

Motivational Role of Free Mid-Day Meals on Learning Process in Basic Community Schools of Western Nepal

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Abstract:- The study, which looked at the management of mid-day meals programs in community schools and the motivational role it played in students' teaching and learning activities, covered two community basic schools in the Amargadhi municipality of Dadeldhura district in the far-western province. In the case of Nepal, the school mid-day meals program has been implemented for half a century, but so far it has not been implemented in all the community basic schools in the country. Therefore, my study is based on the management of the mid-day meals program in community schools and how it motivates students to learn. Although the mid-day meals program was already implemented in both the community schools, the school mid-day meals program has been closed for almost 10 years as per the government policy after these two schools were later included in the municipality. In some schools, the mid-day meals program is prepared by the school and fed to the students, while in the community basic schools within the Amargadhi municipality, the students brought food boxes from their home. Although the management part of the mid-day meal is not seen hopeful nevertheless it has a great impact on student's regularity in the school activities and learning outcome.

Keywords:- *Mid-Day Meal, Hunger Management, Motivational Learning, Community Schools.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of man has been to an oversized extent struggle to obtain food. till the flip of the century, the science of food had a restricted vary, protein, sugar, and fat had been recognized early within the nineteenth century as energy-yielding foods and far attention was paid to their metabolism and contribution to energy needs. individuals aren't thinking solely concerning food, puzzling over nutrition, and a balanced diet. It is necessary to promote activities to related day food in every community school. "Chronic malnutrition in children remains an important global problem, with an estimated 165 million children under 5 years old being stunted (Black et al. 2013)" cited by (Fight & Hunger, 2015, p. 19). Global malnutrition is being serious especially for under-five children. The number of States of the different parts of the world implementing the

mid-day meal program with their resources on a universal or a large scale had increased (With et al., 2008). It is very essential to manage the mid-day meal in every school to solve their short time hunger. Diet is extremely important not only for our current physical health but also for our psychological health, which can enable us to maintain healthy brain development and functioning in day to day life. Healthy nutrition takes many forms and is understood differently in different counties and among different cultures. In general, healthy nutrition should be an integral part of daily life that contributes to the physiological, mental, and social well-being of individuals. It is the combined effect of food, health, and care. Nutritional well-being is determined by consuming safe food as part of an appropriate and balanced diet that contains sufficient amounts of nutrients with bodily necessities (Mathews, 2009). Bessler (2012) claimed that nutrition and diet directly affect the child's physical and mental development. The child's brain grows very fast in the last third of pregnancy and the first two years of his life. School going children must have spent one-fourth time of a day in their school, such a long period they should feed in school also for their good health and better participation in school work. Mozer et al. (2019) explained that along in the USA every year near about five billion school lunches are served, among them 31 million children and teens served meals through the National School Lunch Program most of these 65.5 percent lunches served free. The constitution of Nepal (2015), proposed in part three, article no. 36 that every Nepalese citizen shall have the right relating to food. Every citizen's shell has the right to be safe from the state of being in danger of life from the scarcity of food and every citizen shall have the right of food sovereignty under law. (p. 23). The nutritional insufficiencies have been crushed adversely on school-going children and the quality of education provided in the country. "... [M]illions of children around the world commonly go to school on an empty stomach." (Chisala, 2017, p. 209). Having empty stomach learners cannot concentrate their minds on teaching-learning activities. "Nutritional and micronutrient deficiencies are national challenges, particularly in food-insecure areas, and contribute to poor attentiveness in schools. As a result, many children attend school hungry, which impacts their concentration levels and educational outcomes." (MOE, 2016). School sector development plan (SSDP) 2016 –

2023 feels the inevitability of mid-day meals in basic schools of the country.

School midday meal scheme launched across the country in a bid to attract students and discourage dropout is bearing fruits, according to a study. The educational quality of children is found to be increasing, their health improving, and children's enrollment rate increasing said the analysis carried out by the World Food Program (WFP) and MasterCard in collaboration with the Government of Nepal with help from the United States Department of Agriculture. This program is being implemented under two modalities— food transfers are implemented in 10 districts, while cash transfers in 19 districts. Currently, the program provides a daily, nutritious meal for up to 600,000 children across 29 of the 77 districts in Nepal (WFP, 2018, p. 12).

