

# Perceptions of In-Charge Teachers of Mid-Day Meal Scheme in India (Case Study of UT Chandigarh)

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper is based on a field study conducted on 50 Mid-Day Meal Scheme in-charge teachers in 50 government schools across the Union Territory of Chandigarh. The objectives of the study were to understand the consumption pattern of the cooked Mid-Day Meal by the school going children under Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The majority of the respondent teachers felt that the quality of mid-day meal is average, and it has positive impact in terms of increase in enrolment and attendance but indifferent about increase in attention towards studies. Some of the children do not take food due to reasons like lack of parent's permission, food not tasty, repetition of the same food, distribution of food much earlier than lunch time. There was no unanimity among the teachers, whether the implementation of Mid-Day Meal was satisfactory or not by the Chandigarh administration. The in-charge teachers stated that Chandigarh administration spends reasonably large amount of money as subsidy, but it is not sufficient if quality of food and service delivery is not improved. Involvement of parents is necessary in setting up menu. There is a need to reduce infrastructural bottlenecks and, instead of distribution of food from the centralised kitchens, it is better to decentralise kitchens for better supervision. There is also a need to enhance nutritional standards of the meal.*

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## Introduction

This paper aimed to know the perceptions of in-charge teachers of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) with regard to the issues concerning consumption pattern of the cooked mid-day meal by the school children. Healthy children are better able than sick or malnourished to go to school and learn (World Bank, 2014). The

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decision to send a child to school, like other household investment decisions, can be made by cost-benefit framework (Dreze and Kingdon, 2001). Most of the children from low socio-economic background suffer from under nutrition, more often they dropout from schools at an early age, which shows direct impact on their personality development and indirectly affects human capital formation of the nation. Poor enrolment and higher school dropout rate are attributed to the poor nutritional status of the children compounded by poor socio-economic conditions, child labour and lack of motivation (Ayeni and Adelabu, 2012).

The roots of mid-day meal programme can be traced back to the pre-independence era. It was for the first time introduced in 1925 in Madras Corporation by the British administration. The Government of India initiated the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) as centrally sponsored scheme on 15 August 1995. Due to extension of this scheme to upper primary school children in 2007, it is called as National Programme of Mid-Day Meals in Schools. MDMS serves hot cooked mid-day meal (lunch) on working days to the school children across Classes I–VIII in government-aided schools, Special Training Centers (STC) and *Madrasas* and *Maktabs* supported under the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*. Next to public distribution system, cooked mid-day meal scheme is the second largest food security programme in India. Therefore, it is covered by the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013.

The scheme aimed to achieve the objectives of enhancing enrolment, retention, attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children. MDMS not only encourage enrolment by lowering cost of schooling by providing an implicit subsidy to the parents, but also improve child nutrition and learning. Moreover mid-day meals have an important social value of promoting equality. As children learn to sit together and share a common meal, one can expect some erosion of caste prejudices and class inequality (Government of India, 2006). Studies indicate that there is positive relationship between nutritional status and educational development. Right to life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution supports children right to food. Central and state governments do share financial liability for the implementation of the scheme. The coverage of the scheme among number of schools and number of beneficiaries has increased considerably.

In addition to the cost of food grains, MDMS involves two other major inputs, namely; cost of cooking and provision of essential infrastructure. Cooking cost per child is not static; it is revised by the government in accordance with price index. Cooking cost will be borne by the Central and State Governments/North Eastern States/UTs in different proportions (Centre and the North Eastern states on 90:10 bases and with other States/UTs on 75:25 bases). Cooking cost for upper primary classes is kept higher than primary classes due to the requirement of larger quantities for the former.

The nutritional content in mid-day meal is to supplement 480 calories worth of food for children studying in primary classes and 720 calories worth of food for upper primary classes. The daily protein supplementation is 12 grams and 20 grams for primary and upper primary classes, respectively. The daily requirement of food items for primary classes are — food grains rice/wheat 100 grams, pulses 20 grams, vegetables 50 grams, oil and fat 5 grams, salt and condiments as per requirement, whereas for upper primary classes food grains rice/wheat 150 grams, pulses 30 grams, vegetables 75 grams, oil and fat 7.5 grams, salt and condiments as per requirement (Government of India, 2015).

