



"Evaluating the Influence of the Mid-Day Meal Program on Primary School Students Enrollment and Retention "

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Abstract:

With the dual objectives of improving the health and education of underprivileged children, India has undertaken the ambitious task of implementing the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) program in government and government-aided primary schools. This paper analyzes the nature and impact of the MDM program on the academic performance of students in primary schools. Education forms the foundation of an individual's physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, and social development. Humans, as rational beings, possess unique qualities that distinguish them from other living creatures. This rationality and capacity for higher thought enable humans to transcend their base instincts, a transformation that education facilitates. Without education, a person is akin to being blind or lifeless.

The introduction of the Mid-Day Meal program has significantly increased enrollment and retention rates in primary schools. Parents are now more inclined to send their children to school, and rural head teachers and community leaders have expressed strong support for the initiative. According to the findings, the MDM program has been instrumental in improving attendance and enrollment rates among economically disadvantaged primary school students. Rural head teachers, in particular, have shown a consistently favorable attitude toward the program, recognizing its value in promoting primary education.

Key Words: Education, Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Program, Enrollment, Retention, Academic Performance, Literacy.

Introduction:

Education plays a crucial role in every stage of human life, particularly during childhood at the primary level, as it lays the foundation for all future learning. It is at this stage that children begin their formal education, which shapes their physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, and social development. Man, as the supreme creation of God, possesses unique qualities not found in any other living creature. As a rational being, he acts according to reason and judgment, combining traits of both animal instincts and divine potential. Unlike animals, humans have the ability to transcend their base instincts, evolving from lower self to higher self through rationality and divinity. This transformation is only possible through education, as without it, a person remains blind and disconnected from the potential of their true self.

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man—body, mind, and spirit."

The universalization of elementary education in India, meaning the provision of free and compulsory education for all children until they reach the age of 14, is one of the directive principles of the Constitution. The goal was to achieve this by 1960, but it remains an ongoing challenge. However, efforts continue with the aim of achieving this target by 2005. Universalization of education encompasses three key aspects: provision, enrollment, and retention.

Provision refers to ensuring that every child has access to a primary school within a reasonable distance from their home, allowing parents to easily send their children to school. Enrollment focuses on registering every child of school-going age. Retention means ensuring that children stay in school until they complete their primary education. While these objectives are clear, the question remains whether they can be fully achieved, given the obstacles that still exist.

Several factors hinder the universalization of elementary education in India:

1. Sociological Factors: Migration, family growth, early marriages among school-age children, and parental indifference, particularly toward girls' education.



2. Administrative Factors: Insufficient emphasis on primary education, lack of supervisory personnel, wastage and stagnation, and unequal opportunities.
3. Economic Factors: Poverty, low family income, and inadequate financial support from the government.

The Kothari Commission also identified additional barriers to achieving universal elementary education, including the lack of resources, parental illiteracy, indifference to children's education, rapid population growth, resistance to girls' education, and widespread poverty.

In rural India, many families depend on agriculture and forest resources for their livelihood. The socio-economic conditions of these families are often poor, and many parents are illiterate. As they do not see the immediate economic benefits of education, they prioritize income-generating activities for their children over schooling. Even those who understand the value of education often cannot afford to send their children to school due to financial constraints.

To address this issue, it is crucial to motivate both parents and children to prioritize education. Without the active encouragement of parents, enrolling children in school will remain difficult. Incentive schemes aimed at supporting children and their families can help foster this encouragement. Schools play a vital role in shaping the future of the nation, as the children who attend them will eventually form the workforce and contribute to the nation's development. Their health, nutrition, and education will significantly influence the quality of life in the years to come. Therefore, ensuring that all children are enrolled and retained in schools is key to building a strong, prosperous future for the nation.

Education is one of the most critical aspects of human life, particularly during childhood at the primary level, as it establishes the foundation for all future learning. At this stage, children begin their formal education, which plays a vital role in shaping their physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, and social development. Humans, as the supreme creation of God, possess unique qualities that distinguish them from other living beings. Man is a rational being, guided by thought and judgment. He combines the characteristics of both animals and divinity, with the potential for higher self-development. Unlike animals, who are driven by lower instincts, humans have the capacity to transcend these limitations through rationality and divinity. Education is the key to this transformation, as without it, a person is like one who is blind or lifeless.

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man—body, mind, and spirit."

The universalization of elementary education in India means providing free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14. This principle is enshrined in the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution. Originally, the goal was to achieve this by 1960, but despite ongoing efforts, it remains an ongoing challenge. The target is now aimed for 2005. Universalization of education involves three key elements: provision, enrollment, and retention.