The Food for Education project was first launched in Nepal on 30 August 1967 under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology with the support of the Government of Nepal and the United Nations World Food Program to enhance the quality of education, eradicate hunger, increasing access to and participation in education and helping children from economically disadvantaged families. Has happened From 1990 to 1995, the basic support program for health, nutrition and education was run with the help of donors. Till 1995, the program was implemented under the name of Nutritious Diet Program through the Steering Committee of Nutrition under the then National Coordinating Council for Social Services. The program was conducted in designated places in 37 districts of Nepal. The program, called the Primary School Nutrition Project under the Ministry of Education since January 1996, was implemented until 2002 under an agreement between the Government of Nepal and the World Food Program. A re-agreement was reached on November 1, 2002, to run the Food for Education program from 2002 to 2006. Experience and various studies have shown that this program, which has been agreed upon and implemented time and again under various names, has increased the enrollment rate in the school, reduced the dropout rate, improved the student's learning ability, and increased the student enrollment rate and improved the student's health and nutrition (MoST, n.d.).

Mid-day meals for school children are important in terms of health, education, social justice, and equality (MoST, 2019). The government of Nepal has been trying to manage a school feeding program especially for primary school children with the help of national and international bilateral organizations. There is no similarity in school lunch or school nutrition programs running throughout the country and not covered all community schools. Yohannes (2017) stated that the School Feeding Program (SFP) plays an important role in the relief of short appetite and it helps school children to focus their mind on studies and make them able to get better achievement. "School feeding programs not only alleviate child hunger in school but enhance nutrition, particularly when the food is fortified with micronutrients, raising the potential to improve a child's health, school performance, and

educational attainment" (Board et al., 2009, p. 5). Mid-day meal is not only important for the management of short hunger but it is related to a child's learning achievement similar to Rice and Rud, A (2018) argued that "JDKI (John Dewey Kitchen Institute) seeks to show ways that food is not only sustenance but an occasion for learning" (p. 177). To find out the actual situation of mid-day meals in the basic community schools and to manage the short term hunger of school children was the main purpose of this study. The study was focused on the research question, how stakeholders were trying to manage mid-day meals in basic community schools?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study was guided by Maslow's¹ hierarchical needs developed by Abraham Maslow (1943) in which all needs lie hierarchically from the basic needs to self-actualization. The food lies in the fundamental step of needs. So my research underpins Maslow's need theory. Applying Maslow's theory to the learning activities, the argument is that when hungry children in a mid-day time served meals at schools, they attend and stay longer in school and improve attention to learning activities by solving the short-term hunger (Ramadhni, 2014).

There are many kinds of literature examining the link between school mid-day meals and student's learning performance. Research on the link between child mid-day meals and learning achievement highlights how healthy food can affect learning activities in three ways, physical development (e.g. eyesight), cognition (related to memory and concentration), and social behavior (concern to emotion and hyperactivity) (Anderson et al., 2018). Santos (2014) mentions that the objective of the mid-day school meal program is to develop the learning ability of school-going children, improve poverty, and also promote sociological behavior among school children. The objective of the mid-day meal program to promote quality education by ensuring that children become active when learning reduce if not solve the short term hunger, providing food as a means of an incentive for children to attend school regularly and sustain in the classroom during school time (p.12). "Early malnutrition can adversely affect physical, mental, and

¹ Abraham Harold Maslow (April 1, 1908 – June 8, 1970) was an American psychologist. He was famous for creating Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a theory of psychological health predicated on fulfilling innate human needs in priority. Maslow's hierarchy of needs consists five different levels of needs represented as pyramid with basic needs at bottom and additional needs continuously up to top, as he described (1) physiological needs (breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, excretion), (2) safety needs (security of: body, employment, resources, morality, family, health, and prosperity), (3) love and belonging (friendship, family, sexual intimacy), (4) esteem (self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, respected by others), and (5) self-actualization (morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts).

