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Facilitating an significant role of special educators on implementation of mid-day-meal scheme for students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive classroom: A study of Kasargod district in Kerala

Fr. Baiju Thomas and Dr. S Logesh Kumar

Abstract

A meal to a child is an offering to the God

A study is conducted on a significant role of special educators (SE) on implementation of mid-day meal (MDM) scheme for students with intellectual disabilities (SwIDs) in the inclusive classroom: a study of Kasargod district in Kerala. Education is vital for the progress of human potential. State governments devote a significant portion of their limited resources to providing educational opportunities in the country. A nation's cornerstone is education. If children are to be considered tomorrow's leaders, then ensuring a high-quality education is the best way to ensure a nation's potential success. While people are born learners, school-level education requires a holistic approach under proper guidance and supervision because students at this level are not mature enough to highlight the value of education. The MDMS has a significant effect on students, not just in terms of enrolment, but also in terms of daily class participation. The MDMS had demonstrated to be an effective way to decrease high dropout rates among children from underprivileged backgrounds while also ensuring their nutritional needs. The successful implementation of MDMS at the school level relies heavily on special educators. The research focuses on the obstacles special educators face while implementing MDMS. The descriptive analysis method of survey was used. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique. The sample size was 34 special educators chosen randomly from special schools in Kerala's Kasargod district. The primary data was obtained using a self-made questionnaire. Simple statistical techniques such as percentages were used to analyze the data. This study looks into the essence and effect of a mid-day meal initiative on SwIDs' academic achievement in a few special schools in Kerala's Kasargod district. All of the above-mentioned factors are in the targeted plan in the report to create an extensive MDMS assessment form. MDMS is essential to enhance school attendance, especially among girls: in most studies, girls' enrollment rates have expanded by a far larger number than boys' enrolments. The findings of the study revealed that overall MDMS accessibility is closely associated with students' access to MDMS in their schools, and overall MDMS accessibility also brings with it several advantages, including lower malnutrition levels. Moreover, as children from different classes and social classes engage, MDMS facilitates and improves social interaction by managing to erode caste prejudices and cultivating a culture of social equality.

Keywords: special educators, med-day meal scheme, inclusive classrooms, and SwIDs

Introduction

Education is critical for the growth of human potential. State governments spend a large portion of their scarce resources to provide access to education across the world. Despite these efforts, the target of achieving a hundred percent, because of the inherent socio-economic factors present in culture, universalization of elementary education seems to be a far toward ahead. Learning is one of the most important factors in making societal, economical, and democratic transformation a reality. For both economic and social development, a well-educated populace who has information, attitudes, and skills is required. One of the most potent weapons in the fight for social mobility and a significant part of creating a just and equal society is education. The purpose of education is to provide the abilities and skills that are crucial for long-term economic prosperity. Education helps create a national identity and social harmony by serving as a societal integrator (Narad, 2016) [3].

The MDMS Scheme was founded on the belief that "children cannot reflect on learning if they are forced to sit in class with starvation diets." The scheme is essential to increasing elementary school enrollment, attendance, and retention while also enhancing children's nutrient intake. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme had proven to be a successful way to reduce high dropout rates among children from economically disadvantaged families while also meeting their nutritional requirements. Special educators play a key role in the successful implementation of MDMS at the school level. The study focuses on the problems faced by teachers in the implementation of MDMS. The 'Mid-Day Meals Scheme' has two goals: to ensure that children are fed and to enable them to attend school. Non-food costs such as heating, transporting, and availability of food grains to schools, as well as the purchase of vitamins are mandatory. The 'Mid-Day Meals Scheme' was first established in 1995. To supply prepared lunches to primary school kids, state governments, who were responsible for implementing the reforms, were given two years to put in place the appropriate mechanisms.

Mid-Day Meal Scheme in the State of Kerala

When the Indian government initiated the scheme as a nationally-funded program in 1995, the Government of Kerala agreed to continue with its existing platform. In India, the elementary school meal program is known as the MDM scheme. On the 15th of August 1995, former Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao initiated the MDM scheme for the very first time in India to counter classroom malnutrition and boost the dietary intake of elementary school children (Saini. S. K.2016) [7]. Kerala was a forerunner in implementing the scheme, by doing so in 1984, long even before central Govt did. For the very first time in the state, the act was established in LP Schools in 222 coastal villages with a majority of fishermen. In 1985, the program was developed to include all Lower Elementary Schools (grades I through IV), and in 1987-88, it was modified to include all Upper Primary and secondary schools (grades V through VII) in the province. The MDM scheme was revamped in 2004, and it now includes the availability of prepared, healthy MDM to secondary school students, as per a Supreme Court order. In 2007-08, the Scheme was eventually expanded to include learners in grades VIII and up. The MDM scheme is the largest global lunch program system, and it is in place for primary and upper primary school students across India. The MDMS served more than 104 million students in 2012-2013, and government entities built a major infrastructure to feeding them (Aswany. P.A. 2017). The scheme's main goal is to increase elementary school enrollment and participation by reducing classroom undernourishment, enhancing socialization among children of all caste systems and religions, and combating underfeeding (Nangia. A & Poonam, 2011) [6]. The scheme's purpose is to ensure whether individuals do not just receive food from the government, but also that they eat a popular dish at a

convenient area within their corresponding school grounds, fostering respectful relations, mutual trust, healthier friendships, and social harmony among them.

