

Impact of the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG) on Students at MTs Ma'arif Pinrang Regency

Nursuciyani Jamal¹, Andi Sri Adinda²

^{1,2} Department of Health Administration Study Program, Institut Batari Toja Bone, Bone, Indonesia,
Email: nursuciani01@gmail.com¹, andisriadinda08@gmail.com²

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: December 23, 2025

Revised: January 17, 2026

Accepted: January 19, 2026

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.52970/grdis.v6i1.1988>

ABSTRACT

The Free Nutritious Meal Program, also known as the Free Lunch Program, is funded at Rp 10,000 per portion for large portions and Rp 8,000 for small portions at every Nutrition Service Unit (SPPG) throughout Indonesia. The price per portion reflects the food package consisting of staple foods (carbohydrates), animal protein, vegetable protein, vegetables, fruit, and milk. This free nutritious meal program is not only a health intervention but also part of a social, economic, and educational development strategy. The research method used is a quantitative cross-sectional approach. Which aims to identify or describe the phenomena or factors that influence the relationship between independent (free) and dependent (bound) variables. The results obtained indicate that the impact of the provision of free nutritious meals by the nutrition fulfillment service unit is still not optimal in terms of menu variations.

Keywords: Impact, Free Nutritious Melas, Students.

I. Introduction

Education is a fundamental factor in shaping the quality of human resources. The success of the learning process is not only determined by the curriculum, facilities, and learning methods, but also depends heavily on the physical and psychological condition of students. One important aspect that is often overlooked is meeting children's daily nutritional needs. Children who come to school hungry tend to have difficulty concentrating, tire easily, and lack enthusiasm for learning. This condition can hinder the optimal achievement of learning objectives. Malnutrition can have short- and long-term health impacts, such as stunting, wasting, decreased cognitive function due to iron and iodine deficiencies, and decreased immunity, which increases the risk of infection. Indonesia still faces the triple burden of malnutrition: undernutrition, overnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies. According to the 2022 National Childhood Education Survey (SSGI), the prevalence of stunting reached 21.6%, anemia 32%, and obesity 10.2% among schoolchildren. These conditions are influenced by diets high in sugar, salt, and fat, along with low physical activity. National efforts through the 2025–2045 RPJPN target a reduction in stunting below 5% and are in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eliminate all forms of malnutrition, including stunting and wasting in (Roberts et al. 2022).

Healthy and qualified human resources (HR) are a strategic asset in supporting national defense. HR with excellent physical and mental condition can contribute optimally in various sectors, including the defense sector, which requires resilient and productive individuals (Sarjito, 2023). According to Todaro & Smith



(2020), quality human development is a key element in creating a competitive nation amidst global dynamics. The 2025 global nutrition targets set by international organizations such as WHO and UNICEF aim to address nutrition issues that are a major obstacle to human resource development globally. The six main targets include reducing stunting, anemia, low birth weight, overweight, increasing exclusive breastfeeding, and reducing wasting. The free nutritious meal program initiated by President Prabowo Subianto aims to improve the nutrition of schoolchildren and pregnant women in Indonesia, which is relevant to these targets (Sartijo 2024).

Indonesia also continues to face serious challenges in child nutrition. Data from the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey (SKI) showed that the prevalence of stunting reached 21.5%, still far from the national target of 14% as set out in the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). Malnutrition not only affects physical health but also impacts students' cognitive development, memory, and academic achievement. A balanced nutritional diet is a key factor for successful primary education because it is directly related to children's readiness to learn (Wang and Young 2021). Free Meals are the provision of food without having to pay for it. Naturally, free meals are desirable for everyone. Because food is a daily necessity, the association of "free" with it would certainly be very satisfying, as someone can eat without having to pay for it. Through this promise, Prabowo-Gibran underscores their commitment to fighting for social welfare, health, and reducing economic disparities in Indonesia (Fatimah et al., 2024).

The background to this promise can be understood in the context of the economic challenges faced by most people, especially amid the global pandemic and associated economic uncertainty. The economic crisis has increased unemployment, poverty, and social inequality in Indonesia. Many families struggle to meet basic needs, including food. In this situation, the promise to provide free lunches is a responsive and proactive response from Prabowo-Gibran to address this urgent need (Maharani et al., 2024). Referring to international standards set by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the average per capita calorie consumption in Indonesia is still relatively low. According to information from the Indonesia Baik website, the FAO recommends that every adult consume at least 1,800 kcal per day. This amount is adjusted based on each individual's age, gender, and level of physical activity. This calorie deficiency has the potential to trigger various health problems, such as anemia, stunted growth in children, and decreased work productivity. Nutrition plays a direct role in shaping the quality of human resources. Adequate nutrition enables individuals to reach their full potential in learning, achieving, and contributing to society. Research shows that children with optimal nutrition are better able to concentrate, retain information, and excel academically. Conversely, malnutrition has long-term detrimental impacts on cognitive development, health, and economic productivity. The Indonesian Ministry of Health consistently emphasizes the importance of addressing malnutrition through various initiatives, as seen in its report on child nutrition, particularly those focused on reducing stunting and preventing anemia.