social aspects of child health, which in turn leads to underweight, stunted growth, lowered immunity, and mortality" (Witté, 2012, p. 1). Until a child cannot feed well, he is not able to perform any activity physically, mentally, and socially, become underweight, lower immunity power, and increase the mortality rate. The mid-day meals play a crucial role in the all-round development of school children as UNICEF (2012) also noted that in several US cities research on young children found food-insecure children were two thirds more likely to experience developmental risks in expressive and receptive language, fine and gross motor control, social behavior problems, such as temper tantrums, fighting, sadness, depression, anxiety, and loneliness. The good management of MDM in basic community schools has a positive impact on student's physical, mental, psychological health, and student enrollment rate, and classroom attendance increase as examined by Joglekar and Joglekar (2017) in their pre and post-experimental study.

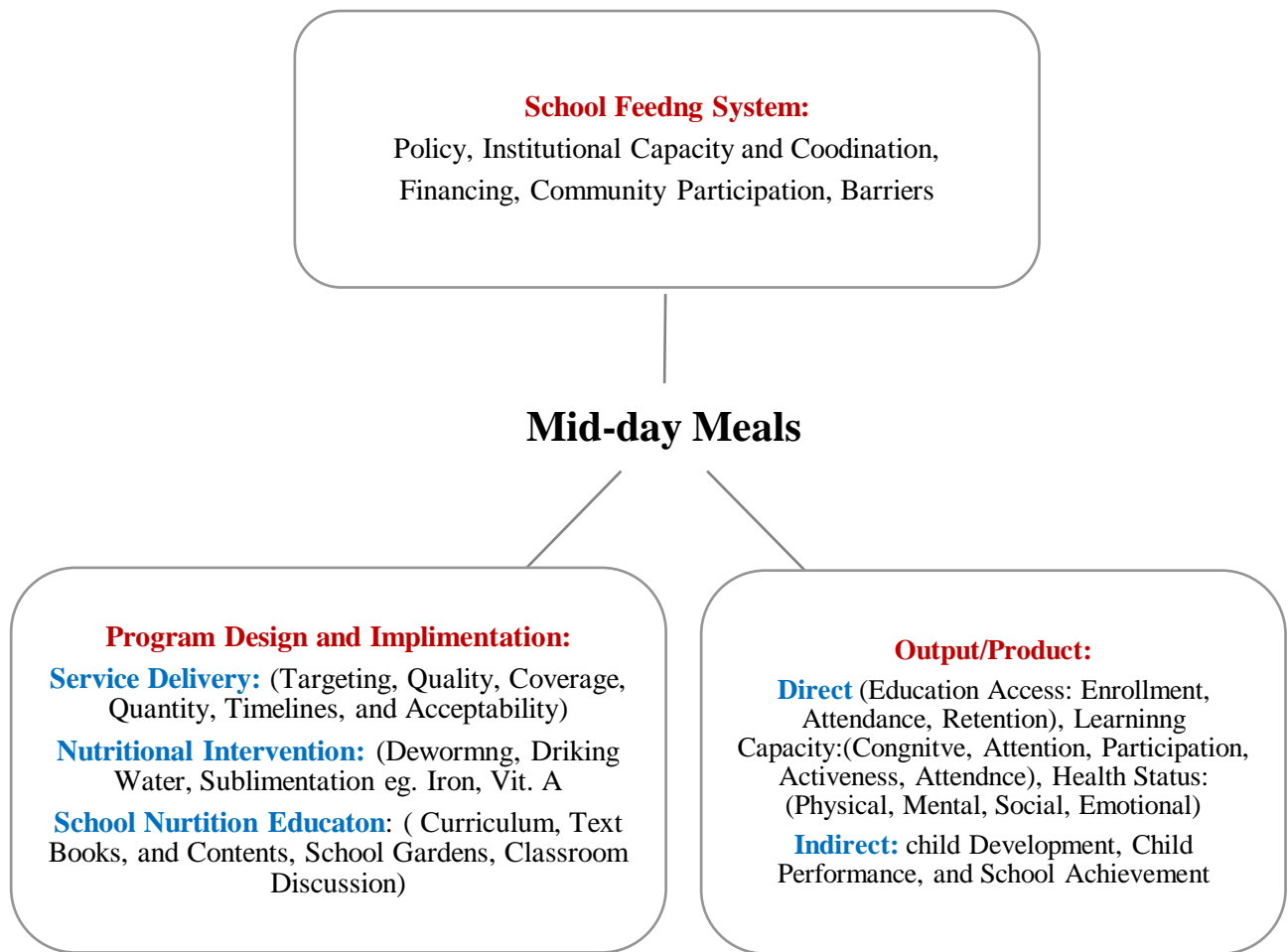
It is shown that when students attend their school without any hunger or they do not have a hunger feeling during school time, students' achievement found good. Children who belong to those schools where mid-day meal is well-managed students stay longer time and actively participated in school activities. Mid-day school meals have been seen to increase the nutritional status of school children. There is a notable reduction in malnutrition and the absorption of micronutrients (Abdulkarim et al., 2017). Chisala (2017) argued that "Hunger and poverty do not only affect the children's developmental and health growth but it also impacts negatively on the quality of learning achievement coupled with poor school attendance" (P. 209). Hungary students not only lose their physical health but they lose their mental concentration toward school learning activities also. Therefore, why do not manage the mid-day meals in every community school properly? MOE (2016) mentioned in the SSDP strategic plan include the provision to Provide midday meals to children enrolled in basic education in food deficit areas (p. 71). Most of the research done in the school has found the effect of mid-day meals, but no research has been done on how it is managed in the school. So my research starts from the very beginning, how is mid-day meals being managed in schools? What efforts are being made by the stakeholders in this work? What are the problems they are facing while running this program? Reyas and Lolita (n.d.) argued that "Most empirical findings suggest that school feeding programs have a positive impact on learning achievement, as measured by increases in test scores and on dropout rates" (p. 584). The mid-day meals have put a vital role in student's learning behavior sustainability at school. Chauhan (2015) found that the mid-day meal has increased the numbers the student who would have never come to school have started coming (p. 11). My study would be the milestone toward managing mid-day meals in every basic community school.

