



Impact of Mid Day Meal Programme on primary School students Participation, and Nutritional Status

Kalpana Kushwah, (Ph.D.), Department of Education,
IPS college ,Gwalior, Madhyapradesh, INDIA

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Corresponding Author

Kalpana Kushwah, (Ph.D.),
Department of Education,
IPS college ,Gwalior, Madhyapradesh, INDIA

shodhsamagam1@gmail.com

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Impact of Mid Day Meal Programme on primary School students Participation, and Nutritional Status Introduction According to the Maslow's hierarchy of needs, unless the basic needs or basic requirements of a person not fulfilled, he cannot attain the requirements of upward order and we know that food is the primary needs of the person and until will not be fulfilled. We cannot reach the position of teaching of the child. Here I want to give a reference of a report published by IMD2020 (published in

Abstract

According to the Maslow's hierarchy of needs, unless the basic needs or basic requirements of a person not fulfilled, he cannot attain the requirements of upward order and we know that food is the primary needs of the person and until will not be fulfilled we will not reached for next order. A report published by IMD2020 (published in 2019) based on hunger index includes 153 countries and India ranked on 112 out of them (4 places down from the previous year). India is behind the neighboring country. In this situation how we can assume that those school going children perform better in achievement without food. Under these circumstances, can midday meal scheme (run by the Government of India) be helpful in the learning of children, my paper is based on this idea.

Key Words

MDM (Mid-day Meal), Enrollment, nutritional status, Learning outcomes, Economic status.

Introduction

The Mid-day Meal Scheme is a largest programs for school children in India, funded by Government of India and State Governments in ratio of 60:40. It was designed to better the nutritional position among the school-going children nationwide. India is a developing country and the progress of our country is depending on quality and quantity of education of new generation. New generation means our students. Education is one of the important elements of the societal fabric of a country. The common cause for low literacy rates in developing countries is the prevalence of poverty, and because of that one-

third of school children are malnourished in developing countries. Basically it has been proved by medical research that malnourished children become physically and mentally weak which makes schooling difficult for them. By the various interventions have been introduced that poverty directly affects school participation and involvement of children in school activities across the globe. School participation means enrolment, attendance of the beneficiary children. It is a main factor for low attendance and learning in schools.

Theoretically this program has been initiated by government of India by assuming that this program will help to increase school participation and betterment of the nutritional status among the primary school going children. After implication so many researches have been conducted to assess the impact of this programme in primary education. Some research explains its positive effect while some shows the opposite result. However, the impact of mid-day meals for the improvement and expansion of primary education and nutritional status among the children is still debated. My study helps to examine the role of the Mid Day Meal (MDM) program for improvement and expansion of primary education and nutritional status among the students in schools of India.

The Problem

The Government of India introduced the Mid Day Meal programme (MDM) for increasing school participation and improving the nutritional status among primary school children. It has been assumed that these improvements would lead to enhanced learning outcomes for the children. However, some recent studies depict a downward trend in rural primary school participation. Some studies have also indicated a poor performance of children in reading, writing, and mathematical skills. But some studies indicate academic and physical growth in students. So overall these facts create a contradiction in my mind. In spite of the fact that the MDM is served regularly in these schools. My study will help for a further probe into the role of Mid Day Meal programme for increasing school participation, improving the nutritional status, and learning outcomes for the beneficiary children.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study are to examine the role of Mid Day Meal in increasing school participation and nutritional status among primary school children.

Methodology

The study basically depends on primary as well as secondary data. Primary data for the study was collected through survey research. A cross-sectional survey was conducted in the Morar block in district Gwalior (M.P.), India. Data were collected from students, their parents, and their teachers. Survey questionnaires were developed for collecting primary data. Morar block is selected for this study because Morar block situated in Gwalior district and Gwalior, Bhind and Murena district count as a weaker area in Education point of view. These districts show lowest performance in terms of learning outcomes. It has been assumed that implementation of MDM scheme would have had a significant impact on the attendance, enrolment and learning outcomes of primary school children in this region. For the purpose of representation to the variation in various factors, 10 schools were selected from Morar block in Gwalior district. Some schools are situated near by city area and others have some distance. This selection was done in consultation with Block Development Officers, project manager and school teachers. It helped to capture the variability in the Mid Day Meal scheme. From 10 selected schools, 160 children were selected for the study. Stratified random sampling method was used to select the children. 8 girls and 8 boys were selected from each school. These all students were from class 4th. This was done to have a representative picture of gender and socio-economic variability among the study sample. Data were collected through questionnaires at two levels: teachers and individual students. One questionnaire collected data on school and teachers details. It also included

questions regarding enrolment, attendance, and retention numbers of children. The Students Questionnaire (Second) included student data, this was also related with the quality and test of Mid Day Meal. Individual student tests (contracted from curriculum) were conducted to know about the educational attainments, that is, numeracy, reading, and writing skills of the sample children.

