

Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Growth of Primary Education: A Case Study of District Anantnag in Jammu and Kashmir

Yawar Hamid* and Asmat Hamid**

Abstract: *The study attempts to assess the impact of MDMS on attendance, enrolment, drop-out rates, of children in primary schools of district Anantnag in Jammu and Kashmir. To gather information regarding the impact of the scheme, 100 students, 50 parents, 20 teachers and 20 government officials were randomly interviewed through structured questionnaire schedule. In order to know the impact of the scheme data have been divided in two period's pre Mid-Day meals period (1999-00 to 2003-04) and post Mid-Day meals period (2005-06 to 2008-09) and growth rate of both periods has been calculated through Log-linear model. The results of the study shows that impact of MDMS is impressive in terms of enrolment, attendance and drop-out rates, but the scheme suffers from a number of bottlenecks in the course of its implementation.*

Introduction

Education is the most important invention of mankind. It is more important than the invention of tools, machines, spacecrafts, weapons and medicines as these are the products of education. Man without education would still be living just like an animal. It is education which transformed man from a mere two-legged animal in to human being. It helps him to behave like a human being and prevents him from behaving like an animal. Hence the value of education is recognized in every society. Education is also regarded as the corner stone of economic growth and social development.

Despite the constitutional commitment, the goal to achieve universal primary education still remains a distant dream. According to 2001 census report, about 34.62 per cent of people remain illiterate in India. Furthermore, those who join primary schools, only one third continue beyond the primary level. The dropout rate is quite high in primary schools. The situation is worse in rural and backward areas. It is noted by many scholars that extreme poverty, malnutrition and under nutrition among the school going children are major causes of illiteracy. To overcome this problem and to increase the literacy rate, reduce drop-out rate, the government has introduced several schemes since independence for promoting education among school going children such as Integrated Child Development Scheme, Balwadi Nutritional Programme, NGO supported schools, Asharam Schools etc. But when these schemes failed to achieve the desired goal, the union Government launched new educational promotion scheme under the name of Mid-day Meals Scheme to universalize primary education.

* Research Scholar, Dept. of Economics, Punjabi University Patiala, India, Email: Wrhmd134@gmail.com

** Student Dept. of Education, South campus, University of Kashmir, Srinager, India

The genesis of mid-day meals goes back much earlier, to 1925, when the Corporation of Madras introduced the scheme for schoolchildren. In 1956, the Chief Minister of Madras, K. Kamraj, set up a 'Poor Feeding' programme. Five years later, all corporation and government schools in urban areas were covered in which American aid acted as a catalyst. And in 1982, the legendary chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M G Ramachandran, set up a state-wide scheme called the 'Nutritious Meal Programme'. By the mid 1980, three states, Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and UT of Pondicherry had universalized a cooked Mid-day Meals Programme (MDMP) with their own resources for children studying at the primary stage. By 1990, the number increased to twelve as more states joined in this mission with their own resources namely, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, U. P. In another three states, i.e. Karnataka, Orissa and W.B, the programme was implemented with state resources in combination with international assistance. Another two states namely A.P. and Rajasthan were implementing the programme entirely with international assistance. (Bhardwaj, R K 2003; Dev Mahendra, 2003; Dreze, j. and A, Goyal, 2003; Khera, Reetika 2002; Mathew, Minnie 2003; Parida, J.2010.)

In mid 1995, the government of India introduced a "centrally sponsored scheme" the national programme of nutritional support to primary education. Under this programme, cooked mid-day meals were to be introduced in all government and government aided primary schools within two years. The idea behind implementation of MDMP can be understood by three crucial perspectives: educational advancement, child nutrition, and social equity. Each of these objectives in turn has different aspects. Some are more ambitious than others. To illustrate, one basic contribution of mid-day meals to educational advancement is to boost school enrolment. Going beyond that, mid-day meals may be expected to enhance pupil attendance on a daily basis (and not just annual enrolment). School meals may also enhance learning achievements, in so far as 'classroom hunger' undermines the ability of pupils to concentrate and perhaps even affects their learning skills. Finally, a well-organized school meal can have intrinsic educational value, in addition to what it contributes to the routine learning process. For instance, school meals can be used as an opportunity to impart various good habits to children (such as washing one's hands before and after eating), and to educate them about the importance of clean water, good hygiene, a balanced diet, and related matters. Similarly, the nutritional objective of mid-day meals has several layers, ranging from the elimination of classroom hunger to the healthy growth of school children. In many respects, a mid- day meal programme is (potentially at least) a nutritionist's dream: the children come every day, on their own, and they eat whatever is given to them. This makes it possible not only to raise their intake of calories and proteins, but also to provide nutritional supplements such as iron and iodine, which need to be ingested in small doses over a period of time.