The school mid-day meals program was started in Nepal in 1967. Initially, selected schools in the food insecurity of 37 districts have been rehabilitated due to poor, marginalized, and underprivileged children of the country. The above-mentioned program was transformed into a food aid project (as a development program) for a primary school in 1996 under the supports of the then Ministry of Education and Sports. The program is currently being implemented under the name of the Food Program Project for the children as it has been implemented in the mid-day meals program to increase the continuity of children's schooling and reduce absenteeism. Recognized as an official tool to ensure access to school education, the School Sector Improvement Program has been implemented since 2009 and the School Sector Development Program is currently being implemented. The Free and Compulsory Basic Education Act 2074 BS has established school lunch as a right to quality education (MoST, 2019).

So far, the mid-day meals program has been implemented in 43 districts of the country from class 1 to 5 and now it aims to expand this program across the country from the next fiscal year. For this, Rs. 7 billion 520 million has been allocated. About 2.8 million children in grades 1 to 5 across the country will benefit from this program (Government of Nepal, 2020). Now the government of Nepal has been felt the necessity of mid-day meals in every basic school from grades 1 to 5 and allocated a budget for management.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher used the following conceptual framework while go to collect the information. Mainly the researcher focused on three components (a) school feeding system, (b) program design and implementation, and (c) output or product. The related information was collected from community basic school headteachers, teachers, students, parents, and members of the school management committee. I observed policies related to mid-day meals, institutional capacity, and coordination to other agencies, financial capacity, and resources, community participation, and barriers related to run this program in the sector of the school feeding system. In the program design and implementation sector, the researcher observed service delivery, nutritional intervention, and school nutritional education components. In the output sector, the researcher observed direct and indirect components. In the direct output of the mid-day meals, these components were observed i.e. access to education, enrollment, attendance, retention, learning capacity, participation, activeness, and health status. Child development, child performance, and school achievement were observed. The detail of the conceptual framework showed below:



IV. METHODS

The qualitative research method was used to complete this study, the study was carried out in two purposively chosen basic schools (running from grades 1 to 5) of Amargadh Municipality ward no. 6, Dadeldhura, Far-western State. These schools already had some form of lunch. A few years ago, with the help of the WFP and district education office, children were fed mid-day meal at school prepared by themselves. The researcher went through the postmodernism world view and qualitative research method. A Focus group discussion and semi-structured interview protocol were used as the main research tool. Apart from group discussion and interview observational information also used in this study. The main focus of the study was to find the efforts of management and its motivational side on student's teaching-learning activities in the school. With the help of school administration, five girls and five boys' students selected randomly to collect the information from the student's sides. Headteachers and chairpersons of the school management committee were also respondents of this study. In the course of this study, informal interactions with teachers, students, local parents, intellectuals, and political leaders have also been included. When the study was conducted the schools were

not running because of novice Corona Virus (COVID- 19). All schools have been closed for an uncertain period, so I visited selected respondents with maintaining safety measures including social distancing, wearing a face mask, and handwashing or sanitizing as possible. Some respondents who were not possible to meet face to face mode they were contacted through virtual mode, for example, using mails, webinars, and especially telephone contact. Although the study mainly used primary data but also used some secondary data as available and relevant to the related field.

V. RESULTS

Amargadhi municipality ward no 6, Dadeldhura district under the far western state, the study was conducted on mid-day school meals management in two community basic schools (grades 1-5) and its motivational role in learning. Two schools in the area, Shree Ganeshman Smriti Basic School (Class 1-5) and Shree Kailash Basic School (Class 1-5) were selected using a purposive method. Both these schools are located in a village about 10-15 km from the center of the municipality. Most of the parents around these schools belong to the farmer and Dalit community. The number of students in these schools was found below. It was

found that there are more female students than male students in these schools. In the academic session 2076 BS, the total number of students in Shree Ganeshman Smriti Basic School (Class 1-5) was 64 out of which 48 were girls and 16 were boys. Similarly, the total number of students in Shree Kailash Basic School (Class 1-5) was 30 out of which 17 were female students and 13 were male students. The number of teachers in these schools was also found to be less than the class ratio. Shree Ganeshman Smriti Basic School (Class 1-5) has 3 teachers with 1 female and 2 males and Shri Kailash Basic School (Class 1-5) has 1 female and 1 male teacher. Each school had one non-teaching staff. Although there are physical facilities that fit the number of students the quality is not good. As most of the parents were involved in agriculture and traditional occupations, it was found that instead of going to school, the children were engaged in household chores with parents in the village. It was found that parents with a weak economy could not bear the financial burden for daily school mid-day meals. About eight years ago, the school mid-day meals program was implemented in both these schools with the support of the Government of Nepal and the World Food Program. During the implementation of the program, the number of students in the school increased, and the participation of students in teaching and learning activities was found to be good. Under the school mid-day lunch program, the girl students got 2 liters of cooking oil also, this kind of incentive program made girls students regularity in class and increased girls' participation. Later the program was closed within the municipality and since then the mid-day meals program was not conducted in the school and once schoolchildren were unable to manage their short-term hunger in the school.

From the recent academic session, it was found that the management of school mid-day meals in these two schools has been restarted in a new way with the help of the local government Amargadhi Municipality. Now the system is a little bit changed of mid-day school meals through this new policy. According to the new arrangement, the mid-day meals program has been run with the financial support of the local government. Accordingly, Rs. 15 has been provided to the school. The school has been providing the amount to the parents (especially mothers) of each student. It was found that the mother of the student used to prepare a lunch box from home and send it to school regularly every day. Parents do not receive the amount on public holidays at school, on exam days, on days when students are absent, and when lunch boxes are not brought. Thus, according to the new system, the school mid-day meals program was found to be in operation. To organize this program, these schools have formed a mother's group to hold regular discussions and find solutions to the mid-day meal-related problem. Only mother parents gave priority in this purpose in local as well as Nepalese culture mostly mother is responsible to feed her children. The mothers are familiar with their children's food habits what they want to eat and how much they need. Although these two observed schools had mid-day meals provision, the students must carry a food box from their home. But the food carried from home is not equal. The school headteachers and teachers said that some students did not like to eat their food in a group because of their poor