Ensuring access to nutritious food for pregnant women and children is one effective way to improve health. When children receive proper nutrition from an early age, they experience long-term benefits such as better brain development, stronger immune system function, and higher life expectancy. Good nutrition not only benefits individuals but also accelerates a country's economic growth. Good nutrition can improve birth quality and promote healthy child growth, directly resulting in a smart, active, and productive generation. Furthermore, addressing food insecurity and malnutrition contributes to the creation of more equitable economic opportunities by increasing employment and encouraging local entrepreneurship, particularly through micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Economic policies aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and reducing inequality are further strengthened by promoting access to nutritious food as part of broader social welfare programs (Badan gizi nasional, 2025).

Fulfillment of national nutrition in Indonesia currently remains a serious problem, because despite achieving economic progress and prosperity, Indonesia still faces the triple burden of malnutrition (undernutrition, overnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies) according to the results of the 2018 Basic Health Research (Risksedas, 2018). The high rates of stunting and malnutrition in Indonesia indicate that millions of Indonesian children still experience obstacles in their physical growth and cognitive development.

This illustrates the problem of nutritional equity or unequal access to nutritious food in Indonesia. In addition, in Indonesia there are also areas that are vulnerable to food insecurity issues that affect access, availability, and quality of food, which directly impact the nutritional status of the community.

This problem is further exacerbated by the persistently high prevalence of stunting in Indonesia. According to 2022 UNICEF and WHO data, as cited from the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture website, 21.6% of children in Indonesia suffer from stunting. This figure places Indonesia 27th out of 154 countries with the highest stunting rates, and 5th in Asia. This situation highlights the importance of immediate intervention through programs such as free nutritious meals to reduce stunting rates and improve the community's quality of life and economic growth. The National Nutrition Agency (BGN), which was established through Presidential Decree number 83 of 2024, has the task of fulfilling national nutrition needs. Therefore, in the context of developing quality human resources towards the Golden Generation of 2045, BGN launched the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) as an effort to improve the nutritional status of the community and improve the behavior of students, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and toddlers towards a balanced nutritional diet.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Human Resource Development Concept

Human resources (HR) are defined as a nation's primary asset, encompassing the abilities, skills, and competencies of individuals to contribute to economic and social development. Within the context of national development, qualified HR plays a crucial role in increasing productivity and innovation, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic growth. According to Todaro & Smith (2020), human development, which focuses on education, health, and skills development, is a key pillar for creating a globally competitive society (Sartijo 2024). Improving the quality of human resources is one of Indonesia's national development priorities. The government is striving to achieve this through various policies in the health and education sectors. In Indonesia's political landscape, campaign promises are a crucial element in gaining voter support. The 2024 presidential and vice-presidential election is no exception. In this context, the Prabowo-Gibran ticket stands out with their promise to launch a strategic program in 2025, providing free lunches for Indonesians. This promise is not merely political rhetoric, but an integral part of their program and vision, "Together with Indonesia Moving Forward Towards a Golden Indonesia 2045" (Aji et al., 2025).

The main targets of this program are children, students, and pregnant women. This is based on data from the Ministry of Health and the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture, which shows that 41% of students experience hunger, negatively impacting the quality of education. Several countries, such as Japan through its School Lunch Program and South Korea with its MBG Policy, have demonstrated that school-based nutrition interventions can improve children's health and learning outcomes. Similar programs have also been recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) as a global strategy to improve child health and reduce nutritional disparities. However, the implementation of MBG in Indonesia still faces serious challenges, particularly at the local level. Since its initial launch, several cases of mass food poisoning have been reported after students consumed MBG meals. For example, in Sukoharjo, Central Java, dozens of students experienced nausea and vomiting after consuming marinated chicken served in a free nutritious meal menu. These problems are not only technical but also structural. According to Edward III's (1980) policy implementation theory, the success of policy implementation is determined by four key factors: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. In the case of MBG, communication issues can be seen in the uneven distribution of food safety SOPs. In terms of resources, a lack of inspectors and food storage facilities has created significant challenges, and communication between the head of the nutrition service unit and partners or foundations is poor (Setiadi and Muhafidin 2025).

Meanwhile, the Free Nutritious Meals program, also known as the Free Lunch Program, is funded at Rp10,000 per serving for large portions and Rp8,000 for small portions at every Nutrition Fulfillment Service

Unit (SPPG) throughout Indonesia. The price per serving reflects the food's ingredients, including staple foods (carbohydrates), animal protein, vegetable protein, vegetables, fruit, and milk (Anifatul Kiftiyah et al, 2025).

2.2. The Role of Civil Society as a Supporting Element of National Defense

National defense relies not only on military strength but also encompasses non-military dimensions such as public health, education, and the economy. According to Buzan (1998) into (Skidmore 2011), the concept of national security must encompass human aspects, including the well-being and health of the population. Good health is a crucial element in ensuring the physical and mental readiness of individuals, which directly impacts national stability and resilience. A study by the World Health Organization (2018) emphasized that countries with high levels of public health have greater resilience to external threats, both in the form of conflict and disasters. Civil society also plays a crucial role in supporting national defense, both directly and indirectly. From a holistic defense perspective, a healthy society contributes to social and economic stability, which supports national development. According to Chotimah et al. (2021) and Budiman et al. (2021), community participation in maintaining health through government programs, such as the free nutritious meal program, is an integral part of the national defense system. This aligns with the total defense approach, where all elements of the nation, including civil society, are involved in supporting national resilience as a whole (NATO, 2018) (Setiadi and Muhafidin 2025).