Mid-day meals also provide an excellent opportunity to implement nutrition programmes that require mass intervention, such as de-worming. Available experience indicates that these interventions are highly effective: for instance, a combination of mass de-worming with vitamin A and iron supplementation can significantly enhance children's nutrition for as little as Rs 15 per child per year (Tara 2003). The contribution of mid-day meals to social equity also has a variety of aspects. For instance, mid-day meals help to under-mine caste prejudices, by teaching children to sit together and share a common meal. They also foster gender equity, by reducing the gender gap in school participation, providing an important source of female employment in rural areas, and liberating working women from the burden of having to feed children at home during the day. To some extent, mid-day meals also reduce class inequalities. Indeed, in contemporary India, children enrolled in government schools come mainly from disadvantaged families. Thus, mid-day meals can be seen as a form of economic support to the poorer sections of society. More importantly perhaps, mid-day meals facilitate school participation among underprivileged children. This is likely to reduce future class inequalities, since lack of education is a major source of economic disadvantage and social marginalization. In short, despite their innocent garb, mid-day meals are a significant challenge to the prevailing inequalities of caste, class and gender.

Mid-day meals scheme was started in Jammu and Kashmir on 1st September 2004. Under the scheme cooked food is supplied to students at primary schools from standard I to V. As per the guidelines of the scheme, 100 grams of rice and 10 grams of dal per student per day are supplied to schools. The Government of India provides rice and Government of Jammu and Kashmir provides fund towards purchase of dal, vegetables, oil, condiments and transportation charges etc. @ of Rs0.64 per beneficiary per day. The government of India provides cooking cost @ Rs 1.00 per day per beneficiary and accordingly Rs 1.64 (Rs 0.64 from state government fund) is being provided per beneficiary per day.

Need , Scope and Research Methodology

Anantnag is one of the districts of the Kashmir Valley situated in its south and south western direction at a distance of 52 Kms of Srinagar. Anantnag is spread over an area of 2092 Sq. Kms. with a population of 7.32 lacs and sex ratio is 922 females per 1000 males as per Census 2001. There are 406 villages, 158 Gram Panchayats and 7 blocks in the District and about 85% of population lives in rural areas. The population density of the district is 350 as per 2001 census. The literacy rate of the district is 44% as compared to 54% at state level. The male literacy rate is 56% while as for females it is 32%. The district is famous for countless springs and streams and is the gateway to the Kashmir Valley and is called the granary of the Kashmir Valley.

To analyse the impact of the scheme, the present study was conducted in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir. District Anantnag was deliberately selected because since the inception of the scheme no systematic study has been done to evaluate the impact of the programme on primary education in the district. Empirical data for the study was collected from 24 sample primary schools situated in the 7 different blocks of the district. Further to gather information regarding the impact of the scheme, 100 students, 50 parents, 20 teachers and 20 government officials were randomly interviewed through structured questionnaire schedule. Besides primary data on enrolment, attendance and dropout rates of school going children were collected from the school registers and inspection reports. In order to see the impact of the scheme data on enrolment, attendance and drop-outs was collected for both pre and post MDMS periods.

In order to calculate the average annual growth rate in Enrolment of Students, log-lin model has been used. The equation for log-lin model is as under

$$Y_t = y_0(1+r)^t$$

Where r is the compound rate of growth of Y . in order to make the equation linear we take natural logarithm on both sides of equation

$$\ln y_t = \ln y_0 + t \ln(1+r)$$

Now letting $\beta_1 = \ln y_0$ and $\beta_2 = \ln(1+r)$

$$\ln Y_t = \beta_1 + \beta_2 t + u_i$$

Where

$\ln y_t$ = logarithm of regress and or dependent variable

β_1 = The intercept.

