

Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Primary Education in India: Quality Issues

Uma

Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Abstract- Improving the conditions of the underprivileged and backward has been the major issues while forming the policies of India as a welfare state. The target is children in many policies, acts and also in schemes. The Government of India started Mid-day meal (MDM) scheme in the government primary schools with the objective of improving health of the poor children. In addition, Right to Education implemented in April 2010 to enable these children the education starting from the age of 6 up to the age of 14 years. Though the quality has been gaining importance in all domains, yet, in both the quality factor seems to be missing. The paper will bring out the quality issues related to these two (Mid-day Meal scheme and Right to Education Act, 2010).

Index Terms- MDM scheme, Right to Education, Quality issues.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in one's life. Though, the education of a child starts with the home itself, yet, the primary school is the first step towards formal schooling in India. India has one of the largest child-population of the world. Half of them are disadvantaged and belong to the families which are economically impoverished. They cannot afford good health care facilities and expensive educational institutes. The Government of India started the Mid Day Meal scheme and implemented Right to Education Act, 2010 to provide nutritional food and free education respectively to these poor children of India. Hence, the government primary schools are the only hope for these children to get free food and education. Though, the Mid day meal scheme has been implemented years back (1966) as compared to Right to Education which has been implemented in the year 2010. Unfortunately, the factor of quality in both is absent. Since in the past few months many incidents were reported in which guidelines to ensure hygiene were kept aside while preparation of the mid day meal scheme. Further, the education in these schools suffers due to MDM scheme. The following paragraphs will bring out the situation of Government Primary School in India with respect to Right to Education Act, 2010 and the MDM scheme.

A number of incidents were highlighted in the media where carelessness was reported while preparing food in the schools. One of the notable incidents of carelessness was reported in the Samran district of Bihar. On July 2013, 23 children died after eating mid day meal in the school. It was reported that instead of putting edible oil the insecticide was used for cooking. The situation in other districts of Bihar was not different where maggot-infested wheat and rice and rotten vegetables were being

used for preparation of food. Further, the usage of toilet water to wash utensils of food in a primary school of Panchkula, A dead lizard was found in the food in a primary school of Haryana and many more. These incidents have become common. Furthermore, the food was being prepared in open in primary schools of Mohali. Hence, non-seriousness in the implementation of the scheme is directly observed in these cases. Moreover, the preparation of the food in the schools directly affects the provision of education in the schools.

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology included both the secondary data and primary data. For secondary data, recent government and non-government reports on primary education, government websites, newspaper articles and journals were relied upon. For primary data, random sample of teachers were taken from primary schools of mohali, panchkula and Chandigarh. The parents of the children of these primary schools were also interviewed.

III. MAIN PROBLEMS OF THE MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME

MDM scheme is one of the largest centrally funded schemes which provide free one time meal to the students in government primary schools. 11 crore of children are being provided one time meal everyday. The programme is considered of immense benefit since it provides both nutrition and education to the children. However, how far the scheme is really being taken seriously by the government and its officials is the issue. The provision involves the preparation and distribution within the school premises. The main findings during the survey of primary schools of Mohali and Panchkula were as follows:

1. There was no proper kitchen to prepare food in the primary schools.
2. Sitting arrangement for students was either in the classes or open grounds which invited flies and other insects.
3. The cooks in the schools didn't know the guidelines to ensure hygiene.
4. The water used for cooking food was not wholesome.
5. The grievance redressal mechanism for the complaints of MDM scheme was not known to the parents.

The teachers in these schools agreed of lack of infrastructural facilities for these schools. The teachers said that the schools lack the provision of proper kitchen though the scheme of food distribution was there. Further, the teachers told that the cooks hired for cooking, were illiterate or hardly know to

read basic hindi or punjabi. These people didn't know about the guidelines issued by the MHRD to ensure the hygiene.

Hence, it was concluded that MDM scheme though has been implemented but is not being monitored properly. The scheme has given one way provision. The feedback from the students and parents should be taken regularly. Further, how MDM scheme is affecting the education in the schools.

IV. QUALITY AND EDUCATION

The Right to Education guarantees free education for the children of age group of 6-14 years. However, the quality through this act is not enabled. According to Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), in 2010, 46.3% children of class V could not read the text of class II. In 2011 and 2012 this percentage increased to 51.8% and 53.2% respectively. This is an alarming situation in terms of quality being offered in these schools.

