

THE PM POSHAN SCHEME AND ITS IMPACT ON DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract

The PM POSHAN Scheme is a significant social initiative in India, substantially contributing to the educational landscape for underprivileged children. This project aims to provide school-going children with free and nutritious meals, effectively addressing issues related to hunger, malnutrition, good health, and education simultaneously. In this article, the author thoroughly examines the implementation and impact of the PM POSHAN Scheme in Andhra Pradesh, with particular attention paid to how the programme affects disadvantaged children, including those belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Keywords: Midday Meals Scheme, PM POSHAN Scheme, Disadvantaged Children, Malnutrition, Good Health, Education, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Economically Disadvantaged.

Introduction

During Pre-independent India, the Midday Meal Scheme (now PM POSHAN Scheme) was implemented in Puducherry under the French Administration in 1930. After independence, the PM POSHAN Scheme was first implemented in Tamil Nadu in the early 1960s during the regime of K. Kamaraj. In 1995, the Indian government introduced the Midday Meals Scheme to improve school enrolment, attendance, retention, and nutrition. By 2002, the scheme was implemented in all the states under the orders of the Supreme Court of India. This initiative has been immense for marginalized groups, providing them with essential nutritional support for cognitive and physical development.

Thousands of children have dropped school at a young age to work as agricultural labourers to earn for their families. Consequently, illiteracy has been looming large for decades. With a continuous monitoring system, the PM POSHAN Scheme has received a new face-lift. Besides, the allocation of funds for the scheme has been incremental in the last five years. The Government of Andhra Pradesh too has taken advantage of it and instructed government schools to implement the programme devotedly, benefiting millions of children, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas facing food insecurity. The scheme works in harmony with efforts to reduce dropout rates and promote inclusive education. This article fairly reflects on the PM POSHAN Scheme, and its impact on educational outcomes - enrolment and attendance, retention and dropout rates, academic performance, nutritional benefits, challenges in implementation and recommendations.

Implementation of PM POSHAN Scheme in Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh has shown proactive efforts to ensure the effective implementation and continued success of the PM POSHAN Scheme. Since the bifurcation in 2014, Andhra

Pradesh has taken responsibility to promote the programme, guaranteeing access to nutritious and wholesome meals to all children attending government and aided schools. The menu is meticulously planned during the YSRCP government (2019 – 2024) to include a combination of essential food items, such as rice, lentils (dal), vegetables, and occasional eggs or fruits providing a balanced diet for caloric requirements and nutrition.

The PM POSHAN Scheme is intentionally structured to benefit children from marginalized communities, including SC/ST students, girls, and those from underprivileged and backward areas of the state. This comprehensive approach shows the commitment of the state government to address the nutritional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged segments of the student population. The appreciated point is that the food commission has taken the programme seriously, and the chairperson visited hundreds of schools during the last five years to ensure tasty and hygienic food with essential nutrients.

Table 1: Funds Released under PM POSHAN Mid-Day Meal Programme in Schools

Year	Funds	Amount (in Rs. in Crore)
2018-2019	Allocation	9947.74
	Released	9518.08
2019-2020	Allocation	9912.21
	Released	9705.94
2020-2021	Allocation	12900
	Released	12882.11

Extracted from Hoque, 2023

Table 2: Actual expenditure under the national programme of the PM POSHAN Scheme in schools

Year	Budget Estimates	Revised Estimates	Actual Expenditure
2011-2012	6514	6341.67	6166.45
2012-2013	6927	6662.76	6628.9
2013-2014	7976	7110.77	6413.54
2019-2020	11000	-	
2020-2021	11000	-	

Extracted from Hoque, 2023

The above two tables help us understand how seriously the government of India is implementing the PM POSHAN Scheme with its budget estimates for the benefit of school-going children.

Impact on Educational Outcomes

The impact of the PM POSHAN Scheme has been phenomenal in addressing several educational challenges:

1. Enrolment and Attendance

The offer of a free nutritious meal has significantly increased school enrolment, particularly among underprivileged children. In the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh poverty levels are high. Many families send their children to school for the midday meals. This is especially important for girls, who often drop out of school first due to economic constraints at home.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) has pointed out that a noticeable increase in enrolment and attendance in Andhra Pradesh can be attributed to the successful implementation of the PM POSHAN Scheme.

2. Retention and Dropout Rates

Prior to the implementation of the programme, numerous underprivileged students, particularly those from rural and tribal areas, faced challenges in completing their education due to economic constraints and lack of food. The midday meals scheme has played a pivotal role in decreasing dropout rates, with children exhibiting an increased likelihood of remaining in school and completing their educations. Research conducted by the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) has found that children benefitting from midday meals demonstrate improved retention rates at the primary and upper primary levels in both Andhra Pradesh.

3. Academic Performance

Nutrition closely impacts cognitive development, and the PM POSHAN Scheme has significantly enhanced academic performance among students from underprivileged backgrounds. The scheme ensures that children, who might otherwise experience inadequate nutrition at home, receive at least one balanced meal per day. This directly influences their attention span, energy levels, and learning capacity. A report by the NITI Aayog revealed that students in Andhra Pradesh, benefitting from the scheme, showed improved performance in literacy and numeracy assessments.

Nutritional Benefits

The PM POSHAN Scheme has played a pivotal role in addressing the issue of malnutrition, particularly affecting children from underprivileged communities. In Andhra Pradesh, where a substantial portion of the population grapples with poverty and malnutrition, this initiative has helped to provide children with essential vitamins, minerals, and proteins, facilitating their physical and cognitive development.

Based on the findings of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), it has been observed that there has been a slight reduction in the prevalence of malnutrition among children in the state, largely attributed to the provision of supplementary nutrition by the PM POSHAN Scheme. The protein-rich food items, such as eggs and pulses, into the dietary routine, have effectively addressed protein-energy malnutrition, a common issue among children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Challenges in Implementation

The PM POSHAN Scheme in Andhra Pradesh has encountered various challenges despite its success. They are as follows:

- a. **Quality of Food:** Reports of food contamination and substandard practices in certain schools have raised concerns regarding the consistent quality and hygiene of the food served, affecting the confidence in the program.
- b. **Infrastructure Gaps:** Schools situated in remote and tribal areas often face deficiencies in essential amenities such as proper kitchens and access to clean water, posing challenges to the successful execution of the scheme.

- c. **Monitoring:** Purchasing high-quality food resources and their timely distribution present logistical hurdles, particularly in remote areas. The state government has undertaken efforts to improve monitoring systems to guarantee the efficiency and transparency of the programme.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The PM POSHAN Scheme has an unquestionable positive impact on educational and nutritional results for disadvantaged children in Andhra Pradesh. The scheme has significantly contributed to marginalised children addressing hunger, and offering a good education for sustainable development.

Nevertheless, here are some recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the PM POSHAN Scheme.

1. **Education on Nutrition:** Introduce programmes for students and parents to raise awareness about the requirement of a balanced diet for a healthy ea.
2. **Community Participation:** involve local communities to bring a sense of accountability.
3. **Adequate Infrastructure:** Improve kitchen and sanitation facilities to cook safe and hygienic meals.
4. **Consistent Monitoring:** The government must have a regular monitoring mechanism to supervise the quality of the food served.

Quality in the midday meals can shape the future of disadvantaged children in Andhra Pradesh, help them break away from poverty, and witness improved educational outcomes.

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