food and want to seat alone at tiffin time. So the variety of food which they brought from home isolated the students from the group. According to a headmaster, one of the students in his school had never been to school after the break and was very weak in his studies. He didn't study hard, but after the lunch program at the school, he started attending school regularly and he was making good progress in his studies. It showed that mid-day meals have a positive effect on student's teaching-learning activities and concentration on studying. Another teacher experienced that a student never stayed in the classroom full time and he never behaved well with his friends in the classroom before mid-day meals lunched in the school after the lunched program has been started in the school he changed his social behavior and kept keen mind in learning activities. Another lady teacher experienced that when the pupils did not get mid-day meals in school they got sleepy after tiffin time and they did not have any energy to participate in classwork. When now the children provided mid-day meals they feel comfortable in the classroom and enjoying in school activities.

It was informed by the school administration that the school mid-day meals program will be revised and implemented from the new academic session. It is planned that the school will get Rs. 20 through the local government and the school will prepare fresh mid-day meals at the school and feed their students. However, the program is not currently in operation as schools are closed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

VI. DISCUSSIONS

The school mid-day meals program was found to have made a significant contribution to the active participation of students in the teaching and learning activities of the school. The mid-day meal was seen to eliminate the short-term hunger of students and increase interest in school work. In Nepal, the World Food Program (WFP) for primary school children has provided significant support to school mid-day meal programs at various stages. A school nutrition program has been implemented in community schools in about 43 districts of the country. This program has been implemented targeting the economically weaker schools in remote areas. The program is not conducted equally in all schools. The management of the school mid-day meals was seen as a different modality as per districts or municipality and rural municipality.

The school mid-day meals program is not mandatory in all schools across the country. Even in the schools where the program has been implemented, its management is very weak. The main problems are lack of school mid-day meals program for all primary level children across the country, lack of uniformity in the operation of the program, lack of active role of the concerned parents, and non-availability of physical facilities in the schools. Similar problems were found in the two community schools where this study was done. The problems and challenges seen in these schools are as follows;

Problems: In the above-mentioned schools there are many problems faced by related stakeholders, the following are some problems aroused by school administration during the management of mid-day meals in the school: (a) lack of financial resources, (b) lack of physical infrastructure (e.g. separate kitchen, lack of dining hall, lack of cooking utensils), (c) lack of proper management of pure drinking water, (d) lack of proper management of cooking fuel, (e) lack of environmental sanitation, toilets, and waste management, (f) problems of personal hygiene, (g) lack of separate kitchen arrangement, and (h) lack of teacher posts in proportion to the classroom.

Challenges: In the study area the target group felt some shorts of challenges instead of the above problems, which are mentioned below: (a) lack of positive thinking about school mid-day meals (b) lack of public awareness about nutrition among parents, (c) increasingly expensive, (d) lack of equality between different castes, (e) unequal financial status of parents, (f) lack of social consciousness, (g) lack of trust in community school among parents, (h) increasing privatization in education and educational commercialization, (i) effects of junk food easily available in the market, (j) food habits and food faddism, (k) lack of awareness towards food items, (l) lack of clear policy and implementation, (m) lack of stakeholders in program evaluation and monitoring, (n) lack of food security and (o) political instability and lack of commitment to education. These are some problems and challenges felt by the target group in the duration of data collection time. The school administrations and school teachers said that the mid-day school meals very initial not only to manage short-term hunger in the school but it is very important for children's socialization and effective teaching-learning achievements. The related stakeholders further added that although the mid-day meal is very necessary for the student's well-being and educational achievement but also it is very difficult to manage properly in schools. Everyone was happy with this year's decision in the budget to provide free mid-day meals in all community schools across the country.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study was conducted in two community basic schools (grades 1-5) in Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura District, Far-Western Province on the management of mid-day meals program in schools and its motivational role to motivate students in their teaching and learning activities. In the course of the study, the school mid-day meals program in the community basic schools in remote and deprived areas of Nepal is being conducted regularly according to various modalities with the support of various donor agencies under the Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal. Currently, this program has been implemented targeting various community basic level schools (grades 1 to 5) in 43 districts across the country. The two schools studied (Shree Ganeshman Smriti Basic School (Class 1-5) and Shree Kailash Basic School (Class 1-5) have also been operating according to different modalities. The school cooked food for the children at that time. In addition to mid-day meals, two liters of pure cooking oil per month