The Statement of Problem

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM) was launched by the Indian government to raise school attendance and improve nutrient intake among primary school-aged children. It was presumed that these enhancements would result in improved academic achievement for the students. Even so, some recent reports show a decline in rural primary school enrollment (GoR, 2010b; Mehta, 2011). The MDM scheme has become an integral feature of primary education, and participation, enrollment, and attendance have both enhanced dramatically in Lower and Upper Primary schools as a result of the scheme's popularity. Even though the MDM is served daily in these colleges, this has happened. This necessitates a deeper investigation into the role of the Mid-Day Meal scheme in growing school attendance, enhancing nutrient intake, and enhance learning results for children who gain. Therefore, the study entitled: "Facilitating a significant role of special educators on implementation of a med-day-meal scheme for students with intellectual disabilities in the inclusive classroom: a study of Kasargod district in Kerala".

Objectives of the study

1. To find out the accessibility of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) for students with intellectual in an inclusive setting in Kasargod district of Kerala.
2. To find out the advantages of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) from the special educators responsible for providing inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities in the Kasargod district of Kerala.

Research Questions

1. How far Mid-Day Meal scheme (MDMS) is accessible for students with intellectual disabilities in an inclusive setting in the Kasargod district of Kerala?
2. What are the advantages of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) for students with intellectual disabilities from the point of view of special educators working in an inclusive setting in the Kasargod district of Kerala?

Research Design

To investigate the difficulties faced by special educators in educating SwIDs in inclusive classroom environments, the research used an exploratory approach with a descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design is a well-organized method of obtaining data to explain special educators' perceptions on the issues they encounter when educating SwIDs in inclusive classrooms. Special educators play a key role in the successful implementation of MDMS at the school level. The study focuses on the problems faced by teachers in the implementation of MDMS. A survey method of descriptive research was used.

Table 1: Distribution of Special educators based on: age, qualification, experience, salary, locality, gender and types of schools

Variables	Groups	Category	N	%
Age	1	Below 30 years	3	9.1
	2	31- 40years	12	36.4
	3	Above 40 years	18	54.5
		Total	33	100.0
Qualification	1	Post Graduate	18	54.5
	2	Graduate	8	24.2
	3	Diploma	7	21.2
		Total	33	100.0
Experience	1	Below five years	4	12.1
	2	5-10 years	7	21.2
	3	Above 10 years	22	66.7
		Total	33	100.0
Salary	1	Below 10,000	13	39.4
	2	11,000 to 20,000	4	12.1
	3	21,000 to 30,000	16	48.5
		Total	33	100.0
Locality of School	1	Urban	9	27.3
	2	Semi Urban	10	30.3
	3	Rural	14	42.4
		Total	33	100.0
Types of School	1	Govt. Aided	11	33.3
	2	Government	3	9.1
	3	Private	19	57.6
		Total	33	100.0
Gender	1	Male	6	18.2
	2	Female	27	81.8
		Total	33	100.0

Sampling Method

The sample was chosen using a targeted sampling technique. The sample size consisted of 33 special educators chosen at random from special schools in Kasargod, Kerala. The primary data was collected using a self-made questionnaire. This study aimed to identify the rights and duties of 33 special educators, as well as the difficulties they faced in preparing, instructing, and tracking student success in district special schools.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were provided to the teachers by the researcher, who gave them plenty of time to complete them. On the same day, the questionnaires were retrieved after they were completed.

Data Analysis

Data were collected from 33 certified special educators from fifteen elementary special schools in the district. Simple statistical techniques such as percentages were used to analyze the data. The information was gathered, coded, and evaluated by the study's goals. Frequency and percentage tables were used to present the analysis and findings.

Statistical Analysis

The data entry was done in MS excel. Statistical analysis was done with the help of SPSS 20. Descriptive statistical analysis was represented through percentages, bar diagrams, pie charts, tables, etc.

Major Findings of the Study

1. How far Mid-Day Meal scheme (MDMS) is accessible for students with intellectual disabilities in an inclusive setting in the Kasargod district of Kerala?

To find the level of accessibility of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) for students with intellectual disabilities in an inclusive setting in Kasargod district of Kerala, the respondents are asked 10 questions on a five-point Likert scale. The responses are scored as 1 for 'Strongly disagree', 2 for 'Disagree', 3 for 'Uncertain', 4 for 'Agree', and 5 for 'Strongly agree'. The total score of the 10 questions for all 33 respondents is found out, based on which we calculate the mean % score of level of accessibility of Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) for students were calculated.

