

From Plate to Policy: A Field-Based Study on PM POSHAN 2.0 in India's Capital Schools

Aadya Mani Bhatnagar¹, Jasmine Kaur², and Preeti Manani^{*3}

¹B.El.Ed. Student, Department of Education and Elementary Education, Mata Sundri College for Women, Delhi University

²B.El.Ed. Student, Department of Education and Elementary Education, Mata Sundri College for Women, Delhi University

³Assistant Professor, Department of Education and Elementary Education, Mata Sundri College for Women, Delhi University

*Corresponding Author: dr.preetimanani@ms.du.ac.in

Available at <https://omniscientmjprujournal.com>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20353931>

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an investigation into the implementation of PM POSHAN 2.0; India's restructured school nutrition program launched in 2021 as a successor to the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS). Data was collected from government schools in Delhi, where the researchers had detailed discussions with students, parents, and teachers, and observed mealtimes and facilities during their one year of internship. This study finds that while PM POSHAN 2.0 has brought in several innovations such as fortified foods, digital monitoring, and stronger community participation, many of its promises are held back by unsuitability of meals; nutritional value and diversity; uneven oversight; lack of balanced distribution; timely delivery. The paper ends with suggestions to strengthen accountability, improve infrastructure, and scale up community-led practices so that the program can better match its goals with ground realities.

Keywords: PM POSHAN 2.0, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Self-Help Groups, School Management Committees, mother committees

INTRODUCTION

Nutrition and education are interconnected in a profound way. A child who is hungry or malnourished finds it hard to concentrate in the classroom, to interact meaningfully with lessons, or to get pleasure from the learning process. The effect of poor nutrition is not only direct appearing in tiredness, lack of concentration, or absenteeism but also prolonged, affecting physical development, mental growth, and the chances of having a better life. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs teaches us that food is among the most basic and essential needs of life. Before this basic need is satisfied, higher-order characteristics such as problem-solving, creativity, and self-actualization will still be unreachable. In the school environment, making sure that the children are well-fed is not an optional extra; it is the very first step that leads to academic, emotional, and social development.

Therefore the Government of India, understanding this, inaugurated the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in 1995 as a landmark intervention. The program turned out to be the largest school-feeding initiative in the world in a very short period of time, its main goal being to provide children with at least one hot, cooked meal during the school day. Besides the problem of hunger, it also attracted children to school, especially those from the downtrodden sections of the society, and at the same time promoted social equality as children from different castes and classes were brought together to share the meal. Over the years, the program has demonstrated the immense potential of linking nutrition to education, on the other hand, it uncovered some gaps that demanded enlargement and innovation.

With a wider perspective and stronger mechanisms, the program was redesigned as Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) 2.0 in 2021. The renovated Scheme went on to cover pre-primary children, included millet and region-specific foods to provide nutritional variety, and also stressed on the fortified staples and local procurements in order to cater both dietary and economic needs. Moreover, it moved community participation up the ladder by incorporating the Self-Help Groups (SHGs), mother committees, and School Management Committees (SMCs) initiatives. The adoption of digital monitoring systems gave way to greater transparency and accountability and brought it in line with India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Zero Hunger and Quality Education.

However, no matter how grand the vision or extensive the policy, putting theory into practice daily is complicated. The internship we had in schools gave us a glimpse of the reality on the ground of how PM POSHAN 2.0 works. The majority of the meals that were prepared and presented for our observation were plain and simple—rice, dal, khichdi, or daliya—that could satisfy only the basic needs and offered a little diversity. Among the everyday irregularities illustrated by the incidents of late serving, cold food in winter, or portions that were either too small or too big and so on. While there were pushing cases, such as millet-based daliya, SHG-led kitchens, or schools that kept up hygiene protocols, there also were some problems like food safety laxity, occasional occurrences of no meals, or lack of grievance redressal channels. Although these gaps are not present everywhere, they substantially determine children's experience of the scheme and, thereby, its effectiveness.