Provision refers to ensuring that every child has access to a primary school within a reasonable distance from home, making it easier for parents to send their children to school. Once this provision is made, the next goal is enrollment—registering every child of school-going age. Retention refers to ensuring that children remain in school until they complete their primary education. While these goals are clear, achieving them remains uncertain due to various challenges.

Several obstacles hinder the universalization of elementary education in India:

1. Sociological Factors: Migration, large family sizes, early marriages, and parental apathy toward girls' education.
2. Administrative Factors: Lack of emphasis on primary education, insufficient supervisory personnel, wastage and stagnation, and unequal opportunities.
3. Economic Factors: Poverty, inadequate financial resources from the government, and the low financial capacity of parents.



The Kothari Commission also identified additional causes for the failure to achieve universal elementary education, including the unavailability of adequate resources, parental illiteracy, indifference to education, rapid population growth, resistance to girls' education, and widespread poverty.

In rural India, many people rely on agriculture for their livelihood, and their socio-economic conditions are often poor. Most parents are illiterate and do not understand the long-term value of education. Since education does not offer immediate economic returns, they prefer to have their children work to supplement the family income, reinforcing the family's economic stability. Even those parents who recognize the importance of education often cannot afford to send their children to school due to financial constraints.

For the universalization of education to be successful, both parents and children must be motivated to participate. Without parental encouragement, enrolling children in school will be difficult. Therefore, it is essential to create a supportive environment where both parents and children are incentivized to value education. This can be achieved through various incentive schemes designed to ease the financial burden on families and encourage school attendance.

The children in our schools represent a vital segment of our population. They are our future human resources, who will contribute significantly to the workforce in the coming years. Their health, nutrition, and educational achievements will greatly influence the quality of our nation in the future. Ensuring that every child has access to education is essential to building a prosperous and sustainable future for India.

Statement of the Problem:

The specific focus of the present study is **"An Analysis of the Impact of the Mid-Day Meal Program on Enrollment and Retention of Primary School Children in Ballabgarh."**

Objectives of the Study:

- a) To examine the impact of the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) program on enrollment rates.
- b) To assess the effect of the MDM program on student retention and academic achievement levels.
- c) To gather the opinions of students, teachers, and parents regarding the MDM program.

Research Questions:

- a) Does the MDM program contribute to increasing the enrollment of primary school children?
- b) To what extent has the MDM program facilitated enrollment, retention, and academic achievement among primary school children?

Methodology:

Research methods are essential in the research process as they outline the steps to be followed in addressing a research problem. These steps include formulating the research questions, defining key terms, selecting subjects for investigation, validating data collection tools, gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data, and drawing inferences and generalizations.

Method Used

This study is descriptive in nature. Given the objectives of the research, the researcher has adopted the sample survey method, which is commonly used in such studies. This method is particularly suited for analyzing the current state of the phenomenon under investigation. It aims to assess and generalize findings based on the existing situation.

The sample survey method offers several advantages, including minimal expenses in terms of both time and money, faster execution, and greater accuracy. These benefits influenced the decision to employ the sample survey method for this study.

Sample:



A sample is a smaller subset of a larger population. The key factor in ensuring the reliability and generalizability of the results is the selection of an appropriate sample. For this study, Ballabgarh has been chosen as the study area, and 12 primary schools from the Block have been selected. The sample has been chosen randomly to ensure unbiased representation.

Data Collection:

To assess the impact of the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) program on student enrollment across different grades (Class I to Class V), the study compares enrollment data before (1994-95) and after the introduction of MDM (1995-96). This data is collected from the school enrollment registers.

To examine the impact of MDM on student retention, the researcher compares the number of students enrolled in each class (I-V) before and after the introduction of the MDM program. The researcher also tracks how many students did not appear for the annual examinations in both periods (1994-95 and 1995-96). This information is gathered from the examination attendance registers of the respective schools.

Information on the impact of MDM on enrollment and retention is also collected through discussions with the headmasters of the schools and the village headmen from various areas. Additionally, suggestions from local residents of different villages are included. The investigator administers questionnaires to the headmasters and village headmen of the relevant schools to gather their insights.

Tools:

Research tools play a crucial role in any study. For the present investigation, the researcher has used the following tools: (1) Teacher Schedule, (2) Public Opinion Survey, and (3) School Records.

(a) Teacher Schedule: The researcher developed a schedule for teachers to gather information about their perspectives on the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) program.

(b) Public Opinion Survey: A survey was prepared by the researcher for the village headmen of the areas where the schools are located, in order to gather their opinions on the impact of the MDM program.