This score is classified into one of the **four groups**:

1. Poor or low if the mean % score is less than 35%,
2. Average if the mean % score is between 35 to 50 percent,
3. Good or medium if the mean % score lies in the interval 50 to 75% and
4. Excellent or high if the mean % score is above 75%.

A one-sample Z test is carried out to test the significance. The following table gives the Mean, SD, Mean % Score and Z value of the variable considered. (Loyd, B. H., & R. R. Abidin. R. R. (1985) ^[2]. Revision of the Parent Stress Index. Journal of Pediatric Psychiatry, 10(2), 169).

Table 2: Mean, Standard deviation and z value for Accessibility of Mid-Day Meal scheme (MDMS)

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean % score	CV	z	p value
Accessibility	33	22.82	9.11	45.64	39.90	-1.377	0.178

Interpretations

The mean percentage score level of accessibility of Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) for students with intellectual in an inclusive setting in Kasargod district of Kerala is 45.64% which indicates that level of accessibility of Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is average. This score shows that the value is more than 20% above the threshold. To identify whether or not the sample information that we observe is distributed throughout the population, or to determine if the accessibility of the MDMS program is standard. We will apply the one-sample Z test to find out if our hypothesis is correct. This is demonstrated in Table 1. The p-value from the table is more than 0.05, which means the test was not significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that MDMS accessibility in Kasargod district of Kerala for students with intellectual disabilities is equal to half, which is 50%.

Table 3: Mean, Standard deviation and z value for advantages of Mid-Day Meal scheme (MDMS)

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean % score	CV	z	p value
Advantage	33	21.76	7.80	43.52	35.86	-2.387	0.023

Interpretations

The mean percentage score of level of advantages of Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) from the special educators responsible for providing inclusive education for students with intellectual disability in Kasargod district of Kerala is 43.52% which indicate that level advantages of Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in Kasargod district of Kerala is average. The CV shows that this score is unstable because the value is over 20% To verify whether the degree of benefits of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is average. To verify the hypothesis, we utilize a single sample Z test and the result is in Table 1.3. The p-value is less than 0.05, which implies that the test is significant. We can therefore assume that the benefits provided to the students with intellectual disabilities in Kasargod district of Kerala by special educators are 50% less than average.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in light of current educational trends:

1. The study recommends that the MDM scheme should provide nutritious food to all female students so that they can improve their mental and physical health.
2. The study recommends that the MDM scheme's charge and class teachers should inspect the food themselves to ensure that the quality is not harmful to the students.
3. The study recommends that the principal and all educators must allow students to take the MDM scheme as necessary.
4. The study recommends that educators should be commended for instilling positive principles such as hand washing, correct spacing, collaboration, and exchanging.
5. The principal should make an effort to visit each as well as every classroom to evaluate the food and determine the learners' worth.

Suggestions for further studies

1. The study has been fixed only on 34 samples. More effort can be made to conduct on large samples.
2. A similar study can be conducted on diverse areas of disabilities.
3. More than one District may be taken for the study.

2. What are the advantages of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) for students with intellectual disabilities from point of view of special educators working in an inclusive setting in the Kasargod district of Kerala?

To find the level of accessibility of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) for students with intellectual disabilities in an inclusive setting in Kasargod district of Kerala, the respondents are asked 10 questions on five-point Likert scale. When it comes to response, replies are graded on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 = "Strongly disagree", 2 = "Disagree," 3 = "Uncertain," 4 = "Agree," and 5 = "Strongly agree. The overall score of the 10 questions for all 33 respondents is calculated, from which we derive the mean percentage score of the program's level of advantages (MDMS).

4. The parallel study can be conducted on diverse groups of respondents.
5. The same study can be conducted in government schools may be taken for the study.

Delimitation of the study

1. The study will be limited only to the Kasargod district of Kerala.
2. The time & resources of study as limited.
3. The study was carried out only on 34 special educators.

Conclusion

As being one of the nation's biggest school-based feeding projects, the Kasargod District of Kerala, the MDMS system, enhanced the enrollment of children and their nutritional status by decreasing their malnutrition rates. In the implementation of the MDMS program in schools, special educators display a major role in ensuring clarity and truthfulness in all aspects. In light of these data, we discovered that the presence of MDMS in schools closely associates with accessibility to MDMS in general, and access to MDMS, regardless of where it is found, comes with various advantages, including a reduced level of malnutrition. Moreover, because the MDMS fosters and promotes social contact by eliminating gender stereotypes and constructing a concept of social equality, children from many socioeconomic classes and backgrounds participate in MDMS programs and learn how to connect with each other in inclusive settings.

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