This study is an outcome of these observations. It is not only about getting to know the extent to which PM POSHAN 2.0 functions in reality but also acknowledging what it accomplishes and indicating where it would have been possible to improve its effectiveness. Even the most modern and well-thought-out policies can be enhanced. This is especially true, of course, when millions of children are impacted daily. Through the highlighting of both the achievements and the routine challenges of implementation, this piece of research aims, quite vividly, at a constructive contribution to the ongoing dialogues regarding school nutrition programmes in India.

At the end of the day, the research rests on a simple conviction: a hungry child can never be properly taught and, therefore, the very learning they ought to be given ought to be the first thing they lose. PM POSHAN 2.0 is a contribution to the realization of this dream and through an honest reflection on its triumphs and setbacks, we can draw closer to the position where we are assured that no child's learning is hampered by hunger.

RATIONALE

This research is motivated by the strong connection between nutrition, education, and equity. School meals do more than just satiate children's hunger—they influence children's attendance, participation in the classroom, and their sense of dignity and inclusion. As future educators and researchers, it is vital to comprehend the role of a flagship program like PM POSHAN 2.0 in the transition from policy to practice because its effectiveness has a direct impact on the learning environment. Though the scheme is bold in its ambit and progressive in its design, the daily realities of implementation often become the determinants of whether its objectives are genuinely met. The present research, therefore, tries to narrow the divide between the goal and the experience: not only it studies whether the food reaches the children but also investigates if it is nutritious, safe, timely, and empowering. This study seeks to bring the voices of the ground — students, parents, teachers, and community members — into the limelight in order to indicate the areas that are working well and those that need to be strengthened. The objective here is not to allocate blame but to anticipate continuous progress so as to facilitate the fulfillment of the PM POSHAN 2.0 pledge in the day-to-day lives of children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The impact of school feeding programs is clearly shown by studies that are frequently conducted. Researching the MDMS in India not only highlights its achievements but also its limitations. A study by Hoque (2018) pointed out a lack of food diversity and an inefficient grievance mechanism in the MDMS and stressed the need for decentralization and the inclusion of micronutrients. Paltasingh and Bhue (2019) acknowledged the MDMS for the positive role it played in the empowerment of the underprivileged areas, especially women, and the safe food issue while being careful of its caste-based discrimination. Singh (2020) talked about the problem of affected educators who usually needed to combine food delivery with their teaching duties and the insufficient cooking facility condition that had been going on for a long time. Mishra (2021) situated the MDMS as a part of larger programs for children's welfare and argued that insufficient interconnections reduced its overall effectiveness.

In 2021, the deployment of PM POSHAN 2.0 brought about dramatic changes, and the efficacy of the program is now being evaluated by contemporary studies. Several scientific studies support the role of the initiative in the use of fortified foods such as fortified rice as the most important method of nutritional treatments. One research of Yadav et al. (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of fortification of the entire staple food to improve nutrition outcomes, thus validating the innovative method. Still, research into the realization of PM POSHAN 2.0 is revealing that some problems are left unresolved. A report by NLUO (2025) argues that the configuration of the new project as being "top-heavy" may lead to lesser achievement of objectives, unless a significant revision is done to improve stakeholder participation and on-ground implementation.

The single most significant improvement of PM POSHAN 2.0 is the use of technology, particularly the Poshan Tracker application. Despite this, the efficiency of the system has been varied. A description in the Times of India (2023) appreciating the app as a "game changer" is made because it can be the source of "real-time" data and can enhance transparency. Nevertheless, other studies such as IMPRI India (2025) highlight technology-related difficulties, for example, the inconsistency of the app, and the insufficiency of digital skills of the Anganwadi workers. This is in line with the finding of Berry et al. (2020) that technology can upgrade service delivery, however, it is not able to substitute for programmatic and social changes which are comprehensive. This study draws attention to the fact that the dawn of change in PM POSHAN 2.0 is not necessarily the end of the struggle but the balancing of the great ambitions with the reality of doing so.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The research purposely sampled the parents, pupils, and teachers as three different groups having diverse views. The data included parents, pupils, and teachers from the government schools of Delhi. The data was collected through face-to-face as well as online mode. Parents: N = 20, Pupils: N = 30 (Classes 3–8), Teachers: N = 50 (including the in-service and the trainee teachers) gave a total of 100 participants; thus, the study has moments that depict a fair representation of people's experiences regarding the PM POSHAN 2.0 scheme. The study used triangulation in terms of methodology weaving data from three different respondent groups : the teachers, parents, and pupils. This method made it possible to verify the findings from different angles by capturing various views of the same phenomenon. That is to say children's direct experiences through taste and satiety were juxtaposed with parents' understanding of health outcomes and teachers' observation of attentiveness and attendance. Triangulation in such a manner goes a step further in lessening the chances of bias while at the same time not constraining the understanding of the PM POSHAN 2.0 implementation.