(c) School Records: School records, including enrollment and attendance data, were used to gather objective data for the study.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1: Distribution of Headmasters and Headmistresses (Urban and Rural Areas)

Category of Sample	N	Percentage
Headmaster	8	66.67%
Headmistresses	4	33.33%

Table 2: Descriptive Characteristics of Age Levels of Head Teachers

Age Range	Number of Head Teachers	Percentage
35-39	4	33.33%



40-44	1	8.33%
45-49	1	8.33%
50-54	5	41.67%
55-59	1	8.33%

From Table 2, it can be observed that out of the 12 head teachers (both headmasters and headmistresses), 4 teachers (33.33%) are in the age range of 35-39 years, 1 teacher (8.33%) is in the 40-44 range, 1 teacher (8.33%) is in the 45-49 range, 5 teachers (41.67%) are in the 50-54 range, and 1 teacher (8.33%) is in the 55-59 range.

Table 3: Descriptive Characteristics of Qualifications of Head Teachers

Qualification	N	Percentage
E.T. (Elementary Teacher)	4	33.33%
C.T. (Certified Teacher)	4	33.33%
B.A./B.Sc./B.Ed	2	16.67%
M.A., B.Ed.	2	16.67%

From Table 3, it is clear that 4 head teachers (33.33%) have an E.T. qualification, 4 head teachers (33.33%) hold a C.T. qualification, 2 head teachers (16.67%) have a B.A./B.Sc./B.Ed., and 2 head teachers (16.67%) possess an M.A. and B.Ed.

Table 4: Descriptive Characteristics of Teaching Experience

Experience as a Teacher	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years
Number of Teachers	6 (50%)	5 (41.67%)	1 (8.33%)
Experience as Head Teacher	4-8 years	9-13 years	14-18 years
Number of Head Teachers	4 (33.33%)	1 (8.33%)	3 (25%)

From Table 4, it is evident that out of 12 head teachers, 6 (50%) have 5-9 years of teaching experience, 5 (41.67%) have 10-14 years of teaching experience, and 1 (8.33%) has 15-19 years of teaching experience. As head teachers, 4 (33.33%) have 4-8 years of experience, 1 (8.33%) has 9-13 years of experience, 3 (25%) have 14-18 years of experience, 2 (16.67%) have 19-23 years of experience, and 2 (16.67%) have 24-28 years of experience.

Analysis of Teacher Responses on Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Programme

Teacher Challenges Due to MDM Programme

When asked if they face any challenges due to the implementation of the MDM programme, 67% of teachers responded "Yes," while 33% replied "No." It appears that most teachers experience difficulties related to the programme.

The urban teachers report facing more problems compared to rural teachers. One significant issue is the inadequacy of government funding for fuel. While the allocated amount for fuel is sufficient in rural areas, it is not enough in urban areas, where the cost of fuel is higher. This discrepancy causes problems in urban schools.

Another challenge is the shortage of teachers in some schools, with only 2-3 teachers available. Consequently, these teachers are often engaged in cooking and purchasing vegetables, leaving them little time for teaching, which leads to incomplete coverage of the curriculum. Additionally, the rice supplied to schools is often insufficient, and head teachers are sometimes forced



to cover the deficit from their own pockets, which is a significant issue for both urban and rural schools.

Problems Faced by Students Due to MDM Programme

Regarding student-related problems caused by the MDM programme, 25% of teachers responded "Yes" and 75% responded "No." This indicates that the majority of teachers believe there are no significant issues for students due to MDM. However, some teachers mentioned that the quality of the food is subpar, which may contribute to malnutrition among children due to the lack of nutritious food.

MDM's Impact on Student Enrollment

In response to whether MDM helps increase student enrollment, 83% of teachers answered "Yes," while 17% answered "No." This suggests that the MDM programme has a positive impact on increasing enrollment rates in schools.

MDM's Impact on Student Retention

When asked if MDM helps in increasing retention, 59% of teachers responded "Yes," and 41% responded "No." This indicates that while the MDM programme has a partial effect on retention, it is not as effective as it is in promoting enrollment.

MDM's Impact on Academic Achievement

Regarding the effect of MDM on academic achievement, 33% of teachers answered "Yes," and 67% answered "No." This indicates that the MDM programme does not significantly contribute to improving the academic performance of students.

Free Textbooks Distribution

In response to whether free textbooks are provided to students, it was found that the scheme only applies to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students. These students are the primary beneficiaries of this programme.

Free Textbooks' Impact on Enrollment of SC/ST Students

Regarding whether the free textbook scheme helps in increasing enrollment among SC/ST students, 42% of head teachers responded "Yes," while 58% responded "No." This suggests that the free textbook scheme does not significantly contribute to increasing enrollment among SC/ST students.