2.3. Plan for Free Nutritional Meal Program in Indonesia

The free nutritious meal program policy plan in Indonesia is a government initiative to improve the nutritional quality of the community, particularly school children and pregnant women (Indonesia.go.id, 2024). This policy aims to reduce the prevalence of malnutrition, including stunting and anemia, which remain a public health challenge. Based on the government's strategic initiative to strengthen community nutrition, this program is designed to reach areas with the highest rates of malnutrition, using a community-based approach and educational institutions. The program is planned to be implemented through a structured distribution of nutritious food in elementary schools, integrated health posts (Posyandu), and health service centers. Each individual will receive a budget allocation of IDR 10,000 per day to meet daily nutritional needs (Kompas, 2024). The program's implementation also involves local governments to ensure smooth food procurement and distribution. Furthermore, this program is supported by training of health cadres to increase community awareness of the importance of balanced nutrition (Fivia Eliza, et al 2024).

Free Nutritious Meals (MBG), launched by the Indonesian government, is a national-scale food intervention designed to reduce the prevalence of malnutrition and stunting and improve the nutritional status of vulnerable groups, especially school children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. From a public nutrition perspective, the nutritional quality of the program depends on menu composition (energy and micronutrient density) and continuity of delivery. In Indonesia, the concept of balanced nutrition is realized through "Isi Piringku", which replaces the old slogan "4 Sehat 5 Sempurna" by describing the portion of food consumed on one plate as 50% containing vegetables and fruit and the remaining 50% carbohydrates and protein. The "Isi Piringku" portion for one meal consists of staple foods (sources of carbohydrates) with a portion of $2\frac{3}{4}$ of $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate, side dishes (sources of protein) with a portion of $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate, vegetables (sources of vitamins and minerals) with a portion of $\frac{2}{3}$ of $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate, fruits with a portion of $\frac{1}{3}$ of $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate (Syamsu, et al 2025).

Quality education depends not only on the curriculum and learning methods, but also on external factors that influence students' cognitive and physical development. One of the main factors contributing to educational success is adequate nutrition for schoolchildren, which plays a role in improving their thinking power, stamina, and learning resilience. Adequate nutritional intake allows students to focus more on the learning process, so they can absorb material more effectively (Anifatul Kiftiyah et al, 2025).

Food security plays a crucial role in physical and psychological health. Historically, food security policies have primarily focused on ensuring physical health outcomes, such as reducing the prevalence of malnutrition and improving growth and development. In this context, programs such as free nutritious meals not only aim to meet the nutritional needs of vulnerable populations but also have the potential to reduce the psychological distress associated with food insecurity. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the MBG initiative in improving physical health and psychological well-being (Peni cahyati teguh pancani, nuna ningsih, 2025). Furthermore, good nutrition also impacts optimal physical development, which in turn supports motor activity and social interaction in the school environment. However, in various developing countries, including Indonesia, unequal access to nutritious food remains a serious challenge that directly impacts the quality of education (Weyana et al., 2025).

Various studies have shown that children who receive adequate nutritional intake have higher levels of concentration, better academic achievement, and more stable attendance rates at school. Conversely, lack of nutritional intake can cause long-term cognitive problems, such as delayed mental development and low critical thinking capacity (natalia desiani, 2025). Providing balanced nutrition from an early age is a crucial factor in improving the quality of human resources. The Indonesian government has placed significant emphasis on nutrition, particularly for school-age children, as this is a growth phase that requires optimal nutritional intake. Malnutrition in children can impact learning concentration, endurance, and overall growth and development (Agustini & Mulyani, 2025). This free nutritious meal program is not only an intervention in the health sector, but also part of the social, economic, and educational development strategy. In response to this condition, the Pinrang Regency Government initiated a free nutritious meal program for elementary school students as an effort to improve child nutrition from an early age. Not only elementary school, but also PAUD up to high school in accordance with the MBG technical guidelines has been implemented, even 3B (toddlers, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers) has also been distributed (Andreas et al., 2025).

This program aims not only to improve the nutritional status of children, but also to increase learning concentration, reduce absenteeism, and form healthy eating habits in the school environment, economic turnover, reduce unemployment rates, and improve nutritional adequacy rates for breastfeeding mothers and pregnant women, considering that the MMR in Pinrang Regency, a suppa area, is quite high (Nursuciyani Jamal et al., 2024). The free nutritious meal program (MBG) involves cross-sectoral stakeholders at the central, provincial, district/city, sub-district, village, and school levels, as well as integrated health posts (Posyandu). At the central level, the National Nutrition Agency, as the responsible body for the program, involves the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Population and Family Development/BKKBN, the Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of National Development Planning/BAPPENAS, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Cooperatives, and the Ministry of MSMEs (UMKM).

The strategy for implementing the free nutritious meal program (MBG) is carried out by establishing or forming 5,000 locations of nutrition fulfillment service units (SPPG) spread across 38 provinces in Indonesia in 2025 in stages, collaborating with government agencies and other institutions such as the TNI/POLRI and Third Parties (Private, Foundations, Community Organizations) in the establishment and management of nutrition fulfillment service units, the national nutrition agency (BGN) involves the participation of cross-sector stakeholders both at the central level and at the provincial and district/city levels, nutrition fulfillment service units coordinate with stakeholders at the sub-district/urban/village level, down to the level of educational units, Community Health Centers and Integrated Health Posts within a maximum radius of 6 km and/or a travel time of 20 minutes from the SPPG, ensuring the availability of food supplies by involving all elements that produce food such as agricultural cooperatives, livestock, fishermen and others.(Badan gizi nasional, 2025).

