

MID DAY MEAL PROGRAMME AND RURAL SCHOOL CHILDREN: AN OVERVIEW OF STRENGTHS

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ABSTRACT

Education is a process through which an individual is made capable, to attain the necessary competencies and skills, to face the challenges in life, to survive and to make the struggle for existence. The need for any change in the society is reflected in the educational system, and it is through education, that the societal needs are realized. In India, this need was recognized long back, and the first and foremost education demand after independence, was that of universal elementary education. Thus, the midday meal program was launched as a centrally sponsored program, on 15th August, 1995, by the Government of India. The mid day meal program is an effort to achieve and facilitate all the four objectives of education. The mid day meal program was started with two major objectives: firstly to enhance the child's nutrition level and secondly to provide the basic education. The present study was conducted in the rural schools of Garag village and the Yettingudda village of Dharwad district in Karnataka state and Simaraddha village and Bhojla village of Jhansi district in Uttar Pradesh state. A total of 120 rural school children (30 from each village), 120 parents, 40 school committee members and few teachers (based on availability), were selected randomly. Personal observation method and personal interview method were used for their opinions and to record the strengths of the mid day meal program. To know the strengths of the mid day meal program, the headcount of total children (N=120) present, at the post lunch session was taken and recorded, for assessing to the regularity of attendance. Many strengths of mid day meal program, was observed and recorded such as good quality and quantity of meal, increased attendance, enrollment and retention rate, positive attitude of teachers, parents, children and school committee members, towards mid day meal program, demand for continuation of mid day meal program, reduced stress of working mothers such as farmwomen, timely supply of food grains and cooked food, innovative model public private partnership, for implementing mid day meal programmes and many more. The Mid Day Meal program is a one such innovative program, started by GOI for betterment of the child's future. As everything have a good or bad impact, the mid day meal program may also have some bad impacts, but positive impacts or its strengths are more important, over bad impact and the weaknesses of the program may convert into strengths, by applying innovative approaches, ideas.

KEYWORDS: program, Attendance, Strengths, Education, Public Private Partnership, Children

INTRODUCTION

Education helps in preserving, enriching and refining intellectual systems. Education, through which the standard of living of the people, their prosperity and security can be considerably improved, is regarded as a potent instrument of rapid and effective development of a Nation. Education plays a vital and important role, in fulfilling the basic needs of a

common man viz., Food, shelter and clothing. The main aim of education is, to prepare and develop the individual physically, mentally and spiritually, to lead a quality life. Education is a process through which, an individual is made capable to attain the necessary competencies and skills, to face the challenges in life to survive and to make the struggle, for existence. The need for any change in the society is reflected in the educational system, and it is through education, that the societal needs are realized. In India, this need was recognized long back, and the first and foremost education demand after independence, was that of universal elementary education.

According to Millennium Development Goals, the universalization of elementary education was nationally accepted, as an important aspect of the overall effort to make education, a tool for socioeconomic transformation. Four important factors are identified, for achieving the goal of education for all. These are access to education, enrollment of children, retention of the enrolled children and achievement. The major programmes of the elementary education sector, during the tenth plan included Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), District Primary Education Program (DPEP), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS) and the National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, also known as Midday Meal Program (MDM).

Nutritional Status of India

India is the seventh largest country geographically, second most populated and twelfth largest economy in the world. India is now largely recognized as a fast developing economy. The decadal growth rate is 21.34 %. The average literacy rate is 65.38 %. Despite the highest growth rate, over the decades, the problem of malnutrition, anemia, vitamin-A and iodine deficiency are very common, among children in India. As India marches ahead with the policy and programmatic interventions, for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, there is increasing recognition of achieving a truly "Food Secure India". However, India is a poignant example of, how food sufficiency at the aggregate level has not translated to nutrition security at the household level, "Hunger report" (Menon, 2003) is a grim reminder of India's failure, to combat hunger and malnutrition.

To ameliorate the hunger and malnutrition, the Government of India (GoI), has undertaken several initiatives, one approach is through price control, by the Public Distribution System, the second is through Food for Work Program and the third is the large scale feeding programmes, such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for children in the 0-6 year age group, pregnant and lactating mothers and Mid Day Meal Program (MDM) for school children.

