

Practice of Mid Day Meal Scheme at Elementary Education Level: A Case Study of a Rural Elementary School

Sankar Prasad Mohanty

Lecturer, Department of Education, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha

***Corresponding Author:**

Sankar Prasad Mohanty

Email: spmcuttack@gmail.com

Abstract: The flagship programme Mid Day Meal was introduced in Odisha in 1995 with objective to enhance enrolment, attendance and retention of children in schools; and to mitigate their classroom hunger and improving nutritional status. After 18 years of implementation of such programme, it has not reached at its destination as stipulated. Although enrolment, retention has been increased, drop out has been decreased, but fulfillment of nutritional requirement of the children is far behind as the review report says. In this context, a research has been conducted in the form of a case study to have an in-depth knowledge about implementation of MDM scheme. One primary school was taken as the case and key informants were comprised the teachers including head master of the school, Students, parents and SMC members. For obtaining data, interview schedule and a guideline for FGD with students were used. Data on the dimensions such as enrolment, retention, learning achievement, social interaction, community participation, health and nutrition / quality of food and management were collected. As revealed from FGD had with children most of the children were found to accept the Mid Day Meal willingly. The children irrespective of their background were found to enjoy the sharing of food. The poor parents had a very positive view on the Scheme. Some parents wanted the Scheme to be continued variety of menu. Insufficient food provided to the students created dissatisfaction among the parents and students. Rice and Pulses is not of high quality, so that the protein and calorie is a question mark. The detail study is presented in the paper.

Keywords: Mid Day Meal Scheme; Elementary Education Level; Case Study; Rural Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

With the objective to enhance enrolment, attendance and retention of children in schools by mitigating their class room hunger and improving nutritional status Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) was started in India by Madras Corporation in 1925 as a *school lunch programme*. After 50 years, the programme got national attention and in 1974, the National Policy on Children declared that country's children were its supreme human resource. This policy stressed the state to ensure full physical and mental development of children. As a result states viz. Gujarat, Kerala and Tamilnadu and the UT of Pondicherry had universalized a cooked Mid Day Meal Programme with their own resources for children studying at the primary stage. Mid Day Meal was also being provided to children in Tribal Areas in some States like Madhya Pradesh and Odisha (erstwhile Orissa). Gradually by 1990-91 the number of states increased to twelve in implementing the mid day meal programme on a large scale basis with their own resources. The states, namely Karnataka, Odisha and West Bengal implemented the programme with state resources along with international assistance.

In later stage, the National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education commonly known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) was launched in India in August 1995. The MDMS covered all students in primary schools run or funded by the Government throughout the country. A historical order by the supreme court of India in 28 November 2001 changed the picture of MDMS and all the state governments introduced cooked mid-day meals programme in all government and government assisted primary schools. It was one of the first achievements of the right to food campaign. Mid-day meal scheme has become an effective means to check high dropout rates of children from economically weaker sections of the society. Besides, it addresses the nutritional needs of the children. Mid-day meal scheme is considered as a means to promoting improved enrollment, school attendance and retention; has brought a positive impact on educational advancement.

Mid Day Meal Scheme in Odisha

Mid-Day-Meal Scheme was introduced in Odisha in 1995 for the children studying in

Government, Government-aided and local body schools in Class I to V. The objective of the scheme was to enhance enrolment, attendance and retention of children in schools; and to mitigate their classroom hunger and improving nutritional status. At the initial stage, the scheme was implemented by providing 3 kg food grain per month @ 100 grams per day per child in school. However, cooked meal was started in the rural areas of the 8 KBK districts (80 Blocks including 44-ITDA Blocks) and in 74 ITDA Blocks of the Non-KBK districts. The cooked meal system under the MDM Scheme was extended to the primary school children in the backward districts. Serving of hot cooked mid day meal was started in all Government, Government aided and local body schools as well as Education Guarantee Scheme/Alternative Education & Innovative Centre and Madrasas/ Maqtabas recognized under SSA in 2004. By introduction of RTE Act 2009 which came into force with effect from 1st April 2010, preference is being given to disadvantaged groups and weaker sections while nominating the representatives for the School Management Committee. The Act clearly stated that all schools should have all weather building consisting of a kitchen-cum-stores to cook mid day meal in the school by 2012-13.