However, the implementation of this program is still relatively new in Indonesia, requiring continuous system and policy improvements to address various challenges, including uneven distribution, ongoing kitchen construction, extraordinary events (KLB) among beneficiaries, and human resources. Furthermore, there are still few in-depth academic studies on this free nutritious meal (MBG) program (Zulfa et al., 2024).

Seen from a theoretical perspective This study contributes to the modernization of policy implementation theory by integrating the concepts of digital institutionalism and adaptive capacity, the ability of institutions to reform regulatory structures and human resources in response to technological disruption (Harun 2026).

Therefore, it is important to conduct an academic study of the nutritious meal program in Pinrang Regency from a health policy administration perspective. The results of this study are expected to provide recommendations and evaluations for improving the program's quality and serve as a basis for more targeted policies in the future. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H1: The existence of The impact of Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) on students of MTs Ma'arif Pinrang in terms of quality aspects food diversity

H2: The impact of Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) on students of MTs Ma'arif Pinrang in terms of program implementation carried out by SPPG (nutrition fulfillment service unit)

H3: The impact of Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) on students of MTs Ma'arif Pinrang in terms of student satisfaction

Based on the results of the review of various literature, the researcher summarizes the theory to find out how the impact of the free nutritious meal program (MBG) carried out by SPPG (nutrition fulfillment service unit) on students of MTs Ma'arif Pinrang, then the following conceptual framework can be created:

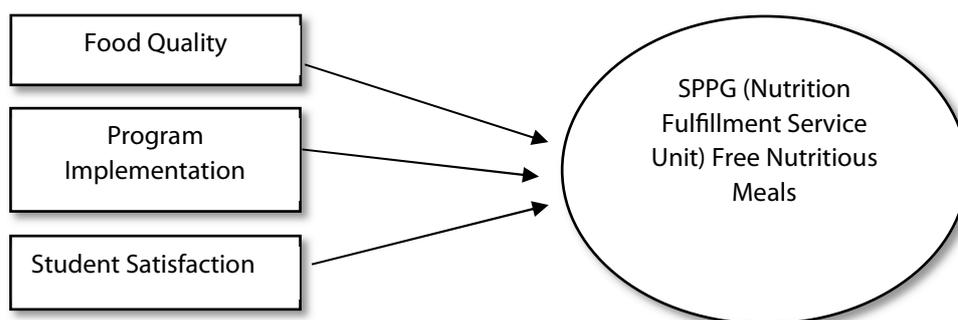


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Information :

 = Independent Variable

 = Dependent Variable

III. Research Method

3.1. Types of Research

This type of research is quantitative research using an approach method. Cross sectional study which aims to determine or describe the phenomena or factors that influence the independent (free) variable with the dependent (bound) variable in the same period or at the same time (I made laut mertha jaya, 2023). This research uses a descriptive approach. cross sectional study because this research aims to identify whether or not there is a relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable in one measurement using a questionnaire measuring tool for respondents.

3.2. Location and Time of Research

This research will be conducted at MTs Ma'arif Pinrang school in November 2025.

3.3. Population, Sample, and Sampling Techniques

A population is a generalized area consisting of objects/subjects that have certain quantities and characteristics determined by researchers to be studied and then conclusions drawn (Corper, et al, 2003 in Sugiyono, 2018). The population of this study were students or pupils studying at MTs with a total population of 40 respondents. The sampling technique used total sampling, where the population also serves as a sample (Sugiyono, 2018).

3.4. Method of Collecting Data

Primary data is new and first-time data collected and is the original data obtained by the researcher from its source. Data collection is carried out directly by the researcher through interviews and questionnaires.

3.5. Research Instruments

The type of research used in this study uses a questionnaire sheet, namely a formal data collection tool for respondents to answer questions in writing that have been designed in such a way as to obtain information that is relevant to the research objectives.

Based on table 1 below with a sample of 40 students or pupils, based on gender, there are 21 people (52.5%) namely women who are respondents with the most age of 14 years with a total of 17 people (42.5%). Meanwhile, based on the research variables there are three variables that state that the impact of free nutritious meals carried out by the nutrition fulfillment service unit (SPPG) on MTs Maarif Pinrang Regency consisting of the food quality aspect 60.0% is still ineffective in providing the package menu provided, the second variable is the implementation of the program consisting of 52.5% stating that the implementation of the program carried out by the nutrition fulfillment service unit from service management and SOP (standard operating procedures / services) is ineffective, and the last variable is the aspect of student satisfaction consisting of 55.0% stating that there is still a high level of student dissatisfaction regarding the provision of food packages provided by the nutrition fulfillment service unit that does not vary.

