

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FREE NUTRITIOUS MEAL PROGRAM AT BINA BANGSA INTEGRATED ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN SERANG CITY IN 2025

Muhammad Saleh¹, Devi Fatwanti², Ali Muhtarom³

¹Bina Bangsa University,

²Islamic University Depok,

³UIN Sultan Maulana Hassanudin Banten

Email: salehgifar@gmail.com, devifatwanti@uidepok.ac.id,

ali.muhtarom@uinbanten.ac.id

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Abstract

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is a program introduced by the Indonesian government in 2025 to address nutrition issues in children, reduce stunting rates, and improve the quality of basic education. This study aims to evaluate how effective the implementation of the MBG program is at the elementary school level through a literature review approach. The findings of this study show that MBG has a good influence on children's nutritional status, including reducing stunting rates as well as increasing students' concentration and attendance at school. The program also contributes to easing the economic burden on families and empowering local entrepreneurs. However, in its implementation, the program still faces several challenges, such as uneven distribution of food, lack of facilities in schools, and differences in understanding of nutrition in the community. This study concludes that MBG has significant potential in creating a healthy and quality young generation, as long as it is supported by good management.

Keywords: Free Nutritious Food, Child Nutrition, Stunting, Basic Education

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of education is related to various elements that include inputs, processes, outputs, and learning outcomes. Therefore, these components are an important measure to assess the success of the education system (Mukhid, 2007). The

signs of quality education include teacher competence, equal access, relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the world of work, and the use of technology for inclusive learning. Students' abilities in literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving are also indicators of educational quality. Instead, policies such as Freedom of Learning, strengthening school infrastructure, and continuous teacher training must be incorporated into the system to improve the quality of education (Nadziroh, et al., 2023). Therefore, the policy will be an indicator in distinguishing the quality between cities and rural areas in adapting to the industrial revolution 5.0.

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program is one of the flagship initiatives launched by the administration of President Prabowo Subianto. This program is aimed at addressing nutrition issues and improving the quality of human resources in Indonesia, especially among pregnant women and children. The implementation plan of this program has undergone several advances since it was first announced (Merlinda & Yusuf, 2025). The targets of this program include pregnant women, toddlers, children at the kindergarten, elementary, junior high, and high school levels. This triggered controversy so that many opinions and opinions emerged from the public, especially on social media (Nursingah et al., 2024).

The free nutritious meal program initiated by President Prabowo Subianto is in line with the global nutrition target for 2025 set by international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the *United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund* (UNICEF) which aims to overcome nutrition problems that are still the main obstacles in human resource development. This global nutrition target includes reducing stunting, anemia, *low birth weight*, *overweight*, increasing exclusive breastfeeding, and reducing wasting. WHO views free nutritious feeding programs as an important part of a promotive and preventive approach in the human health system, and the provision of nutritious food, especially for children, is a crucial effort in improving their nutritional status, immunity, and cognitive development.

In 2024, Indonesia will still face serious challenges in reducing stunting rates. According to the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey (SKI), the national stunting prevalence is at 21.5%, only down about 0.8% from the previous year. This figure is still far from the national target of 14% set in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). To overcome this problem, the government launched the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in early 2025. However, public perceptions of this program are diverse. A survey conducted by GoodStats shows that only 21% of people say they agree with this program, while another 20% choose not to give their opinion or do not know about this Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program. This reflects the lack of information that reaches the public about the purpose and implementation of the program.

However, the implementation of this program in various regions still faces significant challenges. Several reports show that there is a discrepancy between the food served with the set nutritional standards, uneven portions, and the type of food that is not appropriate for the needs of school-age children. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the program in achieving its goals in real terms on the ground. The implementation of MBG in various regions also shows positive impacts, such as increasing the enthusiasm for learning and student attendance at school. For example, at the Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Serang City, Banten Province, this program increases student enthusiasm and reduces the economic burden of parents. However, challenges such as uneven food distribution, limited school infrastructure, and students' food preferences remain obstacles in the implementation of the program.

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the free nutritious eating program with a literature review and literature review approach. By examining relevant theories and comparing findings from various studies and similar program implementation reports, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the successes and challenges in the implementation of the MBG program in elementary schools in Indonesia by 2025.

