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AN OVERALL SCENARIO OF MID DAY MEAL IN INDIA ACROSS DIFFERENT STATES OVER TIME

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ABSTRACT

With the twin objective of improving health of poor children and imparting formal education to these children, the Government of India started Mid-Day Meal Scheme in the government primary schools. The purpose of the government to a great extent has been an initiative to increase the attendance rate and also promote socialization values. Despite all achievements, many problems have been encountered in the implementation of this scheme. Some major drawbacks have also been identified. This paper attempts to analyze the results and factors that are highly responsible for creating discrepancies in its process of attaining the major objectives and goals.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in one's life. Education (formal or informal) is today's need as it is not only the development of intellectual skills and knowledge but also to effective growth and development of Indian economy. In India, primary school is the 1st step towards education or formal schooling. In a country like India, the education system has several issues and faces challenges. As per as 2011 census, data released that 444 million children under 18 years of age constitutes 37% of total population in the country and 99 million from the domain group in total have dropped out of school (reasons highlighted as poverty, availability and accessibility). In accordance to the related information that The Hindu has updated in 2015 from the census report of India (2011) also states that about 70% of Indians live in rural areas that is out of 121 crore Indians, 73.3% live in rural areas and only 26.7% live in urban areas. Out of every 100 children in India, only 32 finish their school education and only 2% of the schools offer complete school education from class 1 to 12 (DISE report).

Nutrition is an input to the foundation for health and development. Health and Education are always connected. It is rightly said that healthy children learn better, they are stronger, they are more productive and are able to create more opportunities. In this regard, better nutrition is a prime entry point. The statistics of under privileged children in India states that 19.8 million children below the age group of 6 are undernourished and 36% out of all totals of the children in India are underweight. India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and this is an important and concerning sector for the growth of the economy as a whole. India has one of the largest child populations in the world and most of them belong from families which are economically impoverished and disadvantaged children. In such societies, children are often seen as investment and are considered suitable for induction into child labor. Child who is the future of a nation is totally malnutrition, not getting adequate food. To achieve the aim of universalisation of elementary education along with protection of nutritional rights of the children, the government of India has launched Mid Day Meal as a centrally

sponsored scheme on 15th of August, 1995 which is the national programmed of nutritional support to primary education. It is a flagship scheme of ministry of Human Resource Development. India has embarked upon an ambitious scheme of providing food in government assisted institutions. This scheme strives to serve in government aided schools, special training centers, madrasas and makhtabs supported under Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan. Under this programmed, free mid day meals are supplied by the government for children in primary and upper primary classes on working days of a school. The scheme is intended to protect the right to food of children while emphasizing right to education, right to growth and right to development. Initiating this kind of meal programmed, government of India aimed at helping the children who especially belong to the poor socio economic background to attend school and to have at least Mid Day Meal through which their education as well as food related issues could be tackled. The world's biggest school lunch programmed and India's second largest food security programmed Mid Day Meal is now being implemented all over India for primary and upper primary school student. This paper attempts to analyze the situation after the introduction of Mid Day Meal. Various factors like attendance rate, food quality, social status, number of schools under the scheme are taken into account. No primary research has been carried out; rather this entire study is based on secondary data and literature pertaining to Mid Day Meal in relation to child nutrition and education.

Literature Review

Mid Day Meal Scheme has been initiated to enhance the enrollment, retention and attendance along with simultaneously improving nutritional levels among school going children studying in classes 1 to 8 of Government – aided schools, special training centers, madrasas and makhtabs. Mid Day Meal Scheme is perceived as a major means to impart positive habits among the children and also in educating them on the importance of health, sanitation and socialization. It is also seen as a factor for economic support to poor parents and educating them about the value of education. (Dreze and Kingdon 2001). The decision to send a child to school, like other household investment decisions, can be modeled by a cost-benefit framework. Schooling requires an initial investment, composed of both the direct cost of schooling and the opportunity cost of schooling. This opportunity cost reflects the forgone benefits a child could provide his or her family if not in school, through labor market incomes or household chores. While education reduces poverty in the long run by providing greater job access and higher wages, the short-run costs of schooling can be very steep, particularly for families living below the poverty line. Thus, many families find that the future benefits of education do not justify its immediate cost (Uma 2013).