Table 1. Results of univariate and bivariate analysis

Measurement	N	%
Gender		
Man	19	47.5
Woman	21	52.5
Age (years)		
13 years old	12	30.0
14 years	17	42.5
15 years	11	27.5
Food quality aspects		
Effective	16	40.0
Ineffective	24	60.0
Aspects of program implementation		
Effective	19	47.5

Ineffective	21	52.5
Impact aspects of the program		
Efektif	24	60.0
Ineffective	16	40.0
Student satisfaction aspects		
satisfied	18	45.0
Not satisfied	22	55.0

IV. Result and Discussion

The Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia is designed with a multisectoral approach that integrates the health, education, and social welfare sectors. Referring to guidelines from the World Food Programme (WFP, 2020) and the African Union (Wang & Young, 2021), the MBG aims not only to meet students' daily nutritional needs but also to build an inclusive and sustainable learning ecosystem (Verguet et al., 2023). Empirical data shows that implementing a school meal program can increase student participation and attendance, improve learning concentration, and contribute to improved academic achievement. This program has been shown to provide particular benefits to marginalized groups such as girls, who often face structural barriers to accessing full basic education. Furthermore, the MBG also provides tangible economic impact by empowering MSMEs, cooperatives, and local food-producing households involved in its supply chain (Dwijayanti, 2024).

Quantitatively, the MBG's scope is very broad, targeting approximately 82 million people, including 44 million school-age children, 30 million toddlers, 4 million Islamic boarding school students (pesantren), and 4 million pregnant women. This program is designed to reach 439,000 educational units with the support of approximately 48,000 service kitchens or distribution units. Projections of annual food needs indicate a very large scale: 1.9 million tons of rice, 5.6 million tons of animal protein, 3.3 million tons of fruit, and 1.8 million tons of vegetables (INDEF, 2024). These complex logistical demands emphasize the need for a coordinated national distribution system that is flexible to Indonesia's diverse geography and capable of ensuring food quality and safety standards (Goodstats, 2025). Although the initial results of the MBG program are promising, implementation on the ground shows that long-term success depends heavily on the readiness of support structures and cross-sector coordination (Karomah et al., 2024). Logistical issues and imbalances in food distribution between regions are major challenges, and the biggest challenge lies in partners or foundations not respecting the heads of nutrition fulfillment service units (SPPG) as those fully responsible for the operational system. Indonesia, as an archipelagic country, faces complex geographic barriers, which require an adaptive distribution system integrated with local capacity. Delays in distribution and variations in menu quality demonstrate that free nutritious meals cannot be implemented with a purely centralized approach, flexibility based on local contexts and community empowerment are required, as well as good cooperation between partners or foundations and heads of nutrition fulfillment service units (K. Hanna et al., 2025).

Fiscally, a report (Rimbawan Rimbawan et al, 2023) estimates that the budget for free nutritious meals will reach IDR 12 trillion in 2024, a 20% increase from the previous year. This figure raises concerns that without careful fiscal planning, large expenditures for MBG could put pressure on funding for other education sectors. Therefore, a long-term and collaborative financing strategy is essential. A mixed financing model through private sector involvement (CSR), state-owned food enterprises, village cooperatives, and Public-Private Partnership (PPP) schemes could be a solution that strengthens the program's sustainability without burdening the state budget exclusively (Muh et al., 2025). In addition to the technical and fiscal aspects, the political dimension also requires serious attention. Free nutritious meals are often interpreted as a symbol of populism in the national political arena. Studies show that student meal campaigns are often exploited as a political image-building tool. This raises the risk that the MBG will remain a short-term project without a strong policy commitment. Therefore, strengthening public accountability is needed through a community-based

digital reporting system, involving school committees in menu planning, and open and responsive risk communication (Qomarrullah, 2025).

The challenges faced in the 3T (frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged) regions further emphasize the importance of systemic integration. Kitchen infrastructure, the quality of human resources, and the availability of local raw materials are major obstacles. Therefore, MBG must be integrated into school development strategies, rather than standing as a standalone program. This approach will enable schools to become community service centers that provide education, nutrition, and other basic services in an integrated manner (Rahmah et al., 2025). As a form of policy strengthening, the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) needs to encompass six integrated and sustainable strategic elements. First, menu quality must be improved based on the principle of balanced nutrition and taking into account local culture and food preferences so that the food provided is not only healthy but also acceptable to students. Second, logistics and distribution systems need to be strengthened through a participatory approach involving local communities and the use of digital technology to ensure efficiency, timeliness, and transparency. Third, coordination between institutions at both the central and regional levels must be improved, accompanied by the active involvement of civil society so that program implementation reflects real needs and local aspirations and prioritizes local workers for economic growth and reducing unemployment (Purnomo et al., 2025).

Fourth, nutrition education campaigns must be intensified through various communication channels, including mass media, social media, and integration into the educational curriculum to create collective awareness of the importance of healthy eating patterns through collaboration between partners or foundations, heads of nutrition fulfillment service units (SPPG), nutritionists, and schools. Fifth, monitoring and evaluation processes must be carried out periodically using a spatial and longitudinal data-based approach, so that program impacts can be accurately monitored and policies can be adjusted responsively. Finally, the integration of the free nutritious meal program into the school curriculum through the Shokuiku approach, namely nutrition education based on cultural context and daily practices, will encourage the formation of healthy eating habits from an early age while strengthening the connection between classroom learning and students' real-life experiences (Haddad et al., 2020). With these six strategic elements, free nutritious meals become not only a food provision program, but also a driver of sustainable social and educational transformation. With this approach, free nutritious meals can transform into more than just a nutrition intervention program, but also a holistic and transformative learning platform, strengthening character, healthy eating habits, and local food security. By strengthening both technocratic and political aspects in a balanced manner, free nutritious meals (MBG) has the potential to become a long-term policy that contributes significantly to achieving "Indonesia Emas 2045" (Ayuni, 2025).