Mid Day Meal Scheme in Odisha, formerly was being implemented by the Department of Women & Child Development and it was transferred to the

Department of School & Mass Education (S&ME) in August, 2011. Odisha has 30 districts and the scheme is implemented and monitored in each district by a District Inspector of Schools. There are 75 education districts in the State; each headed by District Inspector of Schools (DIS). Out of these 75 DISs, 30 DISs are designated as DIS Headquarter and declared as Drawing & Disbursing Officers (DDOs) for the scheme.

They are vested with the powers to release the MDM funds to Block Development Officers on the basis of number of schools/children in each block. The remaining 45 DIS are responsible for the implementation of the scheme in their respective districts and report the physical and financial progress of the scheme to DISs Headquarter. There are 314 Blocks in the State and each Block Development Officers look after the implementation of the scheme at block level. They are assisted by School Inspectors for assessing the fund requirement of each school and releasing it to the schools. It is observed due to lack of proper organizational structure, Mid Day Meal Scheme is not effectively being monitored properly at Directorate, District, Sub-district and school level. Hence strengthening of the management structure of the State is essential for revamping the existing structure. However, the status of MDMS is mentioned below in terms of enrolment and availing of MDM.

Table 1: Coverage of Children under Primary

Year	Enrolment	Average availed MDM	% of Availed vs. Enrolment
2008-09	4467390	4236747	95%
2009-10	4366931	3868417	89%
2010-11	4236747	4000000	88%
2011-12*	4129953	3800000	80%

*Up to 30th September, 2011

(Source: Report of 3rd Review Mission on MDM Scheme, MHRD, GOI, 2012)

Table 2: Coverage of Children under Upper Primary

Year	Enrolment	Average availed MDM	% of Availed vs. Enrolment
2008-09	2081095	1913745	92%
2009-10	1948894	1657375	85%
2010-11	1913745	1569750	82%
2011-12*	1933347	1492174	77%

*up to 30 September, 2011

(Source: Report of 3rd Review Mission on MDM Scheme, MHRD, GOI, 2012)

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researches have been conducted at national and state level, by government; non-government; and academicians in higher education institutions, to find out the gaps in implementation of the MDMS and sketch a framework for effective implementation of the scheme. Some studies have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of the programme in terms of reducing drop-out, enhancing retention, addressing nutritional needs of the children and their educational achievements. A number of studies were

reviewed by the authors and brief findings of a few studies were reported as following:

Anima & Sharma conducted a study on empirical study of the mid-day meal program in Khurda district in Odisha [1]. It was revealed that the mid-day meal program was initiated as a means of achieving universal primary education and satisfactory quality for all the school children bellow the age before 14 by increasing enrollment improving attendance and retention and simultaneously improving nutritional

status. The Government of India provides rice free of cost, while the State Government provides the funds to meet the other expenditure like cost of *Dal* (15 gms : 35 paisa), vegetable, salt and condiments (10 paisa), oil (30 paisa) and transportation (10 paisa). Total expenditure was 85 paisa per child per day. For fuel and stationary, Rs.1.30 per child per month was spent. It was found that poor infrastructural facilities created disturbance in the smooth functioning of the cooked meal scheme. This was the main reason for shifting over to the dry rations scheme in 2001. The main reasons were no separate space for cooking; no separate place for serving meals.

Sinha conducted a study on social audit of mid-day meal scheme Andhra Pradesh. Revealed that the audit did also bring out the many positive effects of the mid-day meal scheme and increasing enrollment, averting classroom hunger and reducing social discrimination[2]. Dreze and Goyal conducted a study on future of mid-day meal and revealed that this initiative could have a major impact on children's nutrition, school attendance and social equality[3]. Khera Conducted a studied on mid-day meals scheme which has overcome many of the teaching problems that becomes an almost universal scheme, feeding primary school children all over the country[4]. This review of the MDM scheme traces its development and examines its achievement to date. The review addresses the challenges faced by the scheme and suggest possible remedies. Bonds conducted a study on Evaluating the impact of India's mid-day meal programmed on Educational attainment and it revealed that given the correlation between educational attainment and economic growth, policies that both effectively and efficiently decrease the financial barriers to primary school education in developing countries one of extreme interest to government and non-government organizations alike [5].