The enrollment statistics have improved and the dropouts might have reduced however quality in education and food has decreased since proper care is not being taken care while preparing the food and teachers are involved in various other duties. The teacher must be engaged in their prime duty of teaching only. Redefining the role of teachers in the primary schools is the need of the hour (Kaur, 2016) Mid Day Meal talks about one meal in a day for 200 days to all children enrolled and present in the school to ensure their attendance in the school. The trends extracted from secondary data based on

time series technique states that ensuring attendance in the school for certain days does not ensure quality education to a child. Trends show that before the launch of this scheme on an average enrollment increased in fifty years but after this scheme in few years the average enrollment decreased. Mid Day Meal Scheme is not the only factor which attracts children to school. There are certainly many other factors responsible for enrollment and drop out of children from schools (Singha and Gupta 2013). Data regarding enrollment, attendance and retention of children collected from school records suggested that enrollment has increased in Mid Day Meal schools as compared to non Mid Day Meal school, difference in attendance percentage between both Mid Day Meal and non Mid Day Meal school children was more in urban area as compared to rural areas and retention rate found higher in urban non Mid Day Meal school and not Mid Day Meal school in rural areas (Jayarama and Simroth 2011). Using panel data set of almost 500,000 schools observed annually from 2002 – 2004, findings stated Mid Day Meal Scheme's result in substantial increase in primary school enrollment, driven by early primary school responses to the program (Singh, park and darcon, January 2014) With the objective of an evaluation of the Mid Day Meal Scheme in India, the study used newly available longitudinal data from the states of India to estimate the impact of the introduction of a national food security program (MDM). And the findings states that the program acted as a safety net for children, providing large and significant health gains for children whose families suffered from drought (Afridi 2010). Examining the extent to which children benefited from the targeted public transfer, the findings suggests that for as low a cost as 3 cents per child per school day the scheme reduced the daily protein deficiency by nearly 10%. At least in the short run, therefore, the program had a substantial effect on reducing hunger at school and protein energy malnutrition.

Brief history

In India, the history of Mid Day Meal Scheme dates back to pre independence era 1925 when Mid Day Meal Programmed was introduced for disadvantaged children in Madras Municipal Corporation in the erstwhile Madras presidency (presently Tamilnadu). By the mid 1980's three states in India namely Gujarat, Kerela and Tamilnadu and the Union Territory of Pondicherry had universalized a cooked Mid Day Meal programmed with their own resources for children studying at the primary stage. By 1990-91, the number of states implementing the Mid Day Meal programmed with their own resources on a universal or large scale had increased to twelve states. The National Programmed of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) was launched on 15th of August 1995, initially in 2408 blocks of the country. By the year 1977-78 the NP-NSPE was introduced in all blocks of the country. It was further extended in 2002 to cover not only children in classes 1 to 5 of Government, Government aided and local body schools, but also children studying in EGS and AIE centers (Education Guarantee Scheme & Alternative and Innovative Education). Thus the idea of Mid Day Meal Scheme has been the serious interest of the Government of India since early 1980's. But the scheme got attention in nationwide only in 1995 with "the aim of universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously impacting on nutrition of students in primary classes". But later it was found that until 2001 the Mid Day Meal Scheme was implemented neither in

letter nor in spirit and was limited to providing dry rations in most of the states. After November 28, 2001, in its historic judgment the Supreme Court of India in the right to food case directed all states to provide cooked meal to all primary school children.

Table 1. School meal programmed in different countries

COUNTRY	YEAR OF INTRODUCTION
United Kingdom	1945
United States of America	1946
Switzerland	1946
Japan	1947
Australia	1950
China	1964
Indonesia	1967
Thailand	1970
Korea	1973
Singapore	1975
India	1995

Source – Parikh and Yasmeen (2004)

Objectives of the Study

- The objective of this paper is centered on the identification of factors associated in creating discrepancy between the percentage of schools serving Mid Day Meal and the attendance rates of the resembling schools in India across different states over time.
- To check the social status of the beneficiary children under the Mid Day Meal Scheme, data based for the year 2010.
- To compare between the state wise yearly funds released and utilized under Mid Day Meal with the recent data available for the year