The success of the free nutritious meal program is supported by several significant driving factors. One key factor is government policy support, which provides a strong foundation for its implementation. Although not based on a Presidential Regulation, the government's strategic initiatives ensure synergy between the central government, local governments, and relevant institutions to achieve the program's targets. Furthermore, the active participation of local communities, such as integrated health post (Posyandu) cadres and school teachers, plays a crucial role in accelerating the distribution of nutritious meals while increasing program acceptance at the community level. Local community involvement not only strengthens implementation but also fosters a sense of community ownership of the (Sartijo 2024). In addition, with the free nutritious meal program (MBG), micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play a fundamental role in supporting the national and local economy, especially in developing countries like Indonesia where MSMEs not only function as engines of economic growth but also as a social safety net for vulnerable populations. MSMEs make a significant contribution to job creation, income distribution, and unemployment and poverty reduction.

From the research results, it was found that not only pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and toddlers were the beneficiaries but all students of PAUD/TK/RA, SD/MI, SMP/MTS, SMA/MA, SMK, SLB, Islamic boarding schools, religious schools and special service education (for example jungle schools, halfway houses and others (within a maximum radius of 6 km/maximum travel time of 20 minutes) and listed in the Basic

Education Data System (DAPODIK) of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education or listed in the e-management Information System (EMIS) data system of the Ministry of Religious Affairs that meet the requirements and are determined by the PPK and approved by the KPA of the National Nutrition Agency. The number of beneficiaries is estimated to reach 20 million students and Islamic boarding school students as well as pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and toddlers in 2025 spread across 38 provinces throughout Indonesia. The number of beneficiaries at each location of the nutrition fulfillment service unit (SPPG) is allocated for approximately 3,000 – 4,000 beneficiaries.

The mechanism for providing free nutritious meals (MBG) for school children is carried out every Monday to Saturday and for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and non-PAUD toddlers, it is carried out every day using wet and dry food, by following the fulfillment of Nutritional Standards according to the group category and age of the aid recipients determined by the National Nutrition Agency (BGN). In terms of distributing free nutritious meal packages for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and toddlers, the nutrition fulfillment service unit (SPPG) will collaborate and utilize local cadres including Posyandu cadres, PKK cadres, village midwives, KB/PLKB counselors or other cadres who are used to dealing with pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and toddlers for package distribution. These cadres also function as Companion Cadres who will ensure that the distributed free nutritious meal packages are consumed by the beneficiaries. Assistance is carried out with the participation of community, private or university elements. In addition to the daily distribution of free nutritious meal packages to aid recipients, a monthly meal for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and non-PAUD toddlers can be held at the integrated health post (Posyandu), following the local Posyandu's routine schedule. The monthly meal at the Posyandu can be used as a means to provide nutrition education to pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and parents of non-PAUD toddlers. The initial data collection on recipients of aid for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and toddlers throughout Indonesia is sourced from the Ministry of Population and Family Development/BKKBN, which will then be verified and validated by each nutrition fulfillment service unit in the field by coordinating with the Health Office, Community Health Centers/Posyandu, Posyandu Cadres, PKK Cadres, Village Midwives, Family Planning/PLKB Counselors, or other cadres who regularly interact with pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and toddlers at their respective nutrition fulfillment service unit locations.

From the research results it was also obtained The impact of the quality of food is that students or students state that the portion of food provided is insufficient, the variety of food is also lacking so that students sometimes get bored if the menu is too often eggs, and sometimes food hygiene is not maintained, especially in oranges and cut fruit, namely watermelon, usually the fruit served is not fresh and not sweet so that it eliminates the taste of the dish and has an impact on the quality and interest of students in eating. In the aspect of program implementation, especially in service management and SOP (standard operating procedures or services), sometimes the delivery time of distributed food is not on time (late) with school breaks so that sometimes children are slow to eat the food provided, all cannot be separated from how a head of the nutritional fulfillment service unit assisted by nutritionist staff, accountants, and field assistants in implementing management in the kitchen, controlling all work processes in the kitchen starting from the raw material preparation stage, the raw material processing process, the portioning process or packing of processed food ingredients, to delivery to minimize delays in the delivery of food packages. Meanwhile, in the field, many findings were obtained that most field assistants were recruited by partners or foundations, resulting in a lack of cooperation between the head of the nutrition fulfillment service unit, nutritionists, and accountants because they felt that they were family members of the partner or foundation, which resulted in a lack of professionalism in managing the nutrition fulfillment service unit.

In terms of student satisfaction, they were less satisfied with the menu, which often consisted of mostly eggs and rarely provided milk. However, one significant impact on the community was that the free nutritious meal program opened up numerous job opportunities for underprivileged communities. Some parents of beneficiary students and local residents were even able to participate in the work. However, again and again it was found that the facts in the field were that most of the volunteers came from partner families

or foundations and did not live around the working area of the nutrition fulfillment service unit, even though if we talk about the technical guidelines for free nutritious meals (MBG), volunteers should be recruited from 30% of local residents or residents around the nutrition fulfillment service unit, so that this incident again caused many disputes because the volunteers considered that the kitchen or nutrition fulfillment service unit belonged to their family even though it had been rented by the national nutrition chart and interfered too much in the internal affairs of the kitchen and only respected the title as head of the nutrition fulfillment service unit and the staff.