Alm, Khalil, Mizz & Khan conducted a study on an impact of mid-day meal scheme on the nutritional status and academic achievement of school children in Aligarh city [6]. It was revealed that children are the most vulnerable group that suffers from malnutrition and nutritional defiance. Under nutrition during any period of childhood even for relatively short term episodes, can have negative effects on the cognitive development thus leads to poor school performance among children.

After analyzing the findings of the studies reviewed as above, the authors realized to conduct a study on the implementation of MDMS in Odisha [7]. Initially, they conducted some case studies to get the perception of the major stakeholders of elementary education where the MDMS is being implemented.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are presented below:

1. To study the perception of major stakeholders of elementary schools such as headmaster, teachers, parents and school management committee members about the implementation of Mid Day Meal Scheme in the schools of Odisha on the following dimensions.
Enrolment, Retention, Learning achievement, Social interaction, Community participation, Health and nutrition/ Quality of food, Acceptance of Mid Day Meal, Management of Mid Day Meal
2. To study the perception of elementary school students about the implementation of Mid Day Meal schemes in the schools of Odisha on the following dimensions.
Enrolment, Retention, Learning achievement, Social interaction, Community participation, Health and nutrition/ Quality of food, Acceptance of Mid Day Meal, Management of Mid Day Meal
3. To study the problems associated with implementation of Mid Day Meal scheme in elementary schools of Odisha.

Research Questions

The research questions framed on the basis of above objectives are as following:

1. What does the headmaster and do other teachers of an elementary school perceive about implementation of Mid Day Meal Scheme pertaining to the following dimensions?
 - Enrolment, Retention, Learning achievement, Social interaction, Community participation, Health and nutrition/ Quality of food, Acceptance of Mid Day Meal, Management of Mid Day Meal.
2. What do the members of school management committee perceive about implementation of MDMS pertaining to the following dimensions?
 - Enrolment, Retention, Learning achievement, Social interaction, Community participation, Health and nutrition/ Quality of food, Acceptance of Mid Day Meal, Management of Mid Day Meal.
3. What do the parents perceive about implementation of MDMS pertaining to the following dimensions?
 - Enrolment, Retention, Learning achievement, Social interaction, Community participation, Health and nutrition/ Quality of food, Acceptance of Mid Day Meal.
4. What do the elementary school students perceive about implementation of MDMS pertaining to the following dimensions?
 - Enrolment, Retention, Learning achievement, Social interaction, Community participation,

Health and nutrition / Quality of food, Acceptance of Mid Day Meal.

THE METHOD

The present study is a case study which comes under descriptive type research and qualitative in nature.

The Case and Key Informants within the Case

The sample of the present study consisted of an elementary school situated in rural area of Kendrapara District of Odisha. The sample school named 'X' for the case study was selected through purposive sampling technique. The key informants within the case were the Head master, all the teachers of the school, Parents of students, SMC members and the beneficiary students.

Tools used

In the present study, four tools were developed and used for collection of information from the stakeholders such as Head Master, other Teachers, Parents and School Management Committee members pertaining to the dimensions as stated in the objectives and research questions of the study. The tools are mentioned hereunder.

1. Interview Schedule for Headmaster/Teachers
2. Interview Schedule for Parents.
3. Interview Schedule for School Management Committee.
4. Guidelines for FGD with Students.

Analysis of Data and Establishing Validity

In the present study, the data were obtained from variety of sources such as the interview with headmaster, interview with teacher, interview with SMC and interview with students. The data were reported qualitatively with thick description. The conclusions drawn from the interviews were compared with the conclusion drawn from FGD had with the students. Validity of the data was established by the conclusions drawn from all the sources through data triangulation.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings pertaining to the dimensions mentioned in the objectives and research questions of the study are reported as follows:

The Case Profile

The name of the elementary school i.e., *the case* is 'X' U.P. School, Kendrapara (name of the school is kept confidential), established in the year 1955. The school is well connected to the highways with concrete road. The school sits in a brick building with 9 rooms out of which eight are used as classrooms and one as office-cum staff room. The school covers an area of 2.7 acres. The school has got pucca boundary wall properly. The school is full of greenery having

huge trees, plants, different type of flower trees etc. There is a small school playground inside the school boundary. Total number of teachers including HM is five.