Thus, the midday meal program was launched, as a centrally sponsored program on 15th August, 1995, by the Government of India. The mid day meal program is an effort to achieve and facilitate all the four objectives of education. Without a healthy body, the mind does not develop without good food. It has, therefore, become more essential to have a good and nutritious food for our growing children. The mid day meal program was introduced primarily, to protect the nutritional as well as the educational rights of the children. This is due to the fact that, children are not able to concentrate on their studies with empty stomach and there is a need to focus upon the midday meal program, to overcome child's short term hunger.

Major Objectives of Mid Day Meal Program

The mid day meal program was started with two major objectives: firstly, to enhance the child's nutrition level and secondly, to provide the basic education. Thus, the midday meal program was basically introduced to improve the

overall development of the primary school children's education. Therefore, it has varied objectives like:

- To increase the nutritional level of the school going children
- To enhance the educational attainment of the children
- To retain the children in the school for a long period of time
- To develop the process of socialization.

METHODOLOGY

Locale

Strengths of the mid day meal program were observed and recorded, through regular visits in the rural schools of Garag village and the Yettingudda village of Dharwad district in Karnataka state and Simarddha village and Bhojla village of Jhansi district, in Uttar Pradesh state.

Sample Size

A total of 120 rural school children (30 from each village), 120 parents, 40 school committee members and few teachers (based on availability) were selected randomly.

Research Tool for Data Collection

Personal observation method and personal interview method were used, for their opinions and to record the strengths of the mid day meal program and suitable statistical tools were used, to assess the results.

Attendance of Children in Mid Day Meal Program

To know the strengths of the mid day meal program, the headcount of total children (N=120) present, at the post lunch session was taken and recorded, for assessing to the regularity of attendance (see Table1).

RESULTS

Strengths of Mid Day Meal Program Regarding Rural School Children

- Rural school children were happy with the quantity and quality of the meal
- They liked to have meals with their friends or schoolmates
- They felt that, the mid day meal program is good and should be continuous
- They were aware of the mid day meal program
- They can concentrate on classroom learning

Strengths of Mid Day Meal Program Regarding Parents

- They were happy that, their children are going to school daily, for better education and they felt that, midday meal is one of the important reasons, for attracting children towards school.
- Working mothers like farmwomen, mothers in other services are satisfied and going to their workplace, without any tension on their children's hunger.

- Other than meals, the school also offers uniforms, books, stationary arts. As a part of the midday meal program for betterment of Childrens' future, which helps them economically also.
- Girls' education was encouraged by the midday meal program

Strengths of Mid Day Meal Program Regarding Teachers and School Committee Members

- Enrollment of rural children has been increased due to the mid day meal program.
- Attendance of rural school children has been improved.
- The retention rate of rural school children was also improved.
- Encouragement to girls' education was provided by the program
- Socialization among school children has been developed
- Health and nutritional status of school children was improved as this program fulfills the one-third requirement of the daily balance diet.
- Personal hygiene, sanitation and good eating habits were also developed among school children through various campaigns such as washing hands before and after eating, proper use of toilet, safe drinking water etc.
- Food grains were timely supplied to the schools of Jhansi district. They did not feel any delay in supply of food grains and Akshaya patra timely supplies cooked food to the schools of Dharwad district through their vehicles daily.

Strengths of Mid Day Meal Program through Innovative Approaches from GOI

- Public private partnership model of mid day meal program ex. Akshaya patra and ISCKON
- Monthly monitoring of mid day meal program through visits and surveys
- Enhancing food quality and preparation of menu according to seasonal foods
- Including a number of food items and availability of utensils.
- Good infrastructure facilities such as a permanent kitchen shed, storage room etc.

