Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan
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Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meals Program Viewed from the Case of Unfit-for-Consumption Food in East Lombok

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Abstract
Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) is a national government initiative launched in 2025 aimed at improving student nutrition and enhancing the quality of the teaching-learning process. However, its implementation in the field still faces several challenges. This study aims to evaluate the success of the MBG program and reveal the issues that arise through a case analysis of findings of unsafe food consumption at SDN 2 Sandubaya, East Lombok. Research data was collected from official documents, literature reviews, and media reports. The findings indicate deficiencies in kitchen hygiene, quality monitoring, and food distribution management, leading to biological contamination such as the presence of maggots in student meals. This situation affects the decline in student health, sense of safety, and parental trust in the program. Analysis using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory emphasizes that the inability to fulfill basic physiological needs and a sense of security can hinder students' readiness to learn. This study recommends the implementation of rigorous sanitation standards, layered supervision, improvement of food provider competencies, and regular evaluations to ensure the MBG program runs efficiently and contributes to improving educational standards in Indonesia.s employed. Please identify at least three keywords through which your research is most easily identified.

Keywords: Free Nutritious Meals, food safety, sanitation, education

INTRODUCTION

Improving the nutritional health of children and pregnant women in Indonesia is the main objective of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), a strategic initiative of the Indonesian government that was formally introduced on January 6, 2025. This program is a part of larger initiatives to address the serious problems of stunting and malnutrition, which have an adverse effect on children's development and health as well as the general quality of schooling. Additionally, MBG is in favor of the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision, which places a strong emphasis on developing outstanding human resources through improved health and education.

In order to reach all societal sectors, especially underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost areas (3T), the implementation of MBG targets a variety of educational levels from early childhood education (PAUD) to high school/equivalent and different locales. Nutritional fulfillment service units (SPPG) are dispersed around different districts and cities to provide free, nutrient-dense meals. By enhancing community nutrition, this program is anticipated to lower poverty rates while raising children's attendance and academic achievement.

Indonesia presents significant problems that need for integrated treatments in the context of increased worldwide attention to child nutrition and health issues, notably in tackling the widespread stunting and malnutrition in many locations. Since early dietary circumstances have a significant impact

on human resource quality, data from many national health surveys show an increasingly pressing need for effective nutritional intervention programs.

However, a thorough assessment of the MBG program's efficacy is still required, especially when it comes to gauging its influence on enhancing child health and educational quality as well as field issues including distribution, resource constraints, and regional inequities. In order to best accomplish program objectives, recent studies highlight the necessity of improved and more inclusive governance. In order to ensure that the free nutritious meal program is well-received and has long-term positive effects, it is also necessary to take into account the various socio-cultural settings across areas when developing menus and providing food to suit local customs and tastes.

METHOD

Since all data sources were accessible online through databases like Google Scholar, official government websites, and digital library repositories, the research was carried out virtually using internet connection from any location, without actual geographic restrictions. Using pertinent keywords, data was gathered on November 26, 2025, and on November 27, 2025, a thorough analysis was conducted. For researchers, accessibility at any time guarantees flexibility.

Since the study uses secondary data, all journal articles, official websites, and books pertaining to the subject from the previous five years make up the research population; human respondents are not included. 17 excellent documents that met the inclusion criteria of publication years 2019-2025 were purposefully chosen for the sample based on relevance, source credibility, and citation frequency. Thematic extraction and content synthesis were employed for result processing instead of surveys, interviews, or in-person observations.

On the morning of November 26, 2025, the researcher started the process by creating search terms. She then used internet databases to find possible sources from journals, official websites, and digital books. The final sample was obtained on the same day after a selection of documents were retrieved and evaluated according to abstracts and relevancy. Data from the sample was extracted on November 27, 2025, and content analysis software such as Microsoft Word was used to categorize the data thematically.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

One of the national priority programs, the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG), was launched widely in 2025. Its goal is to improve students' nutritional status, support learning concentration, and ensure that all students receive equal educational services. As Desiana (2025) noted, food safety, kitchen hygiene, distribution management, and consistent quality control significantly influence the program's success. However, the MBG program still faces obstacles in several locations, including East Lombok Regency. One case that garnered public attention occurred on March 13, 2025, at SDN 2 Sandubaya, Selong. In this case, MBG food containing maggots was deemed unfit for consumption. Burgers, bread, fruit, and dates were on the menu. However, when students received some of the food, particularly the burgers, worms were found. This finding suggests weaknesses in kitchen sanitation, food storage, and the distribution chain. This aligns with findings by Emmanulle et al. (2025) that inadequate quality control and inadequate food safety standards among food providers are common causes of food contamination in the free meal program. Qomarrullah (2025) also stated that the long-term effects of nutrition programs such as MBG can be hampered by poor food quality.