THEORETICAL STUDIES

1. Free Nutritious Meal Program

The free nutritious meal program aims to provide students with nutritious meals at no cost, with a focus on improving their health and learning motivation. According to data, about 41% of students in Indonesia experience hunger while studying, which has a detrimental impact on their concentration and academic achievement. Therefore, the main goal of this program is to increase student nutritional intake, reduce stunting rates and overcome malnutrition problems among children, as well as encourage student motivation and participation in learning activities. Beneficiaries of this program include school children from various levels of education, toddlers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers (Merlinda & Yusmar Yusuf, 2025a).

The implementation of the free lunch program at school can be done with various approaches. Some examples include the universal provision of free lunches, targeted programs, government-planned initiatives, and programs led by local residents and volunteers. The goal of providing free lunches to all children in these eligible schools is to increase student engagement as well as reduce food insecurity (Turner, et al. 2019; Zuercher, et al. 2024 in Desiani & Syafiq, 2025).

2. MBG Program Objectives and Philosophy

Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) is one of the flagship programs launched by the governments of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka. This program aims to meet the daily nutritional needs of school children, with the hope of improving their health and learning achievement. The targets of this program include early childhood, elementary, junior high, high school, and vocational school students, students in Islamic boarding schools, and pregnant women, with a total of 82.9 million people.

The free nutritious meal program is an initiative to provide nutritious food in schools and Islamic boarding schools, which aims to improve the nutritional intake of students (Sitanggang, et al. 2024 in Andin et al., 2024). With this program, it is hoped that justice will be created in the learning process, because all students have the same opportunity to get nutritious food. This is expected to increase students' concentration in learning, regardless of their economic and social background (Karomah, et al. 2024 in (Andin et al., 2024a).

According to President Prabowo Subianto, the background for the implementation of this free nutritious meal program is the fact that 25% of children in Indonesia do not get nutritious food every day. This program aims to address the problem of hunger without distinguishing the economic status of children in the country. As part of the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction (PPS), the program's national strategy adopts a framework for the causes of nutrition problems, which includes the determinants of child nutrition, the main causes of malnutrition, and the context that affects nutrition problems in Indonesia (CISDI, 2024 in Andin et al., 2024).

3. The Impact of Free Nutritious Eating Programs

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program has a significant positive impact on students' health in the long run. Research conducted by Rif'iy Qomarrullah and his colleagues in 2025 shows that the incidence of stunting and malnutrition has decreased significantly in private schools that have implemented the Good Nutrition Intake (AGB) program for more than five years (Qomarrullah et al., 2025).

The research also revealed that students became more active in learning and extracurricular activities after participating in the AGB program. This is in line with the findings of Grantham McGregor and colleagues (2007) in (Qomarrullah et al., 2025) who stated that children who get adequate nutritional intake show better cognitive development and higher ability to concentrate in the learning process. Therefore, MBG has the potential to contribute not only to the physical health of students, but also to their readiness to follow learning optimally.

A study conducted by Khusna Yulinda Udhiyanasari in (Merlinda & Yusmar Yusuf, 2025b) highlights the important role of healthy food in increasing learning

concentration, especially for children who face learning difficulties. The observation results showed that students who did not eat breakfast or ate unbalanced meals tended to have difficulty focusing and felt sleepy more easily. In contrast, students who regularly eat a balanced nutritious breakfast show increased concentration and better response during the learning process.

In addition, other studies reveal that a lack of nutritional intake can negatively impact a child's brain development. Children who eat foods high in saturated fats and sugar are at risk of experiencing decreased memory and learning ability. This is due to the influence of glucose in food which can interfere with brain metabolism, causing children to feel tired quickly and lose focus (Merlinda & Yusmar Yusuf, 2025b).

Thus, it can be concluded that a healthy and nutritious diet has a significant impact on children's learning abilities. By ensuring that children are getting adequate nutritional intake, we can help improve their concentration and support their academic success in school.

4. Management and Governance of the MBG Program

On August 15, 2024, President Jokowi has inaugurated the National Nutrition Agency through Presidential Regulation Number 83 of 2024. This institution is expected to be the manager responsible for the program of providing nutritious food for free. The National Nutrition Agency is led by the Steering Board, which consists of the Head of the National Nutrition Agency and the Deputy Head of the National Nutrition Agency.

In its implementation structure, there are various important positions, including the head, deputy head, main secretariat, and a number of deputies who are in charge of various areas such as systems and governance, provision and distribution, promotion and cooperation, and monitoring and supervision, in addition to the main inspectorate (Salim, 2024 in Andin et al., 2024b).