The cause of dissatisfaction of students or pupils in providing food menus is because the menus provided are not varied and are caused by partners who shop for raw materials too high beyond the HET (Highest Retail Price) in their respective areas, based on findings in the field that the head of the nutrition fulfillment service unit, nutritionists, and accountants have maximized in suppressing prices so that they are not too high beyond the HET or market price, however, it is not recommended by partners or foundations on the grounds that raw materials are rare and difficult to find, even though the head of the nutrition fulfillment service unit may propose to simplify the process of ordering raw materials, but it is still not recommended by partners or foundations. That is why the variety of food menus is difficult to play because the daily budget ceiling is too small which is caused by the price of raw materials being too high and making it difficult for accounting staff to order, even though ordering raw materials is directed to shop directly at farmers, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and bumdes or cooperatives so that the price does not exceed the HET (Highest Retail Price) and is in accordance with market prices, but it is back to the partners who order. This finding is in line with research conducted by (Sri Prilmayanti Awaluddin, et al, 2025) which states that community collaboration serves as a fundamental structural pillar in building socioeconomic resilience among micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). In urban economies like Makassar, collaboration is not limited to formal partnerships but is realized through informal networks, cooperatives, and place-based business communication between economic actors, social networks, and institutional environments.

V. Conclusion

Free nutritious meal program (MBG) President and Vice President Prabowo-Gibran's program is a strategic step to improve public welfare, particularly in improving the nutritional status, health, and academic development of Indonesian children. This program has great potential to improve the quality of human resources, encourage locally-based economic growth, and strengthen national food security. However, its implementation faces several serious challenges, such as lack of coordination between agencies, limited infrastructure in remote areas, weak food quality monitoring, a high fiscal burden, and poor communication between heads of nutrition service units (SPPG) and partners or foundations. Furthermore, ineffective development communication and public ignorance about the importance of nutrition undermine the program's effectiveness.

Despite its positive impact, its implementation still faces challenges such as suboptimal food distribution and difficulty in obtaining local supplies. For the program's sustainability, strengthening strategies, community collaboration, and effective management are needed. In the long term, the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program is a real effort to realize social justice and improve the quality of education and health of Indonesia's young generation. The results also show that the free nutritious meal system provided by the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) by MTs Maarif Pinrang is still ineffective, especially in terms of menu variety and distribution time. Therefore, it is necessary to further evaluate what causes the lack of menu variety so that its distribution is more effective. The theoretical implications of this research also lie in the ability of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) to improve the nutrition of children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers, as well as create new jobs in the agriculture, renewable energy, and logistics sectors.

