (Provision of Meals) Act empowered local education authorities to provide and/or aid the provision of meals at reduced charges. The provision of school meals temporarily expanded on a great scale until the 1915s when it started declining because the government discouraged it. However, the government took fresh interest in it in the 1940's and approved grants in 1943 to build and equip school canteens. The 1944 Education Act and the Provision of Milk and Meals Regulation, which followed, required that local authorities provided school meals in all public schools. Meal service in schools has been maintained in the United Kingdom up to date.

According to Fleck & Munves (1964), one of the first types of school lunch programmes in America consisted of one hot dish at noon particularly during the winter months. Parent groups provided this meal until about 1936 when the Department of Agriculture made surplus food available for school lunches. When in early 1943, the food demands of World War II depleted these surpluses, a cash assistance program for the school lunch programme was inaugurated by the same Department until 1946 when the National Lunch Act was passed. Gallo (1977) says that the purpose of the entire National Schools Lunch Programme was to provide part of the nutrient requirement to American children of pre-school and school going age. In 1968, another programme was begun through which the school child in some areas could also receive a breakfast at school. She cites Cleveland as one of the first school districts to put this breakfast programme into effect. With the passage of time, both breakfast and lunch were made available to all students, at their option, in the districts that operated the two programmes.

Latham (1965) says that in the past, in Africa, only a few day schools provided midday meals. Usually, food eaten at school consisted of either a midday school meal bought from the school market, a snack or a meal taken to school. In some African countries the government or local authority, as part of the educational system, provided the midday school meal, and it was either fully or partially paid for from the normal school fees. In other cases the midday school meal was paid for from special fees collected from pupils daily, weekly or per term. It was also quite common to find organizations within a country, which, from time to time, provided certain items like dried skimmed milk free for school feeding, thus reducing the overall cost. Some schools also kept vegetable gardens, poultry or orchards, which provided some of the ingredients for the midday meal.

In Ghana, many schools above the basic school level are boarding schools, where three meals are usually provided a day. Usually, the quantity of food is roughly designed to meet the likely minimum energy and the micronutrient needs of the particular age group in the school. Larger amounts of food are suggested for older than for younger children. The quantities of the more expensive protein-rich foods of animals origin like meat, fish and eggs and other items such as fat and beverages are however, not based mainly on the nutrient requirements of the individual student but rather, they reflect the likely budget of the institution. The quantities of protein-rich food provided by the school therefore depends on how rich the school is or how much support it receives from the government, the parents or charitable organizations.

According to Latham (1997) in Africa, just like in other parts of the world the main dish for school meals were usually based on what was normally eaten in the country and then small additions of beverages or foods that were locally liked or traditionally eaten were added. The main dish could be boiled rice, food prepared from maize like *kenkey* and *ugali* (maize porridge), food prepared from cassava like *gari*, plaintain or yam, if they were in season, with additions like tea, coffee, cocoa or other beverages. There were usually other products to make the food more tasty or palatable such as jam, margarine, groundnut paste, sugar, soups or some kind of sauce. The situation has not changed much in the schools presently. In boarding schools especially, there is a dining hall for students that is usually very close to the kitchen where the food is prepared. It is very much unlike the situation in the United Kingdom for example where food is produced in a central kitchen usually some miles away from where it is served. As Latham rightly points out, the method mostly used for serving food in most boarding schools in Africa is the family service style, which was used in schools in the United Kingdom until it was recently changed to self-service cafeterias. Communal dining is encouraged because it is thought to afford students the opportunity to socialize and learn to feel at ease among other children.

The meal experience

David and Stone (1991) define the meal experience as a series of events, both tangible and intangible that a customer experiences when eating out. This experience mainly begins when customers enter a restaurant and ends when they leave. Any feelings and impressions customers may have when they arrive, throughout their stay in the restaurant until they leave all together form the total meal experience. These series of events and experiences may be divided into two parts – the tangible aspects that is, their feelings about the food and drink served and then the intangible aspects such as service, atmosphere, cleanliness and hygiene. Axler (1979) refers to these two aspects of the meal experience as the primary and secondary components. All three writers note that in order to attract customers, the caterer needs to integrate both components of the meal experience. Equal emphasis must therefore be laid on both. Eckel (1985) puts it in a more straightforward way. Discussing ways by which college food service managers can convince students that college meals are really edible he says that they first of all need to serve a good variety of food. In addition, the food must be served in a clean and comfortable setting. He adds that ‘customers’ must be treated right. He says it is indeed obvious that students in a residence hall who eat in the same place continuously for as long as three or four months would definitely complain. The underlying reason he thinks is boredom and not necessarily the food that is served. Fortunately, he says, college food service can do several things to combat this inherent boredom of eating in the place for weeks on end. He mentions among these, serving interesting meals, simple decorations of the cafeteria, maintaining a high level of hygiene, comfortable furniture, proper lighting and ventilation, some form of soft music if possible and a less noisy and non-disruptive atmosphere. To him, it is of utmost importance that the operation of a food series is assessed on a regular basis in order to find out what its customers think about it, and what, if anything, they would like changed. He suggests therefore that student opinions must be sought regularly by using any of