to girls, and all the students were given worm medicine once in six months to attract the students to school learning activities. After the closed of that program at schools, there has been no provision of mid-day meals in these community schools for almost a decade, which has led to a decline in the number of students in these community schools. After almost a decade later the school stakeholders and local authorities restart the system of mid-day meals at school. According to the new idea, the local government allocated the fund to these schools for the management of mid-day meals in the school. For this purpose, every school gets 15 rupees per student to provide mid-day meals to their students. The school formed the mother's circle to manage the mid-day meals for their school children. It was found that the mother conducted the program by preparing a food box for lunch for the children from home and sending it to school. Teachers, parents, and the school administration acknowledged that the number of students in the school was declining due to the non-continuation of the school mid-day meals program, an increase in the dropout rate, absent at school, and lack of active participation of students in school activities. All the stakeholders have accepted the fact that the school mid-day meals program is indispensable for the physical, mental, social, emotional, and intellectual development of the growing children of the school. However, there are many problems and challenges in managing the school mid-day meals program. The following suggestions have been received from the concerned school teachers, students, parents, and school administration to make this program easier and more effective:

(a) Compulsory free mid-day meals program should be conducted in all the basic level schools (classes 1-5) across the country, (b) to bring uniformity in the operation of the mid-day meals program, (c) Since there is no uniformity of foods in the food box prepared by the parents for mid-day meals and its effect will be felt in the young brain of the student, arrangements should be made to prepare the school mid-day meals in the school concerned and distribute it equally to the students, (d) separate kitchens should be provided in each school for the school mid-day meals program, (e) Clean kitchen arrangements should be made, (f) when preparing school mid-day meals, the food should be balanced and prepared to keep in mind the health of the children, (g) mid-day meals should be prepared each day with different foods, (h) the active participation of one or parent should be increased in the school mid-day meals program, (i) the school mid-day meals program should be accepted as an integral part of children's teaching and learning activities, (j) personal hygiene and environmental hygiene should be given special priority while conducting the school mid-day meals program in the school, (k) research studies must be carried out on the management, effects, and problems of mid-day meals in school, (l) when preparing a school mid-day meals, use locally available pure organic food items keeping in mind the nutrients as much as possible, (m) the subjects related to school mid-day meals and school kitchen garden should be included in the school's local curriculum and taught experimentally in the school, (n) a mid-day lunch management committee consisting of parents, health teachers, students, and food quality experts

should be formed for the management, operation, supervision, and monitoring of school mid-day meals and the school mid-day meals program should be modified as per the advice and suggestions were given by this committee.

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It is my great pleasure to get this opportunity to write a journal article on the topic 'Motivational Role of Free Mid-Day Meals on Learning Process in Basic Community Schools of Western Nepal'. A person cannot do anything with an empty stomach. Growing children needs foodstuffs from time to time to maintain their physical, mental, social, emotional, and intellectual development. In the context of Nepal, it is being a big problem that many students used to drop out of school due to unmanaged hunger. So I tried to write an article on this topic. In this connection, my special heartfelt thanks go to my respected tutors Dr. Chandra Kumar Laksamba & Yashoda Chaulagain for their valuable suggestions and guidance. I would like to thanks those school headteachers, teachers, students, and SMC members of the school that helped me to provide valuable information through online and offline moods in such a COVID- 19 pandemic situation. I am also in debt to those scholars whose works I have used in my article.

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