This case involved many people, including the beneficiary students and their parents, who first discovered maggots in their food and reported the incident via video to their homeroom teacher. The school, particularly the principal, promptly contacted the food provider for an explanation and conducted a detailed evaluation. The provider then visited the school for a joint inspection. More broadly, education and health institutions are heavily responsible for program oversight. Vitri et al. (2024) emphasize that school nutrition programs must receive support from various sectors, such as sanitation education, kitchen inspections, and food safety monitoring. A report by Inside Lombok (Zarwandi, 2025) states that similar cases have occurred in several other schools in the Selong area. This suggests that the problems that emerged in the early stages of MBG implementation were related to systemic issues in procurement

and oversight. The success of some schools suggests the need for a comprehensive structural evaluation. One key piece of evidence supporting this case is a video sent by a parent to the homeroom teacher showing maggots in an MBG burger. The video subsequently went viral, raising public concerns about the program's safety. According to a report by Inside Lombok, food suffered similar damage at other schools.

These findings align with Karomah's (2024) findings, which state that kitchen sanitation, raw material quality, and lack of supervision are key issues in the school meal program. Puspa et al. (2025) add that poor-quality food can diminish students' interest in learning and negatively impact government programs. Therefore, the case of SDN 2 Sandubaya demonstrates the importance of improving food safety monitoring, improving kitchen hygiene standards, and conducting regular evaluations of the entire food processing and distribution process within the MBG program to achieve the goals of improving nutrition and education quality.

Identification of the Main Causes of the Problem

Weaknesses in Quality Control

The discovery of maggots in the food indicates that the quality control system is inadequate. The stages of processing, storage, and delivery of food do not appear to have undergone standard inspection processes. The absence of quality control standard operating procedures (SOPs) or the weak implementation of these SOPs has resulted in food that should have been fit for consumption reaching students in a contaminated state. This reflects the absence of a daily monitoring mechanism or quality control officers who actually carry out checks before food is distributed.

Inadequate Kitchen Sanitation and Hygiene

This case also indicates that the food production area has poor sanitation. The cleanliness of the kitchen, floors, cooking equipment, and serving utensils is not maintained, thereby increasing the risk of biological contamination. In addition, the processing procedures do not appear to comply with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), such as the selection of fresh raw materials, processing at safe temperatures, and storage in accordance with standards. Other factors, such as food ingredients that are stored for too long or are not processed hygienically, also increase the likelihood of maggots in ready-to-eafood.

Poor Distribution Management

The distribution of MBG food is suspected to be inadequately managed in a professional manner. Delivery delays cause the food to remain at room temperature for extended periods, thereby accelerating the spoilage process. The absence of a proper cold chain for certain food items further increases the risk, particularly for perishable products. During Ramadan, some students take the food home to consume it at iftar, which prolongs storage time and heightens the likelihood of spoilage. This situation reflects a low level of understanding of food distribution standards and indicates limited capacity among providers to effectively carry out their responsibilities.

Weak Cross-Sector Coordination

This case highlights the weak coordination between food providers, schools, the Education Office, and the Health Office. The multi-layered monitoring system, which should involve kitchen verification, periodic inspections, and distribution monitoring, is not working effectively. This condition indicates a structural failure in the planning and supervision of the MBG programme at the regional level.

Impact of the Case on Education

Impact at the micro level (students and schools)

At the micro level, the discovery of maggots in food directly threatens student health. Biological contamination can cause poisoning, infection, or other digestive disorders that can potentially reduce attendance and learning ability. In addition to physical risks, students also experience psychological disorders such as disgust or fear of consuming school meals. Parents' trust in schools and local

governments has also declined dramatically. Many parents become hesitant to allow their children to participate in the MBG programme. Schools are also burdened by demands for public clarification, handling parent complaints, and internal evaluations, which ultimately divert the focus of teachers and principals from their core learning tasks.

Impact at the macro level (government and national education system)

At the macro level, this case has had a negative impact on the image of the MBG programme nationally. The viral incident has led the public to question the government's readiness to implement a large-scale free meal programme. Local and central governments must conduct investigations, kitchen audits, improve supervision standards, and adjust budgets. This situation adds to the administrative and financial burden on the government. If similar incidents continue to occur, the long-term goal of MBG as a national nutrition intervention may be threatened with failure, thereby hindering Indonesia's long-term human resource development agenda.