the several different techniques available such as informal survey, written questionnaires, dish room test or the suggestion box.

Brown (1977) notes that it is essential to make a good diet both interesting and pleasurable. Meal times should be organized in such a fashion as to be as pleasant as possible, served in quiet and non-disruptive surroundings, with comfortable tables and chairs and a generally attractive atmosphere. He notes that food exploration should be encouraged so that individuals can extend their food preferences and recommends the regular evaluation of the (group) feeding program. By adopting these measures, Brown (1977) believes the boredom of eating at the same place and eating the same sort of meals can be avoided or lessened.

Hobbs (1974), Hayes (1977), Simpson (1977), and Furnivall (1977) emphasize the need to maintain a high level of hygiene in group feeding. Furnivall (1977) sees no good reason why both workers and customers in the welfare catering industry should not have surroundings as pleasant and as clean as those enjoyed by many other production workers. She says that uncomfortable, crowded, unhygienic and noisy conditions are not conducive to safety and good work, and are unattractive to customers. To Hayes (1977), hygiene is actually concerned with cleanliness both of the food being prepared and of the things, which come into contact with food such as surfaces, equipment, utensils and personnel. He notes that without suitable standards of hygiene the food can become grossly contaminated with micro-organisms and thus be unfit for human consumption. He concludes that uncleanliness results in unattractive conditions, which contrarily drive customers away from an eating-place.

Hobbs (1974) on her part says that hygiene and the social skills of the service staff are so important that the members of the school meals services staff in the North Riding of Yorkshire are generally, trained to a high degree of efficiency. They are made to attend regular in-service training courses on hygiene and nutrition. She says though most of the members are not professionally trained, while on the job, they are encouraged to take locally arranged certificate courses on the hygienic handling of food. Finally, Simpson (1977) says that since the school meals service is so crucial to the health and growth of the school child, efficient routine cleaning and proper food storage must be essential parts of every institutional catering operation. To him, long-term kitchen hygiene can be facilitated by, among other things, improving methods of cleaning and cleaning regularly. He lists some benefits of clean premises of any eating-place. He says customers are attracted to the place; the catering staff is happier working in clean surroundings, there is a reduced possibility of food contamination and management stress is reduced.

Methodology

The research design

The research was undertaken to bring about a planned improvement in the dining hall attendance of female students of Aggrey Memorial Secondary School. It was therefore intended to first assess dining hall attendance among female students at the school and if attendance was found to be poor, identify and apply appropriate interventions that would improve the situation. The situation was assessed again using the same research instrument after a period of time to see whether the interventions had changed the situation.

Population

Aggrey Memorial Secondary School in Cape Coast has a total population of 2,340 students. The Accra-Takoradi Highway divided the school into two sections. The girls' dormitories are on one side of the highway, while the boys' dormitories, the classrooms, the administration block, and the dining hall are on the opposite side. There is a footbridge that connects the two sections of the school.

Female boarding students, who are the focus of this study, are about 1453 in number. They live in three houses. Each house is made up of girls in the three different year groups and the five different disciplines offered by the school.

All school activities take place at the boys section, so the girls walk about 330 metres from the girls' section to join the boys for school activities like morning assembly, classes, church service and dining hall sessions. Due to the large population of students, there are two dining sessions. All third year students and one-half of the second students attend the first session. The rest of the second year and all first year students attend the second session. There are 69 tables in the dining hall. Each table seats 18 students, 9 on either side.

The second and third year students were used for the study since they have spent a reasonable length of time in the boarding house and are much more familiar with the problem being studied. They number approximately 916 and are on the average in the 16 to 20 year age group, which could be described as the mid and late adolescent and early adult stage.