β_2 = Coefficient of time.

u_i = Disturbance term.

After getting value of β_2 , ACGR has been calculated by the use of equation (1)

$$ACGR = (\text{anti log } \beta_2 - 1) \times 100. \text{----- (1)}$$

Objectives

The major objectives of the study are

- I) To know the impact of Mid-day Meals scheme on primary education in terms of enrolment, attendance and drop-out rates.
- II) To know the operational and structural deficiencies of Mid-day Meals scheme.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the data shown in Table 1 shows that average annual growth rate of enrolment in the Anantnag district has increased in the post Mid-Day meals period in comparison to pre Mid-Day meals period. During the pre Mid-Day meals period, the average annual growth rate of

enrolment was -10.58 per cent and in post Mid-Day meals period it is 0.24 per cent. Furthermore the growth rate of reserved category students also increased in the Post-Mid day meal period. This implies that there has been an increase in number of students enrolled in the post Mid-Day meals period. Over all, Table 1 shows that Mid-Day meals have a positive impact on the enrolment of students in all categories.

Table 1: Average Annual Growth in Enrolment of Students in District Anantnag

Area	Period	Reserved Categories	General categories	Total
Breng Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	-8.90	-11.20	-10.05
	2005-06 To 2008-09	0.28	0.4	0.34
Shangus Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	-9.9	-3.4	-6.65
	2005-06 To 2008-09	0.15	0.3	0.22
Achabal Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	-10.4	-7.6	-9.0
	2005-06 To 2008-09	0.10	0.6	0.8
Dachnipora Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	-11.2	-8.2	-9.7
	2005-06 To 2008-09	0.56	0.38	0.46
Qazigund Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	-12.56	-8.6	-10.58
	2005-06 To 2008-09	0.29	0.19	0.24
Khoiveripora Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	-7.95	-5.78	-6.86

	2005-06 To 2008-09	0.54	0.38	0.46
Shahabad Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	-11.95	-6.45	-9.2
	2005-06 To 2008-09	0.73	0.56	0.64
Anantnag District	1999-2000 To 2003-04	-6.16	-4.15	-5.15
	2005-06 To 2008-09	2.69	1.15	1.92

Note: *Reserved categories include all lower cast categories (social caste, schedule tribe, other backward classes) and General categories* includes other classes.

*Figures based on field data collected from sample primary schools.

Mere enrolment is not sufficient for learning. For better quality of learning regular attendance in the class room is very necessary. To increase the rate of attendance of the students Mid-Day meals programme was started in India. Table 2 provides percentage of average attendance rate of students in both Pre- and Post Mid day meals period.

Table No.2: Attendance Rate of Students in Different Periods* (%)

Area	Period	Attendance
Breng Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	65%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	82%
Shangus Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	72%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	90%
Achabal Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	62%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	80%
Dachnipora Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	63%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	74%
Qazigund	1999-2000 To 2003-04	60%

Block	2005-06 To 2008-09	75%
Khoveripora Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	68%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	89%
Shahabad Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	63%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	87%
Anantnag district	1999-2000 To 2003-04	64.71%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	82.42%

*Period 1999-2000 to 2003-04 refers to pre MDMs and 2005-06 to 2008-09 refers to post MDMs period

*Figures based on field data collected from sample primary schools.

Table No.2 reveals a rising trend of attendance during the post-Mid day meals period. The average attendance rate has gone up from 64.71 % in pre Mid-Day meals period to 82.42% in the post Mid-Day meals period. It clearly indicates that the percentage of average attendance has improved over the study period. To know the reasons for the increasing attendance rate of students in post Mid-Day meals period, the opinion of teachers, parents and students were registered. As per the opinions of the respondents, the Mid-Day meal scheme is one of the reasons for increasing attendance rate of students. But the other vital reasons were: (i) increasing awareness of education among the parents (ii) increasing interests of the parents to send their children to schools, and (iii) the impact of other facilities and incentives like free books, dress material etc.