Findings

Finding of the study can be divided in two parts as per the objectives of the study. Data were analyzed in qualitative way for knowing impact of Mid Day Meal on school participation and nutritional status, of the beneficiary children.

School participation of the students

Rural families, particularly belonging to lower economic status, consider free school meals as an incentive to send their children to school. Since Mid Day Meal is provided only to enrolled and attending children, parents get them enrolled and send all of their school-going children, not only sons even though daughters also, to government schools covered by Mid Day Meal. Most of these families belong to reserve categories. Thus, provision of MDM not only encourages girls but disadvantaged groups also, specially those who belonging to lower economic status.

Free meals attract younger children from age groups of 2 to 5 years to school. Most of the families parents (mother and father) are working. They leave their young children with their elder siblings, these children come with their elder brother and sisters for food and care. This practice helps to decrease enrolment ages and encourage parents to enroll children in early age 5-6 years in place of 8-10 years and we know that over-age enrolments is one of the key reasons specially for girls for early drop-outs from schools. Along with this, household works, illness, irregularity in school, and failure to learn are some other reasons for poor attendance in the schools. Parents those who are economically better are not interested to send their children in poor quality government schools even though they providing mid-day meals. They prefer to send their children to private schools even though they are paying. This factor is more affected in that area where parents were comparatively more educated and their economic condition is better, these trends were directly observed in those schools who were situated nearby area of the city. On the other hand, school attendance for girls and SC, ST children, particularly from lower economic classes, has improved. This happened on two fronts. Firstly, parents of these children try to send them to school regularly to avail themselves of free meals. Those children who are involved in household work and parents face some problems to send them to school, because of MDM they also try to send their children until lunch time. This is the reason that we get majority of the study happening before lunch. Another trend is also observed that the parents send their younger children with elder children, specifically daughters, because this benefits at least two or more children. Gender discrimination is a common social issue in India especially in the Gwalior Chambal region, and sons' education is preferred over daughters' education, very few girls are enrolled earlier in this region, But after starting MDM scheme in government schools, girl child from disadvantaged groups, especially those who are from lower economic status are higher in number. This has resulted in a new form of social stratification.

Keeping these points in view, it can be said that benefits of Mid Day Meal program me, for school participation, nutritional status, and educational outcomes, are mostly accrued by girls and children from disadvantaged families with lower economic status. Out of 160 students mostly or we can say all of them come from poor family. Mostly families were more than 3 children and their family income were not sufficient to provide nutritious diet to their children. Mostly children (147 out of 160) accepted that they enjoyed food.

Nutritional status of the students

As stated earlier most children belong to lower economic class and they do not have sufficient quantity of food therefore in this case nutritional value of food is a question Mid Day Meal provides one meal to school-attending children. However, this meal is inadequate in quantity and inferior in quality. Although it's a good option of nutritive diet for children belonging to lower economic class but for children of elite family with sufficient quantity and quality nutritional diet mid-day meal will be of no benefit. But in a country like India, where children get enough food for two times is also difficult. Where there is enough food, not only the parents but also the basic problem of children. MDM provided education with food. It can become a solution of the problem which is directly related with food, like malnutrition. Gender inequality is commonly observed in rural families especially in Gwalior Chambal region. There is also a big difference the sex ratio. Better food is provided to sons than the daughters. This is prominent among families who have lower economic status and limited food resources. MDM benefits those girls who belong to such types of families. It is a 'partially supplements' of their daily diet. Menu, according to which meal is prepared and served to children is high on carbohydrates and calorie contents but not adequate as far as protein content is concerned. To overcome this additional nutrient in the form of milk and other suitable products should be given and provision for this should be made. Mostly children (127/160) cannot be considered physically fit. Deficiencies like lack of weight and length were also found in these children. According to the teacher, the effect of seasonal diseases is mostly seen in these children. They were found to be suffering from many common problems like cold, cough and fever along with change of seasons. Mid Day Meal guidelines recommend for implementation of hand washing before and after meals and provision of seasonal vegetables. Some schools follow these guidelines. They have introduced hand washing with soap before meals. They have also made eating of seasonal vegetables compulsory. Cases of diarrhea, vomiting, and fever have reduced among these children. These improvements are the ancillary effects of MDM.

Conclusion

It has been assumed that, the increase in school participation and improvement of nutritional status among the rural children will help to enhance the learning outcomes of these children. Since Mid Day Meal is improving nutritional status of Children so enhancement of learning outcomes has been seen in students. they show interest and little improvement in study. Trends of improvement show that these factor will become more effective through regular school participation. On the whole, Mid Day Meal plays a facilitative role for the girls and Boys. It helps them to attend school regularly. These girls and boys perform better because of their regular studies. Further, improvements in girls' education may lead to enhancements of social development, as continued education delays marriage age and increases the participation of women in family decisions.

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