Table 1: Summary of Demographic Profile (N = 100)

Variables	Categories / Mean (SD)	Percentage (%)
Respondent Groups	Parents (20)	20.0
	Pupils (30)	30.0
	Teachers (50)	50.0
Age (Pupils)	8–14 years	Mean \approx 11
Class (Pupils)	Classes 3–5	33.3
	Classes 6–8	66.7
Gender (Teachers)	Male	35.0
	Female	65.0

Tools used

Parents, pupils, and teachers were interviewed by the set of questions. Each interview schedule has both closed-ended and open-ended questions dealing with the aspects of the PM POSHAN 2.0 scheme, such as awareness, perceptions, and experiences.

Parents' Interviews: Concentrated on the knowledge of the scheme, the satisfaction level towards the meals, the child's perception of health and fullness, and participation in the activities of the school committee.

Pupils' Interviews: To know children's first-hand experiences concerning the meals, taste, freshness, satiety, classroom attentiveness, and inclusion of local foods like millets, fruits, or eggs.

Teachers' Interviews: Composed of issues where teachers were requested to comment such as attendance, attentiveness, quality and hygiene of meals, challenges in implementation, and knowledge of monitoring systems.

FINDINGS

During the school internship program, the researchers found PM POSHAN 2.0 functions in real life in quite a varied manner. The food they saw was mostly their daily meals with rice, dal, khichdi, and daliya. It seems these meals met the minimum requirements, however, students and teachers informed us that the portions weren't always the same and that the content from the day before was almost identical. A little bit of rice and millets had been introduced in a few schools that had been promised, which indicated that the policy changes were getting down to the ground but this was not something that happened everywhere consistently. The children were the most delighted when they were eating fruits, puris, and sabzi, though these times were not frequent and felt like they were part of those celebrations rather than the daily routine.

In many schools, parents and teachers told us that children got sick sometimes after eating a certain meal, which made them worry about cleanliness and food storage. It was observed during one of the visits that the puris served were so hard that the younger children found it difficult to chew, and some of them didn't finish their food. During cold seasons, food that was brought to the table was often not warm enough, thus both the flavor and the nutritional value were reduced. Teachers reported that the serving delays interfered with the schedule and sometimes left the children feeling angry and hungry. Conversely, there were times when the amount given to the meals was so high that waste of food occurred, and on the other hand,

there were cases where the quantities were too small to fill up the children. These views demonstrate the everyday problems that go beyond what is stated in the policy and are what determine how children really experience the scheme.

The meal was sometimes not delivered at all as well. During a half day at a school, children were only given biscuit packets instead of the hot meal that was promised in the scheme. While the biscuits did provide the children with something to eat, the teachers together with the parents argued that it could in no way be an alternative of a proper and nourishing meal. Such instances showcased the vulnerabilities of the delivery mechanism in the event of disrupted schedules and the compromises made on the program's benefits that were affected by how quickly.

A teacher spoke proudly about how they mixed local millets in the daliya given to the children, which was evidence to the school meal scheme policy emphasis on nutrient-rich traditional grains. Although this was a very good sign of the policy being effectively implemented, most of the children didn't understand that the food was enriched. For them, it was just a regular meal, indicating that while the quality of nutrition is being improved, the students are still largely unaware of it.

Hygiene and food safety were very different from school to school. In certain schools, we saw teachers or the Midday meal coordinator tasting the meal before serving it and using clean utensils and taking great care. This gave teachers and parents the assurance that good standards were being maintained. In a few schools, we noticed that the cooks were wearing shower caps and gloves while they were preparing and serving food. These actions not only gain the trust of both the teachers and the parents that hygiene is being taken seriously but also make a good example of how the scheme could be implemented with care.