References



- Agustini, U., & Mulyani, S. (2025). Efektivitas dan tantangan kebijakan program makan bergizi gratis sebagai intervensi pendidikan di Indonesia. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebijakan Publik*, 4, 362–368.
- Aji, W. T. (2025). Makan bergizi gratis di era Prabowo–Gibran: Solusi untuk rakyat atau beban baru? *Naafi: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.62387/naafijurnalilmiahmahasiswa.v2i2.134>
- Andreas, K., Tambunan, H., Nababan, R., Siagian, R. A., Naiborhu, R., Harianti, S., & Jamaludin, J. (2025). Tinjauan kritis tentang program makan bergizi gratis terhadap produktivitas belajar siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan*, 2.
- Anifatul Kiftiyah, Palestina, F. A., Abshar, F. U., & R. K. (2025). Program makan bergizi gratis (MBG) dalam perspektif keadilan sosial dan dinamika sosial-politik. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Politik*, 5(1).
- Awaluddin, S. P., Suci, Y. R., Indriasari, D. P., Mariati, & Weraman, P. (2026). Building socio-economic resilience through MSME community collaboration: A critical study on empowerment and collective awareness in Makassar City. *Journal of Community Development*, 6, 59–69.
- Ayuni, D. T. (2025). Dilema pelaksanaan program makan bergizi gratis pada siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan*, 8(8).
- Badan Gizi Nasional. (2025). *Petunjuk teknis makan bergizi gratis* (Final 25 Juni 2025).
- Bahri, S. (2025). Implementasi program makan bergizi gratis di Kabupaten Pinrang. *Jurnal Administrasi Publik*.
- Dwijayanti, A. (2024). Policy spillover: Analisis jaringan dampak kebijakan makan siang bergizi gratis terhadap sektor pertanian. *Jurnal Kebijakan Publik*, 20(1), 281–308.
- Eliza, F., Gistituati, N., Rusdinal, & Fadli, R. (2024). Analisis SWOT kebijakan makan siang gratis di sekolah menengah kejuruan. *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 4(1), 121–129.
- Fatimah, S., Rasyid, A., & Arwakon, H. O. (2024). Kebijakan makan bergizi gratis di Indonesia Timur: Tantangan, implementasi, dan solusi untuk ketahanan pangan. *Jurnal Ketahanan Pangan*, 4(1), 14–21.
- GoodStats. (2025). *Penerima MBG capai 3,2 juta orang per April 2025*. <https://data.goodstats.id/statistic/penerima-mbg-capai-32-juta-orang-per-april-2025>
- Haddad, L., Alderman, H., & Appleton, S. (2020). Reducing child malnutrition: How far does income growth take us? *World Bank Economic Review*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhg012>
- Harun, S. (2026). Policy implementation and regulatory challenges in managing civil service resources in the era of digital governance. *Journal of Public Administration*, 6, 1–17.
- Jaya, I. M. L. M. (n.d.). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif dan kualitatif*.
- Karomah, U., Wahyuni, F. C., & Trisnasari, Y. D. (2024). Program penyelenggaraan makan siang sekolah: Studi literatur tentang dampak kesehatan, hambatan, dan tantangan. *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat*, 4(1), 91–103.
- Maharani, P. A., Namira, A. R., & Chairunnisa, T. V. (2024). Peran makan siang gratis dalam janji politik kesejahteraan sosial. *JOLASOS: Journal of Law and Social Society*, 1–10.
- Muh, A., Hiqh, F., Syahreza, A., Ruzadi, N., & Said, M. R. (2025). Analisis kebijakan makan bergizi gratis Prabowo–Gibran dan dampaknya dalam bidang pendidikan. *Jurnal Kebijakan Publik*, 4(5), 655–664.
- Natalia, D., & Syafii, A. (2025). Efektivitas program makan gratis pada status gizi siswa sekolah dasar: Tinjauan sistematis. *Jurnal Gizi dan Kesehatan*, 7, 27–48.
- Nursuciyani Jamal, Arifin, M. A., Amir, M. Y., Palutturi, S., & Wahyu, A. (2024). Healthcare determinants and dominant factors of maternal mortality ratio. *Journal of Public Health*, 2024.
- Pancani, P. C. T., & Ningsih, N. (n.d.). A comprehensive study on MBG (makan bergizi gratis) in the Prabowo–Gibran cabinet: Evaluating the psychological and health impacts of the policy. *Jurnal Ilmu Psikologi dan Kesehatan*, 177–186.
- Purnomo, A., Putikadyanto, A., & Nur, A. (2025). Program makan bergizi gratis: Analisis kritis transformasi pendidikan Indonesia menuju generasi emas 2045. *Jurnal Pendidikan Nasional*.
- Qomarrullah, R., et al. (2025). Dampak jangka panjang program makan bergizi gratis terhadap kesehatan dan keberlanjutan pendidikan. *Jurnal Kesehatan dan Pendidikan*, 5(2), 130–137.
- Rahmah, H. A., Anggraini, A., Nilasari, Y. P., & Putri, E. (2025). Analisis efektivitas program makan bergizi gratis di sekolah dasar Indonesia tahun 2025. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar*, 2(2), 2855–2866.

- Rimbawan, R., Nurdiani, R., Rachman, P. H., & Y. K., & Y. N. (2023). School lunch programs and nutritional education improve knowledge, attitudes, and practices and reduce the prevalence of anemia: A pre-post intervention study in an Indonesian Islamic boarding school. *Journal of Nutrition and Education*.
- Roberts, M., et al. (2022). The effects of nutritional interventions on the cognitive development of preschool-age children: A systematic review. *Nutrients*, 1–15.
- Sartijo, A. (2024). Free nutritious meal program as a human resource development strategy to support national defense. *Journal of Defense Studies*, 5(3), 129–141.
- Setiadi, A., & Muhafidin, D. (2025). Challenges in implementing the makan bergizi gratis (MBG) program in West Bandung Regency: Between policy goals and field realities. *Jurnal Administrasi Publik*, 7(4), 111–119.
- Skidmore, D. (2011). Theory Buzan, B. (1998), *A new framework for analysis*. *International Affairs*, 93(4), 1010–1011.
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Syamsu, R. F., Putry, R. A., & Widyadhana, N. M. (2025). Tinjauan nilai gizi dari program makan bergizi gratis (MBG) Presiden RI. *Jurnal Gizi Nasional*, 6, 14843–14853.
- Teori, K., Hanna, M., Hylmi, M. R., & Rahmawati, R. (2025). Analisis implementasi program makan bergizi gratis dalam kerangka teori mandat Hanna F. Pitkin. *Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 7(10).
- Verguet, S., Gautam, P., Ali, I., Husain, A., Meyer, S., Coco, M., Mphangwe, M., Burbano, C., Lloyd, E., Saka, A., Zelalem, M., Giyose, B. B., Li, Z., Erzse, A., Hofman, K., Giner, C., & Avallone, S. (2023). Investing in school systems: Conceptualising returns on investment across the health, education, and social protection sectors. *BMJ Global Health*, 8, e012545. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2023-012545>
- Wang, D., & Young, T. (2021). Impacts of school feeding on educational and health outcomes of school-age children and adolescents in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Global Health*, 11, 04051. <https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.11.04051>
- Weyana, A., Khatimah, N., Kamaruddin, S. A., & Awaru, A. O. T. (2025). Rasionalisme dalam kebijakan publik: Analisis dampak program makan bergizi gratis terhadap kesejahteraan pelajar. *Jurnal Kebijakan Publik*, 3(4), 1969–1976.
- Zulfa, S., Habibah, N., & Rahmawati, R. (2024). Analisis persepsi publik terhadap program makan siang gratis Prabowo–Gibran pada postingan Instagram @prabowo.gibran2 di Pemilu 2024. *Jurnal Komunikasi Politik*, 8(11), 41–54.