



Midday Meal Scheme: Bringing Back Children to Schools

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ABSTRACT

The Government of India initiated the second-largest food security programme, named the mid-day meal (MDM) Scheme to tackle nutrition-related issues, especially for children in backward communities. The main aim of the MDM Scheme in government and government-aided schools is to improve physical and economic access to nutritious food for children. The research paper evaluates the importance regarding the enrollment of students in school with the help of MDM scheme.

Keywords: MDM- Mid-day meal.

INTRODUCTION

The Mid Day Meal Scheme is a program introduced by the government of India to provide cooked lunches to children in all government elementary schools. The scheme was first introduced in Tamil Nadu in 1925 at the Sourashtra Boys Higher Secondary School in Madurai. The program is now the world's largest school feeding program. Its goal is to provide at least one nutritionally adequate meal per day to disadvantaged children studying in classes I to VIII who enrol and attend school. The scheme aims to provide a prepared midday meal for a minimum of 200 days, with an energy intake of 300 calories and a protein intake of 8 to 12 grams for each eligible child. Government of India introduced a National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education on August 15, 1995 to provide mid-day meal to the children studying at primary stage. The Supreme Court directed the Government in 2002 to provide cooked Mid-day Meals in all Government and Government aided primary schools (Karabi: 2021).

Mid Day Meal Programme in India is the world's largest school feeding programme, reaching out to about 12 crore children, in over 12.65 lakh schools/EGS centres across the country (Geeta Ozwald Menezes:2014). The midday meal scheme was introduced in India to provide cooked lunches to all children attending government elementary schools, with the aim of increasing enrollment, attendance, and retention of children studying in classes 1- 8, especially those from disadvantaged sections of society. Additionally, the scheme aims to provide nutritional support to children in drought-affected areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to a study published in the JSTOR journal, mid-day meals may facilitate school participation among underprivileged children, which is likely to reduce future class inequalities, since lack of education is a major source of economic disadvantage and social marginalisation. The study suggests that mid-day meals are a significant challenge of class inequality. It was found that the percentage of children with better attendance (> 60% of working days) was higher (97.8%) in MDM schools than in non-MDM schools (95%) ($p < 0.001$) [11] (Shailja: 2013).

Additionally, a study published in the BMC Public Health journal reports significant positive effects of access to the midday meals program on the growth of children. Children with access to the midday meal intervention report an average standardised weight-for-age 0.03 (± 0.01) and height-for-age 0.05 (± 0.01) units higher than similar children without access to the intervention.

Moreover, a study published in the ScienceDirect journal examines India's school feeding program, known as the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), which is the largest school feeding program in the world covering over 113.6 million beneficiaries. The study suggests that this nationally-mandated free school lunch program has a significant impact on the probability of enrollment in primary schools in India.

The information about cooking and serving utensils for Midday Meal in selected schools is given. It reveals that 90.00 percent of the sample schools have sufficient cooking utensils for Midday Meal and only 10.00 percent of the schools have not sufficient cooking utensils. The details about cooking fuel for Midday Meal in sample schools are presented. It can be seen that all (100 percent) the sample schools used firewood as fuel for cooking Midday Meal and firewood is common fuel in the rural areas in Telangana. No sample school is using cooking gas for cooking midday meal because it is expensive. That is why most of the sample schools in study area prefer firewood as cooking fuel which is easily found in the locality (Mallipeddi Bala Bhaskar:2022)

IMPORTANCE OF SCHEME

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in India is a government program that provides hot cooked meals to underprivileged children in government elementary schools, with the aim of removing malnutrition, supplementing nutritional foods in school meals, and motivating out-of-school children towards regular school attendance [1]. The scheme is considered to be the world's largest school meal program and was first

introduced in Tamil Nadu in 1925 [4]. The program is of great importance as it serves as an enticing incentive for parents to send their children to school, as they can ensure that their child will receive at least one plate full of food for the day [5]. Children need to be enrolled in government schools, local body schools, special training centers, makhtabs, madrasas, and government-aided schools supported under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to be eligible for the program [3]. While the program faces challenges, such as funding, food quality, and infrastructure, it has been successful in improving nutritional outcomes.

MDM SCHEME AND INCREASED ENROLLMENT

India's Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is the largest school feeding program in the world, covering over 113.6 million beneficiaries. The program's impact on enrollment in primary schools in India has been studied, with the findings suggesting that it increased the probability of enrollment in primary school and on-time enrollment in first grade. Additionally, the program had a larger effect on socially disadvantaged groups and on girls. One of the goals of the MDMS is to encourage poor children, belonging to disadvantaged sections, to attend school more regularly and help them concentrate on classroom activities. As a result, the program has been found to increase school attendance and improve the nutritional status of children. Therefore, the Mid Day Meal Scheme has been shown to have a significant benefit for increasing enrollment of students in school.

WHY MID DAY MEAL SCHEME IS ESSENTIAL FOR COUNTRY

The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme in India is a government-initiated food security program aimed at improving the nutritional status of students and universalization of education. Researchers have highlighted the importance of the MDM Scheme in addressing nutrition-related issues, particularly in children from backward communities. Studies have shown that the MDM Scheme has improved the physical and economic access of children to nutritious food, which is critical for daily attendance.

CONCLUSION

The MDM Scheme has been recognized as the world's largest school-based feeding program, providing free hot cooked meals to students in lower primary and upper primary schools. An economic analysis of the MDM Scheme in Telangana found that the program is the world's largest school children feeding program, satisfying the hunger of students. Planning Commission (2010) conducted a performance evaluation of Cooked Mid Day Meal Scheme across India and revealed that the scheme has been successful in addressing classroom hunger and achieving social equity.

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