Theoretical Analysis

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is a psychological model that suggests human needs are arranged in a tiered system, from the most fundamental to the more complex. According to Maslow, individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before they can move on to higher-level needs. These needs are typically categorized into five levels:

1. Physiological needs
2. Safety needs
3. Love and belonging needs
4. Esteem needs
5. Self actualisation

The lower-level needs, such as physiological and safety needs, must be met before an individual can effectively focus on fulfilling higher-order needs. In the educational context, Maslow's theory plays a crucial role in determining students' readiness and ability to engage in learning. The Free Nutritious Meals Programme (MBG), aimed at fulfilling some of these basic needs, is a perfect example of how these principles come into play.

Physiological needs

Physiological needs are needs related to physical survival, such as eating, drinking, resting, oxygen, and physical health. For school-age children, adequate and safe nutrition is a basic requirement for them to be able to concentrate, actively participate in lessons, and grow and develop optimally. The Free Nutritious Meals Programme (MBG) is essentially designed to address needs at this level: providing adequate nutrition for students, especially those from economically disadvantaged families. However, in the case of SDN 2 Sandubaya, the food served was found to contain maggots and was potentially unfit for consumption.

This means that instead of meeting physiological needs, the programme actually threatens them. Instead of receiving energy and nutrition, students are exposed to the risk of digestive disorders, nausea, poisoning, or even trauma related to school meals. From Maslow's perspective, if these physiological needs are not adequately met, it will be very difficult to expect students to progress to the next level of needs, such as learning with focus, actively participating in discussions, or achieving academic excellence.

The need for safety

Once physiological needs are met, humans need safety, both physical safety (freedom from danger, illness, violence) and psychological safety (feeling protected, trusting the environment). For students, this sense of safety includes the belief that:

a. The school environment is a comfortable and protected place
b. Teachers and the school can be trusted
c. The facilities and services provided (including food) do not endanger them

In the case of MBG, the discovery of maggots in food directly undermines this sense of security. Students may feel afraid, disgusted, or anxious every time they see or receive food from the MBG

programme. Parents also lose trust in the school and local government. Children may think: "If eating at school is not safe, does the school really care about us?"

Theoretically, the failure to fulfil this need for safety makes it difficult for students to focus on the learning process, as their psychological energy is drained by managing their fear and discomfort. Maslow emphasises that people who do not feel safe will tend to prioritise protecting themselves first, rather than engaging in activities that require high cognitive concentration, such as studying, understanding lessons, or doing assignments.

Review of National Regulations and Policies on School Nutrition

The implementation of school nutrition programmes is closely regulated by national laws and guidelines to ensure the safety, health, and well-being of students. Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System establishes a clear framework for education in Indonesia, emphasizing that education must be carried out in a manner that ensures the safety, health, and welfare of students. This includes ensuring that all learning support activities, such as food programmes, adhere to safety standards. Therefore, both the government and schools are responsible for ensuring that food provided to students is safe, nutritious, and fit for consumption.

In addition to the provisions outlined in the National Education System Law, the Ministry of Health has set forth specific guidelines for school nutrition programmes. These guidelines, issued in 2023, outline the required food safety standards that all school nutrition programmes must adhere to. Key components of these guidelines include daily quality control, monitoring the distribution process, and ensuring the quality of food from the kitchen to the point where it is consumed by students. The objective is to guarantee that the food provided is not only nutritious but also safe for consumption. However, the case at SDN 2 Sandubaya highlights a significant gap in the consistent implementation of these guidelines. The discovery of unsafe, contaminated food, such as the presence of maggots, at the school indicates that these standards were not upheld, potentially endangering the health and safety of students.

This review of the relevant national regulations and policies underscores the importance of rigorous monitoring and adherence to food safety standards in school nutrition programmes. Ensuring the consistent implementation of these regulations is critical for protecting students' health and supporting their ability to learn in a safe and supportive environment.

CONCLUSION

The discovery of unfit-for-consumption food at SDN 2 Sandubaya, East Lombok, exposes serious flaws in the administration and oversight of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). The presence of maggots in the food is a sign of poor quality control in terms of hygiene standards, distribution management, and kitchen sanitation. These issues immediately affect the health risks to students and undermine the program's credibility with parents and other school stakeholders. From a systemic standpoint, this case highlights deficiencies in cross-sectoral supervision and coordination between schools, food providers, the Education Office, and the Health Office.

Improvements in inspections, certifications, and multi-layered, transparent monitoring methods are desperately needed, as seen by the discrepancy between national food safety requirements and field implementation. The National Education System Law and Ministry of Health instructions are in conflict with MBG implementation that does not adhere to health and food safety standards, both legally and in terms of national policy. Therefore, in order to guarantee that the program operates efficiently and provides the most possible benefits for every student, it is imperative that quality supervision and integrated monitoring systems be improved immediately.

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