The need for the meal was, among other things, the point that teachers mentioned repeatedly. They noted that the children were attending the school more regularly and were more focused during the classes when the food was served on time and was of good quality. Some even admitted that a few of the children were coming particularly for the meal which, for most of the low-income children, is the only reliable source of food for the entire day.

On governance matters, digital monitoring systems were in place, but it was discovered that the majority of the staff had not been trained to use them. Teachers made it known that in some schools there are bodies such as SMCs and mother groups which are very active, while in others, they are only on paper and without any real commitment.

On the other hand, there were some good things despite these issues. In certain areas, the women's Self-Help Groups (SHG) were in charge of the cooking which, in addition to giving the community a sense of ownership, also created income opportunities for local women. Children liked meals made with local ingredients much better because the food matched their cultural food habits.

These problems were still systemic even if such innovations existed. The lack of a comprehensive grievance redressal mechanism, the inclusion of the variety of meals promised and monitoring were the most common issues which we bumped into. The parents and teachers reported that they frequently did not have a proper channel through which they could express their grievances either when the food was of poor quality or when meals were missed.

DISCUSSION

The results of the current research are parallel the main aspects addressed in several studies of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme situation, most importantly the problems in monitoring the program and the lack of good accountability systems (Hoque, 2018; Singh, 2020). Although PM POSHAN 2.0 has brought in various changes such as the inclusion of proteins, fruits, and other items in the menu and the introduction of the systematic record, the survey

demonstrates that these steps are still to have visible results on the ground. The observations suggest that the impact of PM POSHAN 2.0 relies not only on how the policies are formulated but also on what children experience on a daily basis.

The reports of children becoming ill after the meal, the puris being too hard for young children to chew, and the food getting cold during winter are some of the indications of quality and sanitation gaps that Singh (2020) also mentions in her study based on the field. Some sanitation issues were uncovered in schools, but others were found to be strictly following their routines. For example, at one of the schools where the researchers went, the staff wore shower caps and gloves, and the food tasting was carried out before the food was served. If the staff members are properly trained and motivated, they can execute the scheme's regulations without any problem, thus, the point of food safety raised by Paltasingh and Bhue (2019) can be supported by these activities.

The long time before the serving, the uneven sizes of portions and the substitution of hot meals with biscuits on half-days are only a few examples on how the delivery can be weak or even break down in some parts of the town, thus, Mishra's (2021) worries about the lack of interlinks among different welfare schemes being confirmed. Additionally, the situation where some schools were serving more meals than needed and some less is a direct reflection of the issues found in management by Paltasingh and Bhue (2019) that have been pointed out. The things that happen every day in people's lives mean that even though some policy innovations like local foods and SHG participation are promising, they still need to change the reality on the ground.

It was found situations where the school's food was different, and it was because of the policy. The teacher explained that for the nutrition program, the daliya was made with locally grown millets which is in line with PM POSHAN 2.0's initiative to reintroduce traditional and climate-resilient foods. On the other hand, children themselves were completely unaware of the new food and looked at it just as another school lunch. So, student awareness of the policy is still far behind implementation, signaling that nutrition education, as Singh (2020) puts it, is still an auxiliary part of distribution.

There also appear to be vinculos between both nutritional aspects as well as attendance. However, if the scheme does not guarantee both that, firstly, it will have less than half of its potential impact. It does appear to be a wise decision to have the SHGs and mother committees with their decentralized power, although, again, these will be of real importance only if they have the necessary support to survive.

All in all, PM POSHAN 2.0 is a good initiative; however, his triumph lies in finding the right balance between innovativeness and successful implementation.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

PM POSHAN 2.0 study reminded us how a meal in school is very much different from a mere food on a plate—a meal is often the one commitment of nourishment a child can rely on in a whole day. As for a lot of children attending Delhi schools, such lunch not only satiated their appetite but also supplied them with the required energy and concentration to take an active part in their lessons. Teachers told us many times that attendance was higher during that time when meals were on time and of good quality. Alongside that, the disparities we found, for example, meals getting cold during winter, children having a hard time biting into dry puris, or food being exchanged for biscuits on half-days clearly indicate that the system can be very vulnerable in real life. Parents felt uneasy when their children became ill after eating, and employees confessed that paying low wages made it hard for them to keep their spirits up. However, there were also some moments that made our hearts glad, like the cooks who wore shower caps and gloves for sanitation, daliya cooked with local millets being served, and small kitchen gardens where children were happily watering spinach and

coriander plants. These instances indicate that with love, consciousness, and collective effort, the scheme can be closer to its promise. PM POSHAN 2.0 is hence not only about feeding children but also about the right, the fair and the giving every child the opportunity to learn without carrying the weight of hunger.