Mid Day Meal Scheme is being implemented in this school for 151 (Class-I to VIII) students. The weekly menu and food quantity managed under MDMS at primary stage as reported from the stakeholders of the school is as hereunder:

Monday: Rice, Dal (Rice-100gms, Dal-25 Gms, Oil-2 Gms, Vegetables-40Gms per child)

Tuesday: Rice, Soyabadi (Rice-100gms, Soya-12 Gms, Oil-2 Gms, Vegetables- 100 Gms per child)

Wednesday: Rice, Egg (Rice-100gms, Oil-2 Gms, Egg- one, Vegetable-20 Gms per child)

Thursday: Rice, Dal (Rice-100gms, Dal-25 Gms, Oil-2 Gms, Vegetables-40 Gms per child)

Friday: Rice, Soyabadi (Rice-100gms, Soya-12 Gms, Oil-2 Gms, Vegetables- 100 Gms per child)

Saturday: Rice, Egg (Rice-100gms, Oil-2 Gms, Egg-one, Vegetable-20 Gms per child)

Enrolment and Retention

- The head master, the teachers, most of the parents and SMC members of the school reported that the students enrolment has been increased and daily attendance of the students also been increased by implementation of mid-day meal in the school.
- There is no student drop-out from the school since the starting of mid-day meal scheme in the school.
- This MDMS provides good quality of food and that helps in increasing the student's interest for regularly coming to the school.
- The poor parents who were unable to send their children to school due to lack of food, they started sending them to school after the implementation of MDMS.
- The existing number of students as enrolled is 151 and all the students are coming to school regularly.

Learning Achievement

- This MDM Scheme has increased the student's attendance in the school; made the students regular in attending the classes and ultimately the regularity helps them properly understand the topic and secure good marks in the examination.
- Teachers, parents and SMC members opined that teaching learning activities are never disturbed by this scheme.
- By implementing this scheme the achievement of the student has been improved in the school.

Social Interaction

- As reported by all the stakeholders of the school that MDMS provides a scope for better relationship with society and for smooth functioning of the school the community members are involved in various activities.
- As reported by the stakeholders there are different Committees formed for its better functioning of MDMS such as *School Management Committee* (SMC), *Food Committee* (FC). These committees take decision in preparing a food list every month; choosing different types of vegetables having good calories; preparing monthly list of grocery; and focusing on the cleanness of the mid-day meal programme.

Community Participation

- The MDMS, as reported by the stakeholders, provides opportunity for the parents to participate in the activities in the school and it creates better relationship between the parents and school.
- As reported, some parents cook mid-day meal and serve to the children in the school.
- School management committee president and other members look for the development of the school.
- The school management committee is actively involved in the implementation and monitoring of the Mid Day Meal Scheme.

- The president of the SMC co-operates the Headmaster of the school in the implementation of MDM programme. He devotes sometime in the school every day for helping students and teachers. All the members of the SMC are closely associated with the school activities. They are motivating parents to send their children to school.
- The SMC plays a proactive role in persuading the drop out students and habitual absentees to come to the school. As a result of their efforts, enrolment has been increased.

Health and Nutrition / Quality of Food

- Regarding quantity of food, as reported by the teachers and School Management Committee, is insufficient for children. The cause for the less quantity of food is sufficient finance for implementation of mid-day meal scheme.
- The school environment is found to be neat and clean. The place for cooking MDM is not hygienic. The school has not separate room for serving mid-day meal and the hygienic condition is maintained for the purpose. Members from mother committee help in cooking and serving the mid-day meal carefully.
- As the data obtained from the informants and other sources of the case the protein and calorie obtained from food under MDM is mentioned hereunder:

Table 3: Nutritional Aspects of Food under MDM Scheme

Day	Name of food (Source)	Quantity	Energy (in K. cal)	Protein (in gms)
Monday & Thursday	Rice	100 gms	346	6.4
	Dal	25 gms	84	5.5
	Oil	2 gm	18	---
	Vegetables and Salt (Iron fortified Iodized)	40 gms	16	0.6
			Total=464	Total=12.50
Tuesday & Friday	Rice	100 gms	346	6.4
	Soya	12 gms	51	5.1
	Oil	2 gm	18	---
	Vegetables and Salt (Iron fortified Iodized)	100 gms	40	1.6
			Total=455	Total=13.10
Wednesday & Saturday	Rice	100 gms	346	6.4
	Egg	01 (one)	86.5	6.65
	Oil	2 gm	18	---
	Vegetables and Salt (Iron fortified Iodized)	20 gms	8	0.32
			Total=458	Total=13.37