Sample

Out of the population of 916 second and third year girls, 152 were selected for either of the pre-intervention and post-intervention tests. This number represents 16.6% of the total population of second and third year female students. The girls' houses were used as a basis for selection for two main reasons: (a) the study is centred on female boarding students only; (b) students in the different disciplines live in the houses, so that the sample will be made up of students in all disciplines.

Sampling procedure

The house lists of the three houses at the girls' section of the school were used to select the sample. Each house list is made up of three groups of alphabetically arranged names, which are the names of the first, second, and third year students. The sampling was systematically obtained by selecting every sixth student from the lists of the second and third students of each house for both the pre-intervention and post-intervention data collection. Table 1 shows the distribution of the population among the three girls' houses of the school.

Table 1 Distribution of the Sample According to Classes and Houses

House	Year	Population	Sample	% of population
Katherine Aikins	Second	170	28	16.4
	Third	131	22	16.5
Segbefia	Second	163	27	16.6
	Third	126	21	16.7
Lucille	Second	185	31	16.7
	Third	141	23	16.3
Total		916	152	16.6

The research instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used as the sole instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was made up of 10 items that were meant to gather information on students' punctuality to the dining hall and also their opinion about conditions prevailing in the dining hall.

Pre-Intervention data collection

The pre-intervention data gathering was conducted purposely to establish the real state of the problem of the problem of poor dining hall attendance of female boarding students in Aggrey Memorial Secondary School. This information was necessary for the researcher to identify interventions that could be instituted in order to remedy the situation.

Variables explored to investigate the problem:

1. Audibility of the dining bell.
2. Cleanliness of the dining hall.
3. Availability of water in the dining hall.

4. Overcrowding of students per dining table.
5. Frequent and arbitrary punishments in the dining hall.
6. Houseflies in the dining hall. 11

Interventions applied after the pre-intervention test

1. The purchase of a siren: an automatic siren that is heard at the girls’ section was installed in the school. It replaced the bell, which was rarely heard at the girls’ section.
2. Provision of water in the dining hall: three 3000 liter water tanks were provided at the dining hall. Similarly, 138 pieces of four and a half liter water jars were provided, two for each table in the dining hall.
3. Control of flies in the dining hall: wire mesh was fixed on all openings to the dining hall to prevent flies and mosquitoes from entering. Food covers were also provided for covering the food after it has been served on the dining tables.
4. Reduction of students numbers on the dining tables: the number of students per table was reduced from 18 to 16, making it 8 on either side instead of 9.
5. Cleaning of the dining hall: two more pantry boys were engaged to help in the cleaning of the dining hall and the table ware. This raised the number t to six. In addition, a timetable was drawn for SS1 students to take turns to scrub the dining hall twice a week – on Wednesdays and Saturdays.
6. Punishment during dining sessions: punishments like students being asked to stand on their seats or kneel down whilst their colleagues ate were banned. No prefects were to punish students during sessions.

Post-Intervention data collection

Two weeks after school re-opened for the third term of the 2010/2011 academic year, (and 14 weeks after all identified interventions were put in place) the same questionnaire was re-administered to students. This was done to find out to what extent the interventions administered had brought improvement in the dining hall attendance of the female students in Aggrey Memorial Secondary School.

Data analysis procedure

Data collected at both the pre-intervention and post-intervention stages were edited for consistency. The responses of the two groups of respondents were tallied separately to obtain frequencies of the various items on the questionnaire. These frequencies were totaled and their percentages were calculated and used for both the pre-intervention and post-intervention data analysis.

Results

Details of the results of both tests are presented in tables below for ease of understanding.

Table 2 Pre-intervention and post-intervention Responses on Dining Hall Attendance of female boarding students

Response	Respondents (% of Total)	
	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Very regular	22	69
Regular	48	26
Not Regular	29	5
Rarely	1	0
Never	0	0

Approximately 30% of girls, which was more than a quarter of the sample population confirmed their attendance to the dining hall was not as regular as expected. Meals provided at the dining hall are the main source of nutrition for students in the boarding house and so

they are expected to be regular to eat in order to meet their nutritional requirements. The post-intervention test saw a decrease in the percentage of students who were not regular at the dining hall to 5%.