Table 1: Attendance of Rural School Children for Mid Day Meal Program (N=120)

	Dharwad n (%)			Jhansi n (%)			Total N (%)
	Garag (V-1)	Yettingudda (V-2)	Total	Bhojla (V-3)	Simarddha (V-4)	Total	
Enrolled	1764	1953	3717	1710	1425	3135	6852
Attended	1593 (90.31%)	1856 (95.03%)	3449 (92.79%)	1487 (86.86%)	1260 (88.42%)	2747 (87.62%)	6196 (90.43%)

DISCUSSIONS

Results or strengths of the mid day meal program of the present study, can be justified with studies as: Pratiche (2004) also reported in the study that, 88 percent of children wanted the program to be continued. Jain and Shah (2005) reported that, 60 percent of the parents felt that, the meal was of very good quality; 96 % of parents and 93 % teachers, felt

that, the scheme should be continued, as it positively influenced attendance besides providing food to poor children, who may have otherwise gone hungry. Parents felt that, children's interest in studies had increased and it had become easier to send them to school. Wizarat (2009), conducted a study of best practices adopted in mid-day-meal scheme in Uttar Pradesh. Children and parents were satisfied with the quantity and quality of the food. Nambiar and Desai (2010), reported in their study that, 69 percent of parents felt that, their children had gained weight because of mid day meal and 65 % of parents felt that, their children suffered less from common ailments. Bellary et al. (2011), in their study found that, beneficiaries were satisfied with the functioning of the program, quality of food, menu and thus suggested for its continuation, with addition of newer recipes. According to children at school level, the program is successfully functioning.

Nath and Nath (2015), reported in their study, that parents are more interested to send their children. It is found that, rural head teachers have shown favorable attitude towards the introduction of the midday meals program, at the primary level. Dries and Goyal (2003), reported on their findings that, the school enrollment increased after mid day meals were introduced.

The results of the present study have revealed that, the overall attendance of rural school children for a period of one month was 90.43 percent (Table 15). Similarly, Naik (2005) reported a higher percentage of attendance in schools of Karnataka, where the Akshara Dasoha program was implemented. Findings of Bonds (2012) and Paul and Mondal (2012), Singh and Gupta (2013) was found that, the percentage of children with better attendance (> 60 % of working days) were higher (97.80 %) in MDM schools, than in non-MDM schools (95 %) ($p < 0.001$) and Vippala (2015) support the results of the present study. Similarly, Rana et al. (2005) reported that, 88.00 percent of children suggested for continuation of program, which showed the mid day meal program a good initiative from GOI.

CONCLUSIONS

- The mid day meal program helps to make school more attractive for children and thus, improves the enrollment and attendance.
- As the hunger of the child gets satisfied, it helps to improve attentiveness, memory and learning, particularly in the context in which, many children came to school on an empty stomach, in the morning.
- The mid day meal program reduces the likelihood of children leaving school early, because of hunger.
- Children can learn hygienic eating habits, related both to personal hygiene and understanding the importance of the cleanliness of the surrounding areas.
- Eating the food by sitting together, increased socialization and breaks social barriers among the students, helps in progressing them towards positive social change.
- The introduction of public-private partnership, has reduced teacher's workload as well as changed the negative attitude of teachers, towards the mid day meal program.
- The mid day meal program helps to change the mindsets of children, which leads to change the mindset of parents and hence, of the community about education and nutritional aspects of the children.

- For the students of this age group, the food provided through this program in the school becomes one of the extrinsic motivation factors and therefore, it increases their enthusiasm for the study. Hence, this scheme should be continued.
- Community leaders/school development committee members play a major role under this program and encourage the rural families, to give education to their children by enrolling their children in the school.
- The mid day meal program helps in improving the nutritional status of school children, with its proper implementation and functioning, such as updating the menu, good infrastructure facilities, maintenance of mid day meal attendance and other records, keeping good quantity and quality of the meal, drinking water and separate toilet facility etc.
- Even though, the increased outlay of the budget and guidelines of the program, for successful implementation of the midday meal program updated time to time, but still rural school children, found to be suffering from malnutrition. It can be removed by proper monitoring at grass root level, updating menu by including a number of nutritious items, such as milk, egg, seasonal food items, green leafy vegetables, fruits etc., by increasing diet requirement from one-third to half, or more and promoting and developing hygiene practices, while preparation of food at school level.

Education helps in preserving, enriching and refining intellectual systems. Education through which, the standard of living of the people, their prosperity and security can be considerably improved, is regarded as a potent instrument of rapid and effective development of a Nation. Thus, the Mid Day Meal program is a one such innovative program, started by GOI for betterment of the child's future. As everything have a good or bad impact, the mid day meal program may also have some bad impacts, but positive impacts or its strengths are more important over bad impact, and the weaknesses of the program may convert into strengths, by applying innovative approaches and ideas.

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