## **The Problem, Objectives and Methodology of Research**

### ***The Problem***

The school dropout rate, wastage and stagnation are still high among children from low income groups. They suffer from anaemia and mal-nutrition due to non availability of adequate quantity of nutritious food. Thus, making available tasty and nutritious food to the school children is a matter of great concern.

### ***Objectives***

The objectives of the study included the followings:

- (i) To study the consumption pattern of cooked mid-day meal by the school going children.
- (ii) To study the opinion of mid-day meal in-charge teachers on implementation of the scheme particularly with regard to providing cooked mid-day meal by the government.
- (iii) To suggest policy measures for better implementation of mid-day meal scheme.

### **Data Sources**

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaire by conducting personal interview at the place of work (schools).

### **Sampling Method**

Clustered Simple Random Sampling method was used.

### **Sample Size**

Fifty mid-day meal in-charge teachers both males and females were selected as respondents from 50 government model (english medium); non-model (hindi medium) primary, secondary and senior secondary schools across the city of Chandigarh (three administrative regions) for the study. Out of the 50 schools, 45 schools were getting MDM from centralised kitchens (hotels), while the remaining 5 schools had kitchens in the school itself.

### **Selection of the Study Area**

Chandigarh city was selected for the study, because it occupies third rank in per capita income among the Indian cities and, thus, attracts large number of migrant poor people from different parts of India. Children of poor people generally study in government schools, hence it is felt important to know the perceptions of mid-day meal in-charge teachers for better implementation of MDMS to enhance learning abilities of the children.

### **Reference Period**

The field survey is carried out during 2015.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Beneficiary Children**

Among the eligible (studying Class I–VII), about 64.26 per cent of the children studying in non-model (hindi medium) schools and about 57.22 per cent children studying in model (english medium) schools were the consumers of mid-day meals. Children studying in model schools are economically better than those studying in non-model schools. This may be the reason for this gap. On the whole, about 60.60 per cent children were the consumers of mid-day meal, an index of under utilisation.

### **Supply Source and Quality of Food**

Among 50 sample schools, the highest majority of the schools (N=45, 90 per cent) were getting food from three centralised kitchens (hotels) located in Chandigarh, while the remaining five (10 per cent) of the schools had their own kitchens in their respective schools. Keeping in view the experience of getting food from centralised kitchens (hotels being managed by government), based on punctuality, maintenance of hygiene, quality and quantity of food supplied, teachers assigned ranks to the three hotels. A large majority of the MDM in-charge teachers (84.44 per cent) assigned first rank to Chandigarh Institute of Hotel Management, Sector 42, about (84.44 per cent) teachers assigned second rank to Ambedkar Institute of Hotel Management, Sector 42, while (86.66 per cent) teachers assigned third rank to Shivalik Hotel Sector 17. Teachers stated a number of reasons for assigning rank 3 to Shivalik Hotel. The large majority (51.11 per cent) of the teachers stated poor quality is the main reason, about (17.77 per cent) teachers stated three reasons, i.e., poor quality, lesser quantity, less hygienic, and about (15.55 per cent) teachers stated food either over cooked / under cooked, while the remaining teachers expressed more than one reason as said above.

### **Impact of MDMS on Enrolment, Attendance and Attention Towards Studies**

Majority of the teachers perceived positive impact of MDM on increase in enrolment and attendance. Table 1 indicates that 22 teachers said that MDM is the reason for increase in enrolment, 34 teachers opined that MDM has made positive impact on increase in attendance, and 14 teachers stated that MDM is the reason for increase in attention towards studies.

**Table 1**  
**Impact of MDM on Enrolment, Attendance and Attention towards Studies**

Impact Status (1)	Number of MDM In-charge Teachers (Number of Sample Schools) (2)	Due to MDM (3)	Cannot say due to MDM (4)	Indifferent (5)	Total (3+4+5)
	Enrolment Increased?				
Yes	40	22	18	0	40

No	10	NA	NA	0	
<b>Attendance Increased?</b>					
Yes	48	34	14	0	48
No	2	NA	NA	0	
<b>Attention towards Studies Increased?</b>					
Yes	39	14	23	2	39
No	11	NA	NA	0	

### **Perception about Consumption and Quality of MDM**

The in-charge teachers assigned different reasons for certain proportion of the entitled school going children not taking mid-day meal. It is clear from Table 2 that the larger majority (36 per cent) of the teachers stated three reasons, namely, lack of parents' permission, food not tasty, repetition of the same type of menu, while 26 per cent of the teachers expressed only one reason, i.e., repetition of the same food. Teachers stated different reasons for students' not taking MDM. About 26 per cent of teachers revealed that those who attended school take meal, and about 12 per cent teachers said that children bring food from their homes, children prefer to buy food which is available in the school premises and in the market, food distribution too early, i.e., much before than lunch time.