- Children should be provided with meals that are warm, delicious, and diverse and in which fruits, milk, and traditional grains such as millets are regularly included. This will make them feel both fed and looked after.
- Hygiene has to be the main concern which could be achieved by instructing and assisting kitchen personnel and promoting activities like the use of gloves, shower caps, and the storage of the hygienic kind among them.
- Time is of essence. Meals ought to be delivered on time, even on half-days, so that children cannot be left waiting or given substitutes like biscuits.
- Parts should be of equal proportions—not so small that children still feel hungry and not so big that food is discarded.
- The likes of SHG-led cooking should be availed and spread to all schools as this would bring about community pride and ownership since it is a kind of cooking that communities manage themselves.
- Children should be told while serving the meals why the foods that they eat like millets or vegetables are of great importance to their growth. This simple knowledge may turn a meal into a lesson in health and dignity.

PM POSHAN 2.0 will not only be able to feed children if the above interventions are in place but will also be able to realize its dream of creating a healthier, and more inclusive and equitable education system.

REFERENCES

- Berry, J., et al. (2020). Crowd-out in school-based health interventions: Evidence from India's midday meals program. *The Journal of Economic Development*, 45(1), 123–145.
- Hoque, M. R. (2018). The Mid-Day Meal Scheme in India: A critical analysis. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 1(3), 11-20.
- IMPRI India. (2025). *Poshan Abhiyaan 2.0: Strengthening India's Nutrition Revolution*.
- Lok Sabha Secretariat. (2022). Replies to Unstarred Questions on Mid-Day Meals and POSHAN Abhiyan. Government of India Parliamentary Debates.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- Ministry of Education. (2021). Guidelines for PM POSHAN Scheme (2021–22). Government of India.
<https://pmposhan.education.gov.in>
- Ministry of Women and Child Development. (2018). POSHAN Abhiyaan: National Nutrition Mission Administrative Guidelines. Government of India.
<https://poshanabhiyaan.gov.in>
- Ministry of Women and Child Development. (2022). Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0: Scheme guidelines. Government of India.
<https://wcd.nic.in>
- Ministry of Women and Child Development. (2023). Mission Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0: An exploratory analysis. Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) and Child Rights and You (CRY).
- Mishra, A. K. (2021). An analysis of the linkages between the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and other child welfare programs in India. *Journal of Public Policy and Administration*, 4(2), 55-68.
- NITI Aayog. (2018). Transformation of Aspirational Districts: Baseline Ranking and Indicators. Government of India.
<https://www.niti.gov.in/aspirational-districts-programme>
- NLUO. (2025). PM POSHAN: Ensuring social & economic justice for school going children in India. National Law University Odisha.
- Paltasingh, T., & Bhue, P. (2019). Efficacy of mid-day meal scheme in India: Challenges and policy concerns. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 65(4), 856–870.
- Singh, N. (2020). Evaluation of mid-day meal programme on grass root level in India.

Omniscient
(An International Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed Journal)
Vol 4 Issue 1 Jan-Mar 2026 EISSN: 2583-7575

Journal of Pharmacognosy and
Phytochemistry, 9(3), 1039–1046.

Times of India. (2023, October 24). How tech-
driven monitoring is revolutionising
India's malnutrition fight.

Tripathi, K. P. (2023). Mid-day meals programs in
the school of Pokhara through child-

friendly school manual. Janapriya Journal
of Interdisciplinary Studies, 12, 80–94.

Yadav, A., et al. (2023). Large-scale staple food
fortification as a complementary strategy
to address vitamin and mineral
vulnerabilities in India: A critical review.
NITI Aayog.