Research Question

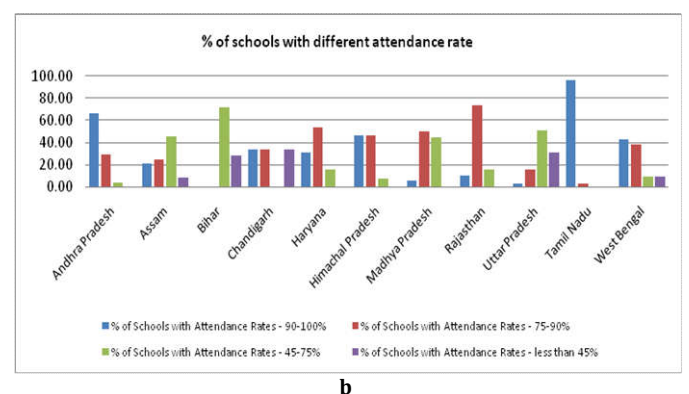
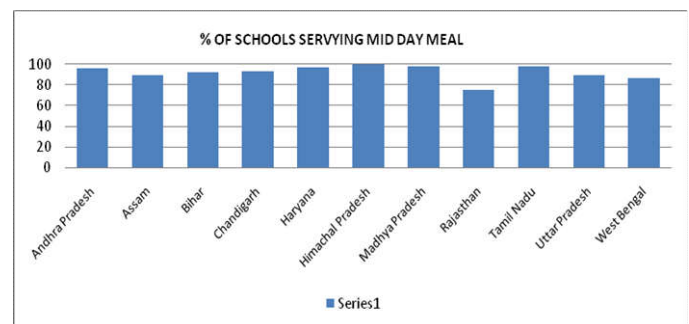
Areas of concern pertaining to Mid Day Meal Scheme of the Government have been highlighting the objective of this food security program. It has been stated that higher percentage of attendance is vital for the successful implementation of Mid Day Meal Scheme but later it was argued that Mid Day Meal Scheme was initiated in order to draw attention of the families belonging to low socio-economic background of the rural areas in India to participate in the program along with gaining education instead of sending their children for meager daily earnings. In view of the above, the basic question that arises attempts to state if Mid Day Meal Scheme in India has been successful in working to facilitate and increase the school participation among the underprivileged children which would lead to their education as well as economic upliftment.

Data Collection and Methodology

The methodology includes secondary data. For secondary data, Governmental websites (<https://data.gov.in/>) and recent Governmental reports were relied upon. Data regarding enrollment and dropouts was collected from news articles. No primary research has been carried out, rather this presentation is based on secondary data as mentioned above and literature pertaining to Mid Day Meal with relation to child nutrition and education.

For the analysis part of the study, different types of variables are taken into consideration for identification of factors under Mid Day Meal.

Analysis and Finding



State wise % of schools serving Mid Day Meal and its attendance rates accordingly (discrepancy between the two)

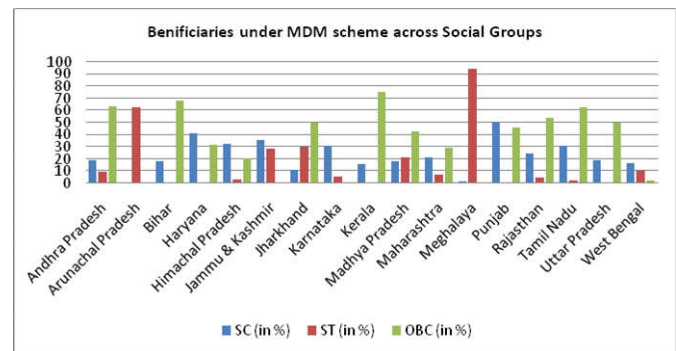
The purpose of the Government serving Mid Day Meal in schools to a great extent has been an initiative to increase the attendance rate in schools. The different states in India have implemented this food security program in different time periods. In few states, until a large period of time, dry ration was provided and then the provision of cooked meal came into existence by the intervention of Supreme Court in 2011. The different states in India vary in its percentage of schools covered serving Mid Day Meal under the flagship program of central government adopted in the year 1995. Amongst all other states in India, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh has 90% schools and above serving mid day meals in schools and there are states namely Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Chandigarh that has 85% schools and above serving mid day meals [refer to figure 1.7.1 (a)]. These states have been picked amongst all other states in India for making comparisons in this study according to data viability and in relation to the attendance rates that are depicted by the schools of this state's accordingly lowest, medium and highest rate of the attendees of the school children of this particular states. As against this, [refer to figure 1.7.1 (b)], the state of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh has attendance rates to the lowest ground possible. The food security program in Bihar has been adopted in late 1995. Until 2002, only dry ration was provided to the children. The provision of cooked meal started by the year 2003-04. More than 90% of the schools in Bihar has implemented this food security program and accordingly serves children meal in all 200 days of working periods. Mid Day Meal was observed being served in 75% of all Bihar schools visited as against the national average