**Table 2**  
**Reasons for Entitled Children Not Consuming MDM**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Number of MDM In-charge Teachers (Number of Sample Schools)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lack of parents permission, food not tasty, repetition of the same food	18	36%
Repetition of the same food	13	26%
Those who attended school, avail meal	13	26%

Bring food from home	4	8%
Preference of food other than being supplied through mdms	1	2%
Food distribution too early i.E., Earlier than lunch time	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

As regards the level of satisfaction on consumption of MDM, about 34 per cent of the teachers said that they were satisfied with the way in which Chandigarh administration implementing MDMS. In contrast, about 34 per cent teachers said that the need of improvement of quality and quantity (not satisfied), and about 24 per cent teachers opined that there is a need to change the menu (not satisfied). Based on the above information it can be concluded that, the major proportion of the teachers were not satisfied. It were only in-charge teachers of school based kitchens (8 per cent) who expressed full satisfaction (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Level of Satisfaction about the Status of Implementation of MDM in Chandigarh**

Opinion	Number of MDM In-Charge Teachers (Number of Sample Schools)	Percentage
Satisfied	17	34%
Need improvement of quality and quantity (not satisfied)	17	34%
Change menu (not satisfied)	12	24%
Fully satisfied	4	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey Data

**(e) Reasons for Wastage and Non-Consumption of food by the Children**

Table 4 reflects that the larger proportion (66 per cent) of the teachers said that children don't waste food. However, all the teachers were not unanimous with regard to the reasons for wastage of food. While 16 per cent revealed no taste, 6 per cent teachers stated that they don't allow children to waste, 4 per cent said food not well cooked, and 4 per cent of the teachers expressed thin consistency of pulses (more water content).

**Table 4**  
**Reasons for Wastage of MDM by the Children**  
**from their Respective Share**

Reasons	Number of MDM In-charge Teachers (Number of Sample Schools)	Percentage
Don't waste	33	66%
No taste	8	16%
Don't allow to waste	3	6%
Don't like	2	4%
Not well cooked	2	4%
Thin consistency of pulses (more water content)	2	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 5 shows that majority (34 per cent) of the teachers stated that children were not interested to eat MDM due to no-taste, 26 per cent said children don't like menu, 10 per cent stated repetition of pulses, and only 10 per cent teachers said that they like the whole menu. Thin consistency of pulses (more water content), no variety, no vegetables in pulses, not appealing for students, not a good combination of menu, repetition of pulses, eat similar food at home were the other reasons.

**Table 5**  
**Reasons for No Interest to Consume MDM**

Menu Not Interested	Number of MDM In-charge Teachers (Number of Sample Schools)	Percentage
Don't like	13	26%
No taste	17	34%
Repetition of pulses	5	10%
Whole menu is good	5	10%
Not properly cooked	3	6%
Thin consistency of pulses	2	4%
No vegetables in pulses	1	2%
Not appealing for students	1	2%
Not good combination of menu	1	2%
Not stated any reason	1	2%
Same food available at home also	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>



## **Conclusion**

The analysis shows that a large majority of the children studying in non-model (hindi medium) schools availed MDM than the children studying in model schools. The teachers perceived that MDMS has positive impact on enrolment, attendance and retention. Low quality of food, and improper cooking are the reasons for not consuming meals by all the entitled children. Majority of the teachers said that there is a need of improvement in quality and quantity of MDM. Mere implementation of Mid-Day Meal Scheme will not give fruitful results, unless timely necessary measures are initiated to bridge the existing drawbacks. Food menu should be maintained in accordance with the interests of children without compromising nutritional values. Food should be prepared in the school itself for better supervision and serve it fresh, which will attract large number of children. Parents' views should be taken into consideration while fixing menu and timings of the food. Licence should be given to food supplying hotels on year to year basis based on their performance. Education department should take timely feedback from the children, in-charge teachers and principals about the implementation of Mid-day Meal Scheme and take effective measures for further improvement.

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