Dadan Hindayana, Head of the National Nutrition Agency, revealed that they have established 85 service units to support the Free Nutritious Food (MBG) program. This service unit will provide services to 3. 000 schoolchildren who are entitled to receive free food. The function of this service unit is more comprehensive than that of the public kitchen, because in addition to providing food, it also acts as a cooking place that utilizes local agricultural products (Andin et al., 2024b).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The MBG program at the Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Serang City, Banten Province has been running for two weeks and is carried out regularly for five days a week, from Monday to Friday. The standard menu in the Free Nutritious Meal division is categorized into 2, namely high class and low class. For low grades (grades

1-3 SD) and high grades (grades 4-6 SD). The timing of the division is set specifically. For 1st and 2nd grade students, the distribution of MBG is carried out 15 minutes before school time considering that they go home earlier. Meanwhile, students in grades 3 to 6 get MBG rations at the first break with a duration of approximately 20 minutes of meal.

In each implementation process, teachers have a role in not only monitoring but also supervising students until the end of eating. The importance of the role of teachers can also be seen from their responsibility to ensure that all the food provided is consumed by students and the eating utensils are not lost. In the event of a loss of foodstuffs, the school is responsible for replacing them. In addition, the school is also required to document the implementation of the program, both in the form of photos and videos as evidence to the Babin (Bintara Pembina Desa) who play a role in distributing nutritious food to schools.

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program at the Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Serang City, Banten Province shows success in achieving its goal of increasing student nutritional intake. The active role of teachers in supervision ensures that food is consumed optimally and that cutlery is maintained. This is a crucial aspect in a school nutrition program because distribution alone does not guarantee the desired consumption and impact. The documentation obligation to Babin also affirms the principles of accountability and transparency in fund management and program implementation.

The Positive Impact of the MBG Program for Students

The MBG program has a very positive impact on students. Students feel very happy with this program and become more diligent in school. They even feel at a loss if they are not present at school. The program also helps regulate students' meal times and can significantly reduce students' pocket money. From the student side, Fatir Ahmad Azzani (5th grade of elementary school) stated that he really liked the food provided from the MBG program. His favorite menu includes milk, eggs, bread, and nuts. After consuming the food, students feel full, which ultimately makes them more focused and enthusiastic in learning. In addition, the positive impact of the program on students is very clear. Increased motivation to learn, focus on learning, and reduced absenteeism are strong indicators that nutritional fulfillment has a direct impact on academic performance and students' emotional well-being. The fact that students feel a loss if they don't attend shows that the MBG program has become a significant attraction. In addition, this program also contributes to the formation of a regular diet and reduces students' dependence on pocket money, which can indirectly teach financial management from an early age.

Table 1 The Impact of Free Nutritious Eating Programs on Students' Nutritional Status

Yes	Impact Aspects	Description
1	Reducing Stunting	Potential 10-15% decline in 3-5 years
2	Obesity Reduction	Pattern eat more healthy and Controlled
3	Improvement of General Health	Nutritional intake supports the system immune, lowering attendance
4	Concentration and Memory	Nutrition supports brain function and memory
5	School Attendance	Children are healthier and motivated be present
6	Social and Psychological Skills	Subtract taste ashamed Shaping Social Interactions

METHOD

The research method contains the research approach, research design, time and place of the research, samples, data collection procedures and data analysis and is written in the form of paragraphs. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the implementation of free nutritious meal programs in schools as an effort to improve nutrition and quality of education. This approach is taken to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, views, and perceptions of stakeholders such as principals, teachers, and students. Information was obtained through interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis regarding policies and program implementation at the Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Serang City, Banten Province. The *purposive sampling technique* is applied to select sources who are considered to be able to provide relevant and detailed information. Data analysis was carried out thematically by finding patterns, categories, and themes arising from the results of interviews and observations, then presented descriptively to illustrate the real conditions that occurred in the field.

CONCLUSION

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program in Indonesian primary schools by 2025 is a strategic step to improve the nutritional status, health, and quality of children's education. Based on literature analysis and implementation reports, this program shows a fairly high effectiveness in reducing the prevalence of stunting, increasing learning concentration, and student attendance at school. However, this effectiveness is not fully optimal because there are still obstacles in food distribution, limited infrastructure, and nutritional quality that is not uniform in all regions.

To ensure the sustainability and increase of program effectiveness, periodic evaluations, strengthening operational standards, and involvement of local communities and nutrition education to the community are needed. With good governance and cross-sectoral collaboration, the MBG Program has great potential as a foundation in building a healthy, intelligent, and competitive young generation of Indonesia.

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