Item No. 8(iii): Free Textbooks' Impact on Retention of SC/ST Students

When asked if the free textbook programme helps in increasing the retention of SC/ST students, 33% of head teachers responded "Yes," while 67% responded "No." The data suggests that the free textbook scheme does not significantly improve retention rates.

Free Textbooks' Impact on Academic Achievement

In response to whether the free textbook scheme improves the academic achievement of students, 25% of teachers answered "Yes," while 75% answered "No." This indicates that the free textbook programme does not significantly impact students' academic performance.

Scholarship for Primary School Children

It was found that all schools in the area provide scholarships. However, when asked whether the scholarships are given to meritorious students on time, 42% of head teachers responded "Yes," while 58% responded "No." This indicates that scholarships are not always distributed in a timely manner.

Scholarships' Impact on Enrollment

When asked whether scholarships help increase enrollment, 33% of teachers responded "Yes," while 67% responded "No." This suggests that the scholarship programme does not have a significant effect on increasing student enrollment.

Scholarships' Impact on Academic Achievement

Regarding the impact of scholarships on academic achievement, 50% of teachers responded "Yes," while 50% responded "No." This indicates that scholarships have a limited impact on improving students' academic performance.

Survey on MDM Programme

It was found that no survey has been conducted on the MDM programme in the area.



In conclusion, the Mid-Day Meal programme has a positive impact on student enrollment and retention, but it does not significantly contribute to improving students' academic achievements. Similarly, the free textbook and scholarship schemes do not appear to have a substantial impact on enrollment, retention, or academic performance. The implementation of MDM faces several challenges, including resource shortages, teacher shortages, and issues with food quality, but it remains a critical factor in increasing enrollment and retention rates.

Impact of Mid-Day Meals on Enrolment and Retention

Enrolment Analysis in 2013-14

The total number of students enrolled across 12 primary schools during the 2013-14 academic year is shown below:

Class	Enrolment (Number of Students)
I	516
II	456
III	444
IV	432

Enrolment Before the Introduction of the Mid-Day Meal Programme (1994-95)
The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) programme was introduced in 1995. Enrolment data for the 1994-95 academic year, before the MDM programme was implemented, is as follows:

Class	Enrolment (Number of Students)
I	132
II	408
III	396
IV	384
V	372

Enrolment After the Implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Programme (1995-96)
The 1995-96 academic year marks the beginning of MDM programme implementation. Enrolment data for this period is as follows:

Class	Enrolment (Number of Students)
I	516
II	468
III	456
IV	444
V	432

Percentage Increase in Enrolment After the Implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Programme
The table below shows the percentage increase in enrolment for each class after the introduction of the MDM programme:

Class	Enrolment Before MDM	Enrolment After MDM	Percentage Increase
I	432	516	19.44%
II	408	468	14.7%
III	396	456	15.15%
IV	384	444	15.62%
V	372	432	16.12%

Retention Before the Implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Programme (1994-95)
Retention data before the implementation of the MDM programme is presented below:



Class	Retention (Number of Students)
I	348
II	324
III	276
IV	252
V	240

The data clearly indicates a positive impact of the Mid-Day Meal programme on student enrolment and retention. Significant increases in enrolment percentages were observed across all classes following the implementation of the MDM programme, demonstrating its role as an effective incentive for school attendance and participation.

Conclusion:

1. The introduction of the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) programme has led to a significant increase in student enrolment percentages.
2. Parents are now more inclined to send their children to school due to the implementation of the MDM scheme.
3. The percentage of student retention has also increased as a result of the Mid-Day Meal programme.
4. Village headmen have expressed their strong support for the introduction of the MDM scheme at the primary school level.
5. The MDM programme has effectively enhanced attendance and enrolment rates among economically disadvantaged students.
6. Rural teachers and village headmen collectively exhibit a positive attitude toward the Mid-Day Meal scheme.
7. Rural head teachers, in particular, have shown a favorable outlook on the introduction of the MDM programme at the primary level.

Recommendation:

1. Free textbooks should be provided at the start of the academic session.
2. Merit-based scholarships should be awarded to primary school students of all classes in a timely manner.
3. Free textbooks should not be limited to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students but should also be extended to economically disadvantaged students from the general category.
4. The meals provided under the Mid-Day Meal programme should be of high quality and sufficient quantity.
5. Additional staff should be assigned to primary schools to support the implementation of the programme.
6. All materials used in the preparation of Mid-Day Meals should undergo thorough medical inspection.
7. Higher authorities should conduct regular inspections of primary schools to ensure proper implementation of the programme.
8. Students should not be compelled to bring utensils from home for the Mid-Day Meal programme.
9. Village committees should oversee the programme's implementation with integrity and diligence.
10. Food distribution under the programme should be carried out efficiently and fairly.

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