The interviews with the teachers in Primary Schools brought out the following obstacles to ensure quality in the education. Teacher responsibilities in the Primary schools with special reference to MDM scheme: The foremost duty of the teachers has become the supervision and distribution of food among the students. Though the supervision does not improve the quality of food, yet, teachers get distracted from the main duty of teaching. Further, many teachers added that the students after eating tend to sleep. The higher officials didn't bother about the teaching or learning of the students. According to one of the teachers they clearly say that 'Let the children sleep. They will develop better physically'. Hence, distributing food and guarding these children has become the prime duty of these teachers. This neglects the main duty of teaching in these schools.

To add to the issue of quality education for the students, they have to be given passing grades in these classes. The results must be 100% pass, whether they learn the subject matter or not. The teachers were unable to justify their profession of teaching and evaluating a child in these schools. Further, it was stated by a senior teacher that the 'quality is certainly being compromised in education. The students get pass whether they study or not. This will make them suffer in their life later. When there are competitive exams and entrance tests for medical or engineering. If we promote the students every year then the competitive exams held should also be made cleared by all the candidates appearing. Why don't they pass all the candidates?? It was stated by one of the retired teachers of a reputed primary school in Chandigarh.

Hence, it can be concluded that the teachers in these schools were not doing their primary duty of teaching due to many duties assigned to them by the higher officials. Major one of them was the MDM supervision and distribution. Further, the teachers were passing the children in the exams without making them learn because of the pressure of the policy makers and executors. This hampered their role and brought forward the fact that the quality in education was being compromised in the primary schools in India.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Therefore, from the above discussion it was concluded that the clients of government primary schools were the children who belonged to the poor families. Though, the objectives and potential benefits of the MDM scheme were mainly: increased enrolment, attendance and retention; improved child nutrition; and social equity. Though, the enrolment statistics have improved and the dropouts might have reduced however, quality in education and food has also decreased. Since, proper care is not being taken care while preparing the food and teachers are involved in various other duties. The quality has to be taken care in primary education in terms of class size, child-centered teaching process, and continuous assessment of learning of students and so on.

Further, the meaning of school for these kids and their parents is more of food rather than education. Since the prime duty of teaching was not being done in these schools. The teachers were doing everything except imparting the education. Furthermore, the quality of education was absent as children were being passed to next class every year. The achievements of these programs were being measured quantity wise rather than quality wise.

The recommended solution for these primary schools is to change the role of government sector in these programs. The preparation of food for the students should be contracted out to the non-government organizations. The negligence should result to the cancellation of the contracts. Further, the government's role should be more of monitoring and regulating these organizations. In addition, the contact numbers of redressal mechanism for mid day meal scheme should be made available with the parents representatives and teachers in the schools. This will help the teachers to bring back to their main work of teaching.

Further, to improve quality in the education, the students should be told the importance of education. Small plays and entertaining games should be organized for the children to develop to their potential. The evaluation of a student should be done on the bases his performance. If the students can not be failed then some criteria should be adopted that students get promoted to next class only when they have learnt about the previous. The chance to improve the grades in previous classes should be given to the students. The teachers should give special attention to the weak students. As a result, they learn in the school in a better manner. The methodology of teaching should be developed through organizing workshops. The parents of these children are illiterate; therefore, the onus to make children learn lies on the shoulders of the teachers. Hence, the teachers' role and responsibilities should be clearly defined. The teachers must be engaged in their prime duty of teaching only. Hence, redefining the role of teachers in these primary schools is the need of the hour.

REFERENCES

- [1] Annual Status of Education Report of 2010, 2011 and 2012
- [2] www.tribune.com
- [3] www.thehindu.com
- [4] <http://www.accountabilityindia.in/accountabilityblog/2568-mid-day-meal-scheme-story-so-far>

- [5] www.unicef.org/india/education_3614.htm
- [6] <http://forbesindia.com/article/briefing/primary-education-in-india-needs-a-fix/35287/1#ixzz2h7RKJbqD>
- [7] http://www.isid.ac.in/~pu/conference/dec_10_conf/Papers/RajiJayaraman.pdf
- [8] www.mhrd.in
- [9] www.planningcommission.in

AUTHORS

First Author – Uma (Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration, PU, Chandigarh), Email Id: uma.sharma106@gmail.com