Acceptance of Mid Day Meal

- As reported from FGD had with children that most of the children were found to accept the Mid Day Meal willingly. The children irrespective of their background were found to enjoy the sharing of food.
- The poor parents had a very positive view on the Scheme. Some parents wanted the Scheme to be continued variety of menu.
- Some the parents reported that Mid Day Meal Scheme has provided a platform to learn many good habits while taking the food such as washing hands before taking food, discipline, respect to elders etc.
- The introduction of egg in the menu was highly appreciated by the students and parents for providing healthy diet.

Management

- The school has engaged one cook and one helper with payment of Rs. 600 and Rs. 400 respectively (Total Rs 1000 for cook and helper).
- The fund management mechanism is like that the State Finance Department releases the funds to Director Elementary Education (DEE), School & Mass Education, Government of Odisha. DEE releases the funds to the District Inspector of Schools (Headquarters). Then the funds are transferred to Block Development Officer who releases it in to the joint account of Head Masters and SHG or SMC.
- Food grain management is like that the Storage Agents lift Food grains from FCI and transport them to the Block go downs from where they are again transported to the schools.
- The Government of Odisha has decentralized the procurement of Pulses, Vegetables, Eggs, condiments and spices, oils & fats, fortified salt etc. Self Help Groups and/or School Management Committee procure these items locally. The quality items procured is examined by the Janch Committee.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH MDM SCHEME

- No separate room for serving the food. Students eat the food in school veranda.
- Insufficient food is provided to the students. So that it creates dissatisfaction among the parents and students.
- Sometimes rotten eggs are supplied to the schools.
- Rice and Pulses is not of high quality, so that the protein and calorie is a question mark.
- Salary to the cook and helper is not satisfactory.
- Irregular release of fund for the purpose.
- Teachers are getting engaged for arrangement of MDM programme.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The case study revealed the status of MDM Scheme in a particular school. As the findings of the case study cannot be generalized to all cases, still the researchers may suggest some measures to improve in the light of problems found in the case study. The govt. need to form a team comprising a health specialist for

monitoring the healthy and hygienic aspects of the scheme at the grass root level. The objective of the scheme is not only to increase enrolment and retention rather to enhance learning achievement among the students. For this reason, a suitable study environment is vital, which is lacking in the schools. Teachers should not be engaged but Separate staff needs to be recruited to MDM programme. Besides, other minus points as discussed above caption need to be taken care of immediately. The most vital nutritional aspect is neglected as revealed from the review report on MDMS in 2012. Our Hon'ble Prime Minister recently expressed serious concern on the review report on MDMS and stated that '*malnutrition is a national shame*'. United Nations Standing Committee on Human Right states that '*Good nutrition is a human right*'. Therefore, the Review Mission recommends that the State Govt. should make rigorous efforts for focusing on the malnutrition amongst children in all the districts and ensure that hot cooked mid day meal of required rich and nutritional value as prescribed in the MDM guidelines is provided to the school children in the State.

REFERENCE

1. Si AR, Sharma NK; An empirical Study of the Mid-Day Meal programme in Khurda, Orissa. Economic and Political Weekly, 2008; 46-55.
2. Sinha D; Social Audit of Midday Meal Scheme in AP. Economic and Political Weekly, 2008; 57-61.
3. Drèze J, Goyal A; The future of mid-day meals. Economic and Political Weekly, 2003; November 1, 4673-82. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4414222>.
4. Khera R; Mid-day meals in primary schools: achievements and challenges. Economic and Political Weekly, 2006; November 18, 4742-50. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/441891>
5. Bonds S; Food for thought: evaluating the impact of India's mid-day meal program on educational attainment. 2012. Available online at [berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/Bonds .pdf](http://berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/Bonds.pdf).
6. Alim F, Khalil S, Mirz I, Khan Z; Impact of mid-day meal scheme on the nutritional status and academic achievement of school children in Aligarh city. Indian Journal of Science Research, 2012; 3 (2):85-90.
7. GoI MHRD; Report of 3rd review mission on MDM scheme (Odisha). New Delhi: GoI, MHRD