in providing 87% in 2012. Bihar is also ahead in case of providing drinking water facilities that is 85.4% as against the national average of 73%. 45.3% of schools have library facilities as against national average of 43.9%. The problem detected shows that as per as the attendance of children in schools are concerned, the average attendance of teachers has declined from 85.7% in 2011 to 78% in 2012 (Annual Status of Education Report). The primary duty of the teachers in such government schools has not been confined to educating children only rather their work has been distributed among various other duties of the school. Since Bihar is still considered as one of the rural states in India, the percentage of children attending primary school stands less if compared to the other urban states in the country. Further, males are more likely to attend school in Bihar because gender disparity is highly observed in this state.

The International Centre for Research work on Women (ICRW) stated in its reports that Bihar has the highest rate of child marriage in India. As against the national average of 47%, the figure stands 60% as in case of Bihar. The quality of food is a major drawback in this regard. Reports state that it is the second state ranked after Uttar Pradesh which has the highest number of lodged food complaints. Death of children in the states of Bihar in the year 2013 and frequently children falling ill after consuming meals have recorded a tremendous decrease in the continuation of the children in coming to schools. The identification of these factors has immensely contributed in creating a discrepancy between the schools of Bihar serving Mid Day Meal and the associated attendance rate with it. The state of Uttar Pradesh in the list is another matter of concern. Uttar Pradesh has a literacy rate of 69.72%, India's eight lowest in the country, according to the census of 2011. More than 85% of the schools in Uttar Pradesh (UP) serve Mid Day Meal but the attendance rates from these schools serving meals stand as low as 10%. Studies found that meals are not enough to draw attention of the children to schools. major drawbacks in this state are at 30 students per teacher as prescribed by the Right to Education Act (RTE) – at the primary level, the state should have 840,000 teachers but is short of 21% that is in figures it stands 176,000. About 23% of all elementary teacher posts in government school in Uttar Pradesh are vacant. This state even records for second highest teacher absenteeism (31%) in rural public schools surveyed in the year 2010. This state records for the lowest transition rate from primary to upper primary level in the country (DISE Flash Statistics Reports). More children are at work in UP than any other state in India (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights). These factors has been identified to cause discrepancy between these two states taken for study under Mid Day Meal which stands among the highest implementation and serving of food under mid day meal and at the same time records to have the lowest of attendance rates from the area of serving.

The Figure [1.7.2(a)] depicts a column bar which represents children belonging from different caste groups as beneficiaries under the mid day meal scheme of the government in India. Mid Day Meal scheme of the government have a great socializing value. Studies indicate that most of the children enrolled in private schools are from general caste groups whereas most of the scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) children attend government schools (Agarwal 2000, Kumar et al 2005, Mehta 2005, Probe 1999). Studies reveal that children of all social backgrounds seem to be quite happy

sitting together and sharing the common food. This food security programmed was introduced to mitigate social inequalities inherited through the hierarchical division of society, or what is called "resilience of social structures".

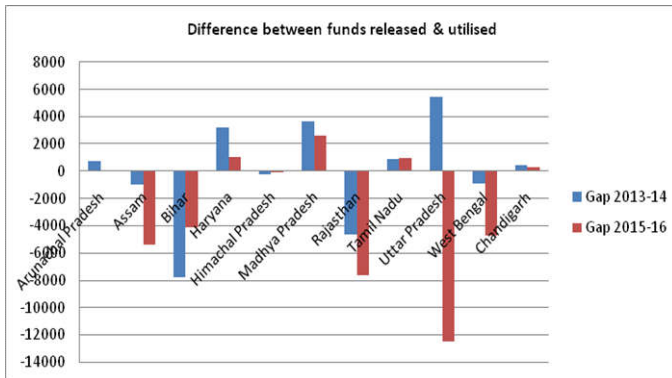


Social status of beneficiary children under the Mid Day Meal Scheme in India

Enrolment in school is the foremost criterion for school participation. Low enrolments for disadvantaged groups result in their dismal representation at all levels of education. Enrolment of children belonging to SCs and STs has increased since 2005, when the new cooked mid day meal was implemented. Before 2005, many of the children from these disadvantaged sections did not participate in primary schooling. In most of the states in India, the economically disadvantaged groups consider mid day meal as an economic incentive for sending their children to school. In Between the year 2005-2009, children belonging to marginalized sections have increased under mid day meal, and during the same period children belonging to general category declined steadily. Primary education which is available free of cost in government run schools in rural and urban areas may not have many takers in schools charging a fee as thought in initial years under reform (primary education did not attract private capital). However, the quality of education provided in the free government schools was poor and even the poor parents became keen to provide better quality education to their children and prepared to opt for fee charging private schools for better quality of education. Fee charging private schools offering primary education in rural areas started emerging and those who could afford withdrew their children from free government schools and admitted them to fee paying relatively better quality private schools forgoing free mid day meal. These phenomena of migration of children from better-off sections, mostly belonging to higher caste led to drop in the enrolment of children from the general category.

