

MID-DAY MEAL: AN INSTRUMENT FOR ENHANCING ENROLLMENT IN INDIA**Mirza Muneeb Manan *****ABSTRACT**

Mid-Day Meal Scheme is very popular in Indian context at elementary level. In the present paper an attempt has been made to discuss the role of mid day meal scheme for enhancing the enrolment of children at school level.

Keywords: School, Enrolment , Enhancement.

Introduction

A number of schemes were launched in the primary education sector by authorities to reach the deprived section. Access to Primary Education was universalized through flagship program of government in the name of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), despite its successful implementation; a few children were still seen underprivileged of primary education due to their poor economic background (Kainth, 2006). The authorities among the developed countries instituted an array of policies which focused on enhancing of school enrollment. Provision of school meal is one among those that is believed to increase the enrolment through two major channels (PROBE, 1999; Dreze and Goyal, 2003; Kremer and Vermeersch, 2004). Despite a massive practical literature available on relationship between school meal program and educational outcomes (Bundy et al, 2009), there is still a dearth of large-scale assessment of its casual effect on enrollment as per our knowledge (Adelman et al. 2007). Ironically, India has one of the largest elementary educational systems at global level. India has nearly 150 million children enrolled in 800 thousand schools across the nation (Department of Education, Government of India, 2002-03).

A program namely “National Program for Nutritional Support” was launched in 15th August 1995 across India by MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource Development), Government of India.

On November 28, 2001 the Honorable Supreme Court released a provisional order which directed state authorities to start Mid Day Meal which is serving of hot cooked meals in public/government but not in private schools. More exclusively, the directive said, “Every child in every government and government-assisted school should be given a prepared mid-day meal”. In 2001 November, the Supreme Court ordered all state level authorities to provide cooked mid-day-meal in place of giving raw food grains to the children which they could not consume at school. Peculiar timing in implementation has been credited to thriving demands raised by civil society (Karunakaran and Krishnaraji, 2015). In the year 2002 the scheme was also stretched to the students studying in Alternative Informal Education (AIE) and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS). In October 2007 the scheme was extended to class VIII (up to the Elementary level) in 3479 educationally backward blocks. The number of beneficiaries under cooked meal scheme has been raised from 33400000 in 1995 to 120000000 in 2010 (Karunakaran and Krishnaraji, 2015).

The execution of Mid Day Meal scheme is the joint responsibility of state and central government as mentioned above. The central government offered financial help regarding the cost of food grains and their transportation. Certainly, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) which is an institution established in 1964 to assist the central government’s food policies, provides state authorities free delivery of food grains from the

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nearest of its stock stations. Each student has been decided to provide with 100 grams of wheat/Rice per day which cost central government nearly Rs 1.11 (NPNSPE 2004). Fair quality of food grains were guaranteed by the FCI and full commitment for replacing the grains if found otherwise. The subsidy for the carriage charges of grains from FCI store house to primary schools were set Rs. 50 for every quintal which has an individual subsidy of Rs. 0.05 per child per school working day (NPNSPE, 2004).

Scope of the Scheme

The thought behind implementation of the Mid Day Meal Scheme in India can be viewed by three essential perspectives: Educational progress, child nutrition and social equity. Every objective has different aspect, one is more determined than other to illustrate, on fundamental contribution of Mid Day Meals towards Educational progress, is to improve school enrollment going beyond that, Mid-day meals might be expected to augment student attendance on regular basis. School meals may also enhance learning achievement, in so far as “classroom hunger” destabilizes the capability of students to concentrate and possibly even affects their learning proficiency.

In the context of United Nations Summit in 2000, India has planned to achieve the goal of Universal Elementary Education and eliminate the gender inequalities in Education by 2015 which are the two among eight Millennium Development Goals. Evaluation reveals that South Asia, besides sub-Saharan Africa, is straggling behind in attaining this goal. Universal Primary Education is one of the important objectives of “Millennium Development Goals” (MGDs) which ensures that boys and girls must identically complete Primary Education. ‘India is residence to the world’s biggest food insecure population, with more than 200 million people who are hungry,’ India State Hunger Index (ISHI) said, adding that the country’s poor performance is driven by its high levels of child under-nutrition and poor calorie count. It is further noted that “The child malnutrition of India” is higher than most of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa’ (World Bank, 2003). As per the global hunger index report which was released in 2009 India ranks at 65 out of 84 countries. In India more than 200 million people suffer from hunger which is more than any other country in the world, as according to 2008 report. Report also brings attention to some specific states of India where child nutrition should be addressed urgently.

Mid Day Meal and Enrollment at elementary level in India

It can be clearly reflected that MDM scheme has positively affected the enrolment, attendance and gender equity at elementary school education level (Penisetty, 2015). In district Pulwama, of Jammu and Kashmir the scheme has a significant positive effect on enrollment of students, their retention in schools and relatively high growth of female enrollment at elementary level (Jan, 2014). The school meal program was highly victorious in enhancing the enrollments particularly for the students coming from poor socio-economic backgrounds (Bonds, 2012). In district Anantnag of Jammu and Kashmir state the attendance rate has risen from 64.71% to 82.42% which clearly shows an optimistic effect on average attendance over a period of time. After taking the opinions from teachers, parents and students to know the cause of enhancement of attendance rate, it was concluded that mid meal is the key factor (Hamid & Hamid, 2012). In district Burdwan of W.B the scheme has a definite positive effect on increasing enrollment, strengthening of attendance, low retention rate and minimizing dropouts which seems to be an important aspect for high academic achievement particularly students belonging to the lower economic backgrounds

(Paul & Mondal, 2012). It was found that scheme witnesses the large increment in enrollment among the primary schools. Our indicator shows that there is 13% increase in enrollment at primary level. 6.3 million Extra children attended the school after scheme. House hold survey data is an evidence for enrollment of children in schools from poor socioeconomic background and educationally backward groups (Jayaraman & Simroth, 2011). The mid day meal scheme has a positive effect on enrolment of children belonging to any class, category and gender in government and government aided schools of Ferozpur. The more rise in enrollment were seen in case of reserved categories. Enrollment has showed more attention in case of girls. The meal is having an optimistic effect on students of all categories general, ST, SC, OBC, etc. (Kaur, 2010).

Findings

The Mid Day Meal scheme has a positive effect on school Enrollment, Retention, Drop-out rates, bringing out of school children into the school or broadly on access to education. Mid Day Meal program also provides an opportunity to bridge the gender gaps, as an impressive effect was found in case of female enrollment. It is an attempt to end the caste conflict in our nation, brings an opportunity of initiation of social equity because it is clear from the above data that scheme is very fruitful for socially and economically weaker sections. The scheme is successful in bringing up the school enrollment especially the students belonging to the weaker sections. It is a catalyst for the Universal Elementary Education (UEE).

Conclusion

The present study shows that Mid Day Meal is an incentive which has boosted the enrollment and has retained the enrolled students. The rate of increment in enrollment is more in case of girls as compared to the boys. It has helped in reduction of gender disparities. It has also reduced the social discrimination present in schools which revealed in different studies during observation of researchers.

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