Another variable used in our study was drop-out rate. The school lunch programme was primarily introduced to prevent drop-out from the schools. Average drop-out rate of students in the district is given in Table 3, which reveals that average drop-out rate has declined in the post Mid-Day Meals period. The average drop-out rate in pre Mid-day meals period was 25.15 % which has reduced to 14.22 % in post Mid-Day meals period. This implies that the average drop-out rate in the district has declined by 10.93 per cent indicating positive impact of lunch programme.

Table 3: Average Drop-out Rate of Students in Different Periods* (%)

Area	Period	Drop-outs (%)
Breng Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	27.11%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	13.12%
Shangus Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	22.54%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	10.3%
Achabal Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	25.11%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	16.22%

Dachnipora Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	26.17%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	14.23%
Qazigund Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	30.34%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	19%
Khoveripora Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	26.15%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	12.13%
Shahabad Block	1999-2000 To 2003-04	18.53%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	14.56%
Anantnag district	1999-2000 To 2003-04	25.15%
	2005-06 To 2008-09	14.22%

*Period 1999-2000 to 2003-04 refers to pre MDMs and 2005-06 to 2008-09 refers to post MDMs period

*Figures based on field data collected from sample primary schools.

Though our study has found that MDMs has produced positive results, the operation of the scheme is not free from defects. This study found a number of socio-economic, cultural, financial and administrative problems influencing the operation of the scheme. In the study area it was found that general caste (general categories) students were not taking Mid-day meals with reserved caste (SC, ST, OBC) students on account of their social status and prestige. This was also true in case of students belonging to higher income group parents. There were often complaints by children and parents of higher income or caste that mid-day meals were prepared and served by cooks and helpers with dirty hands and clothes belonging to lower income class or lower castes.

The quality of food material supplied for school lunch programme is found very poor. Rice supplied by FCI godown was found producing bad smell. Dal and other condiments supplied by the agents were not fit for human consumption. Not only this but also the agents charged very high prices because they are not paid for the same on due time.

The scheme also suffers from managerial and administrative problems. There is no separate staff to look after the operation of the Mid-Day meal programme. At the school level, it is Headmaster/Headmistress or his/her representatives who are mostly involved in the management and operation of the noon-meals. The teacher also maintains daily record, receipts and expenditure under the programme. All these affect the study hour, the teachers ability in engaging classes. Overall it makes adverse impact on study atmosphere. At the upper level there is poor coordination and cooperation among the officials with regard to operation of the scheme.

The scheme also suffers from financial problem. There is no separate budgetary provision for the scheme. Financial allocation for the operation of the scheme is found not only inadequate but

also irregular. Due to inadequate provision of money for purchase of vegetables, condiments etc, quality of meals served to the students are very substandard in all the schools.

Conclusion

Education moulds consciousness and character of a person. Realizing the importance of education, both the central and state governments, since independence have taken many measures to universalize primary education. Among the various measures undertaken in the recent past, the National Programme of Nutritional Support to primary education or popularly known as Mid-Day Meals scheme is a landmark programme in the direction of spreading primary education. The main focus of the MDMs is to increase enrolment, retention and simultaneously, take care of the nutritional health of primary level school going children. To know the impact of the programme this study was carried out in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir.

The study found that the MDMs have produced a positive impact in case of attendance and drop –out rate in both reserved and general categories. It needs to be mentioned that the MDMs is not sole reason responsible for spreading of primary education. Increasing consciousness on the part of the guardians, implementation of other educational promotion schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abiyan etc., could be another reason responsible for increasing the rate of enrolment and decreasing the drop-out rates.

Though the impact of MDMs is impressive in terms of enrolment, attendance and drop-out rates, the scheme suffers from a number of bottlenecks in the course of its implementation. The quality of food supplied for the noon -meals programme is found very poor. Financial allocation for the operation of this scheme is inadequate and irregular, supervision and monitoring of programme is not regular. The study hours of the schools are getting affected due to direct involvement of teachers in the management and operation of the noon meals.

At the end, we may say that Mid-Day meals programme is a massive social welfare programme aiming at attracting children in to the educational main stream and also providing them with all the much needed supplementary nutrition to make them healthy and worthy citizens of the country.

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