In states like Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya, tribal people belonging to the caste of scheduled tribe make up the majority of the state's population and in this regard ST categories of children of these states are more benefited under mid day meal. And the percentage stands around 62.66% for Arunachal Pradesh and 94.77% for Meghalaya. As against this, in the states of Haryana and Punjab the Jats are the dominant caste who mostly belongs to SC classes of the society and rest of the electorates include only 24% of the population and the figures states that SC children are mostly benefited from this program. In the states of Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Kerala, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh the nutritional intake of OBC children was found high. Unlike students belonging from other caste groups, the students belonging to most marginalized group, i.e., STs, SCs and OBCs gets some nutritional benefit due to the operation of

the mid day meal. This is an encouraging finding about mid day meal. What lessons do we derive from these findings? If social development program offer something which is not envied by the better –off sections, social structures would respond to changes that can reduce inequalities.



Examining and identifying the factors that play vital role in determining the implementation of the scheme

Funds for mid day meal scheme are released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), government of India to the State Finance Department for Central Share. The State Finance Department releases the same to the Education Department and from the Education department to the Directorate of school education and literacy. The State Finance Department also releases the state share meant for the same. And the Directorate releases funds for Mid Day Meal by E-transfer. The Figure 1.7.3(a) as depicted above represents the differences between the funds released and utilized under the food security programmed. In the year 2013-14, Uttar Pradesh had the highest surplus which indicates that the funds released have been greater than the expenditure in this state. This surplus accounted by Uttar Pradesh has been followed by the states of Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Arunachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Chandigarh. In the same year the state of Bihar had the highest deficit followed by Rajasthan and Assam. The same figure indicates that for the year 2015-16 the state of Madhya Pradesh had the highest surplus followed by Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Chandigarh. And the deficit states were Uttar Pradesh followed by Rajasthan and West Bengal.

The government has utilized only 67% of the funds meant for the mid day meal scheme as it spent only 3,666 crore of the budgeted provision of Rs 5,466 crore, including the central government share for the year 2013-16. As the scheme is mostly implemented in the rural areas of the states, the allocation of fund rests upon the panchayat heads. Sources say that per child per cost of the basic daliya program for a 20 day school month should have been at least Rs 7.47 for these years but the panchayats were spending less than this officially mandated expenditure in the surveyed villages of these states. In few states there was surplus not only indicating good run of the scheme but studies revealed that budget allocated and released remained unutilized. In the year 2013-14, the state of Uttar Pradesh has recorded the highest surplus that means the expenditure on the program in the state has been less or has remain unutilized but the upcoming year it has accordingly recorded a deficit in the budget. The budget announced for this state was an amount of Rs 166.83 crore but due to a “technical glitch” only Rs 66 crore was released in the year 2015-16 for

the reason which the state had to use funds from the state to ensure better implementation in food and pay off to the staff which resulted in the expenditure to rise in the last years. Due to the lack of separate funds in every state for effectively implementing the scheme, there has been continuous disparity and gap between the funds released and utilized under the same.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Therefore from the above paper work it can be concluded that the food security scheme Mid Day Meal can achieve its objectives entirely only with improved work in its places of disparitions. Though the scheme has shown increased number of enrollments and attendance but the area of retention has shown slow progress. Proper care has not been taken while preparing food and the role of teachers in involved has shown huge negligence. The study also found out that there are certainly other factors responsible for enrollment and drop out of children from school and these areas must be checked and worked upon. It has restore policies to bring in the social equality but it has to do the same with the parents and other individuals concerned. The recommended solution for this program to achieve its goals and objectives without any differences, the role of the government sector in the program must be changed. Non-governmental organisations should actively be involved by the government to look, assist and report about transfer of funds and utilisation of the same and the government can monitor and regulate these organisations. The evaluation of a student should be done on the basis of his/her performance. And hence, redefining the role of teachers in these government run schools is the need of the hour.

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