Table 3 Pre-intervention and post-intervention Responses on whether or not girls hear the Bell/Siren which invites them to the Dining Hall

Response	Respondents (% of Total)	
	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Always	0	88
Often	0	12
Not often	6	0
Never	94	0

Girls hardly heard the bell that invited them to the dining hall. They had to guess when the dining hall bell would be rang. Consequently, many missed dining hall sessions because they did not hear the bell. The replacement of the bell with a siren which was louder, alerted girls when it was time to go to the dining hall and this contributed to the improvement of the number who attended dining hall sessions regularly.

Table 4 Cleanliness of the Dining Hall Pre-intervention and post-intervention ratings of cleanliness of the Dining Hall

Tableware and serving area Cleanliness		Rating (% of total)	
		Pre-Intervention	Post-intervention
Plates	clean	24	69
	Not clean	76	31
cups	clean	18	82
	Not clean	82	18
ladles	clean	55	94
	Not clean	45	6
tables	clean	81	97
	Not clean	19	3
benches	clean	40	95
	Not clean	60	5
floor	clean	22	70
	Not clean	78	30

The investigation revealed that girls were not attracted to the dining hall because they felt it was not clean enough. Out of the six items rated, respondents found only two to be clean. The intervention of improving the cleanliness of the dining hall can be said to have contributed to the improvement of attendance.

Table 5 Availability of Water in the Dining Hall Pre-intervention and post-intervention Responses on the Availability of Water in the Dining Hall

Responses	Pre-Intervention (% of Total)	Post-Intervention (% of Total)
Always	0	77
sometimes	0	23
Rarely	10	0
Never	90	0

It was revealed that the frequent water shortage in the Cape Coast municipality made it difficult for the school to frequently provide enough water for students in the dining hall to drink and wash their hands and their cutlery, which they carried to the dining hall. The situation deterred students from attending dining hall sessions. The intervention of ensuring

the regular availability of water in the dining hall helped to improve the willingness of students to go to the dining hall to eat.

Table 6 Number of students per Table Pre-intervention and Post-intervention Responses on the Number of Students Per Table

Responses	Pre-Intervention (% of Total)	Post-Intervention (% of Total)
Too crowded	89	45
Just enough	19	55
Too few	0	0

Findings confirmed that most girls found the dining table too crowded and uncomfortable. There was little room to sit to eat in comfort. The reduction of the number of students on a dining table by two saw an improvement in the rating of the situation. It is believed this also helped encourage girls to go to the dining hall.

Table 7 Frequent punishments in the dining hall Pre-intervention and Post-intervention Responses on whether frequent punishments in the Dining Hall deterred students from going to eat

Responses	Pre-Intervention (% of Total)	Post-Intervention (% of Total)
Yes	71	0
No	29	97
Indifferent	0	3

The study also revealed that the frequent and arbitrary punishment of junior students by prefects deterred students from going to the dining hall to eat. The intervention of banning punishments in the dining ensured comfort and assurance of freedom from being embarrassed before their colleagues. This improved dining hall attendance attendance. 15

Table 8 Houseflies in the Dining Hall Pre- Intervention and Post-intervention Rating of Houseflies in the Dining Hall

Response	% of Total	
	Pre-intervention	Post - intervention
Too many	93	3
Quite many	7	14
Few	0	83
None	0	0

It was found out that too many houseflies in the dining hall whilst students ate was of major concern. As many as 93% of respondents found houseflies in the dining hall to be too many. The post –intervention test revealed a remarkable reduction to 3% and hence an improvement in the comfort of the environment of the dining hall.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study has revealed that apart from the usual “dining hall food is bad” excuse that girls of Aggrey Memorial Secondary School give for not going to the dining hall, their irregular attendance of the dining hall could be partially blamed on certain conditions that students found unpleasant at the dining hall and the fact they could hardly hear the dining bell that was to prompt them to go to the dining hall. Though it was found that majority of the girls were regular to the dining hall, more than a quarter of the girls were not regular, a situation which called for attention.

When at the girl’s side, girls either had to rely on their watches or guess when all was set for them to go and eat. Naturally, girls could not be expected to be punctual to the dining hall if the bell prompting them could not be heard. Some would definitely be late and others would miss dining sessions altogether due to wrong timing. For this reason, it is very necessary that girls hear the sound of the dining bell at the girls’ side so that they will have no

excuse for being late or not going to dining. As the study has shown, most girls will go to the dining hall if they know exactly when they should be there. It is quite logical to conclude that most of the girls would not like to be late and risk being punished. One can conclude that some girls sometimes stayed away from the dining hall when they are late.

It also became apparent that girls did not like food served in dirty plates and cups. Cleaning the dining hall and the tableware regularly, as the study has revealed, is very essential. Girls will naturally not like eating in the dining hall if they think the environment is dirty. It is obvious that a clean, odourless and well-ventilated dining hall, with clean tableware will be an asset to any school that wishes its students to enjoy dining hall sessions.

Girls also found the large population of houseflies in the dining hall quite unpleasant, which simply implied that they did not enjoy eating in the dining hall. Certainly students will not find dining sessions pleasurable if flies plague them when they are eating. It is therefore not surprising that attendance improved when this situation was remedied.

It is also quite unpleasant for a student to be punished in the dining hall while his or her colleagues are enjoying their meals. Some students find this situation extremely embarrassing and therefore try as much as possible to avoid it. Students who are late to the dining hall, those who do not have the appropriate cutlery to eat with, students who have not paid their fees in full usually avoid going to the dining hall to avoid being punished.

That students avoided going to the dining hall partly because they did not like conditions prevailing there is further emphasized by the fact that they felt the dining tables were too crowded and also complained about the lack of water in the dining hall.

In sum, therefore, although students generally wanted to go to the dining hall to eat, the unpleasant conditions kept them away. The study has shown that an attempt to make the dining hall a more pleasant and comfortable place to eat and socialize will encourage students to go there more regularly to eat. As Davis and Stone (1991), Brown (1977) and Eackel (1985), point out, eating is not only about choosing or serving the kind of food and the variety that one desires but also about comfort, and reasonably pleasant and friendly surroundings in which meals are served and eaten. The study has revealed the equal importance of this usually neglected side of the school-feeding programme. In an attempt to solve the problem of irregular dining hall attendance among students, school administrators should aim at, among other things, ensuring that mealtimes for students are organized in such a fashion that they are as pleasant as possible, and the food served in a clean, quiet and non-disruptive surroundings with comfortable and a generally attractive atmosphere.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are provided for consideration. The dining hall could be made an attractive eating-place for students. The school's Dining Hall Committee should become more active. Its members need to pay regular visits to the dining hall in order to acquaint themselves with whatever goes on there and to make regular and relevant suggestions concerning the conditions pertaining in the dining hall to the school administration. This will ensure welcomed improvements in the schools' meals service program. Student's opinions about the dining hall must be sought from time to time, because the most direct way to find out about a food service is to find out what its customers think about it. Students must be asked what they would like changed in the dining hall. Although they may raise impossible issues, they will also come up with useful suggestions.

Cleanliness of the dining hall and its surroundings must be insisted upon. The kitchen staff must be educated and encouraged to ensure this at all times. The pantry boys must be properly supervised to clean the tables and tableware thoroughly.

Due to the large population of students, teachers on duty should be in the dining hall during meals to help the dining hall masters maintain order. Senior and prefects would not maltreat the juniors in the presence of teachers. If it is necessary that a student is punished it could wait until dining sessions are over. As much as possible, no student should be prevented from eating his meals during sessions.

The dining hall must be regularly maintained. The walls must be painted from time to time. The wire gauze and food covers must be replaced promptly when they are torn. School authorities must always ensure that there are enough plates, cups, ladles, water jugs, and serving bowls in the dining hall. The water tanks must always be filled before meals. If the dining hall is maintained such that students enjoy eating there, there will be a tremendous improvement in the dining hall attendance of students.

Recommendations for further study

There are definitely other reasons apart from what have been explained in this study, for which girls do not attend dining hall regularly. The study could be carried out in other schools where conditions may be different from those in Aggrey Memorial Secondary School in order to find out what these other reasons are. It would also be interesting to find out whether the problem exists in single sexed schools, the extent to which it exists and the reason behind it. The findings from the study of the different schools could be compared and recommendations derived from the results of the comparative study for the general improvement of the school dining system to meet the expectations of all students.

If funds are available, for example, more variety of meals could be provided to students' attitude towards dining hall attendance. Also in a school where the population is small, meal service times and the duration of meals could be explored.

There could also be a comparison of dining hall attendance among girls and boys in the boarding house. It is often assumed that boys are regular to the dining hall. This assumption could be verified and the reasons behind it unearthed. Findings could be used as a basis for restructuring the dining hall system in order to improve dining hall attendance among students.

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