

Free Nutritious Meal Program Implementation and Reported Learning Focus: A Qualitative Case Study in Bandung

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Abstract

Purpose— This study examines how meal delivery, reported food-consumption practices, and perceived classroom attention intersect in elementary schools implementing Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program.

Research Methodology— The original study describes a qualitative case study in Batununggal District, Bandung, using interviews with students, teachers, and program administrators, classroom and meal observations, and document review.

Results— The study account describes more regular school meals, acceptance of varied menus, and communal eating experiences. It also reports teachers' perceptions of fewer hunger-related interruptions and more sustained classroom engagement. Meal timing and menu appeal emerge as operational themes.

Research limitations/Implications— The interpretive design and the absence of independent attention measures preclude causal claims. The documentation of participant selection, fieldwork, and thematic inference also requires verification. School-level monitoring should attend to delivery schedules and meal acceptability.

Originality— The paper relates local school-meal implementation practices to reported learning experiences within a public-service delivery context.

Keywords: School feeding; Program implementation; Food consumption; Learning engagement; Qualitative case study

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1. Introduction

School feeding connects nutrition, educational participation, and the organization of services delivered to children. Regular access to food may reduce the discomfort associated with hunger during school hours, but changes in learning behavior need to be evaluated separately from claims about nutritional or physiological effects. Indonesian research has reported an association between breakfast habits and classroom concentration (Apriani *et al.*, 2022). School-meal programs are also discussed as potential investments in human-capital development and educational attainment (Nida & Sari, 2023; Wijaya *et al.*, 2016). The direction and strength of any relationship nevertheless depend on study design and the outcomes actually measured.



Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meal (Makan Bergizi Gratis, MBG) Program brings these questions into a public-program implementation setting. Service delivery involves more than the nominal provision of meals: preparation, distribution schedules, menu variety, food acceptability, and coordination with schools can shape whether intended recipients consume the food. Policy analyses have identified challenges in interagency coordination, operational readiness, and program monitoring (Agustini & Mulyani, 2025; Herdiana, 2025; Suprpto *et al.*, 2025). Case-based research in Indonesian elementary schools has likewise emphasized implementation arrangements and responsiveness to students' preferences (Febryanti *et al.*, 2025; Habib *et al.*, 2025).

Studies differ in the type of evidence they provide. Arifin *et al.*, (2025) examined concentration using a quasi-experimental design, whereas Pramesthi *et al.*, (2025) evaluated another Indonesian school-feeding initiative, ProGAS, using a mixed-methods approach. Research in other settings has also assessed educational outcomes in prospective and experimental designs (Mohammed *et al.*, 2023; Wang *et al.*, 2024). These studies provide a useful backdrop, but they do not establish that the same effects occurred at the schools discussed in the present qualitative account. Research on program governance and localized implementation further suggests that delivery conditions deserve analysis in their own right (Akbar, 2026; Yuliani *et al.*, 2026).

Against this background, the present article examines the reported experience of meal provision at elementary schools in Batununggal District, Bandung City. The questions are: How are changes in food consumption and acceptance characterized in the study account? What do the reported classroom observations suggest about students' attention and participation? Which operational features of MBG are described as relevant to these experiences? The contribution is a context-specific account linking school-level delivery practices with reported learning experiences. It is not presented as a causal impact assessment or a direct measurement of nutritional status.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Food Consumption, Meal Acceptance, and Learning

Food-consumption patterns encompass the foods chosen, the regularity of eating, and the extent to which offered meals are consumed. The importance of nutrition for children's development is addressed in existing educational and nutrition literature (Ismasnawat *et al.*, 2025; Syakir & Noviani, 2025). Related research on breakfast and concentration has identified associations in primary-school populations (Apriani *et al.*, 2022). However, research on food patterns among older adults, such as Pratiwi *et al.*, (2013), addresses a substantially different population and should not be treated as direct evidence about children's school performance.

Acceptance also has a sensory and social dimension. Food appearance, flavor, variety, and familiarity may influence whether children eat the food that is served; food sensory experience and consumption behavior are discussed by Fibrianto *et al.*, (2025). A mixed-methods study of school breakfasts in South Africa found that product preference and meal preparation were relevant to plate waste (Kesa *et al.*, 2026). Plate waste is consequently an informative implementation indicator, although it does not directly measure micronutrient absorption, blood glucose, or cognitive performance.

2.2 School Feeding as a Managed Public Service

The organizational performance of a feeding program can be examined through timely delivery, consistent procedures, menu responsiveness, stakeholder coordination, and monitoring. Analyses of MBG highlight distribution and governance challenges as practical implementation issues (Herdiana, 2025; Suprpto *et al.*, 2025). More recent reviews stress the importance of institutional capacity and local adaptation rather than assuming that an identical delivery model performs equally across schools (Akbar, 2026; Yuliani *et al.*, 2026).

A public-service perspective is also relevant to decisions about procurement, equity, and the use of available resources. Kiftiyah *et al.*, (2025) consider social justice in MBG implementation, while Jablonski *et al.*, (2023) discuss trade-offs associated with local procurement in school-feeding policies. These contributions broaden the program-management context, but the present case does not provide procurement, costing, or economic-outcome data with which to test those dimensions. Its organizational contribution is limited to the operational features described in the school-level account.

2.3 Perceived Focus versus Measured Learning Outcomes

Learning focus may be described through classroom behaviors, including attention to instruction, restlessness, participation, and completion of assigned tasks. Such observations are not equivalent to standardized cognitive testing. Research on school meals and academic outcomes employs distinct measures and designs, ranging from longitudinal observation (Mohammed *et al.*, 2023) to impact evaluation (Nida & Sari, 2023). Other studies have examined concentration directly using explicit measurement instruments (Arifin *et al.*, 2025). The present study's qualitative observations must therefore be interpreted as perceptions and descriptions of classroom behavior rather than measured changes in attention span or biological function.

The broader literature also cautions against treating program availability as identical to program effectiveness. Reviews of MBG's relationship with productivity and education emphasize evaluation of implementation and outcomes (Qomarrullah *et al.*, 2025; Tambunan *et al.*, 2025). An analytically useful school-level account should distinguish the observed service-delivery process from students' responses and the interpretation placed on those responses.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Setting

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative case-study approach situated in several elementary schools in Batununggal District, Bandung City, Indonesia. It explores food-consumption practices, meal delivery, and classroom experiences in the context of the MBG Program. The interactions surrounding meal provision constitute the case-study setting. The number of participating schools and the period of fieldwork require substantiation from the original study records.

3.2 Informants and Data Collection

Informants were reportedly selected purposively from student beneficiaries, classroom teachers, and MBG program administrators. The study describes in-depth interviews, participant observation of meal acceptance and classroom activities, and review of documents concerning meal composition, learning activities, and attendance. Interview guides and observation sheets are identified as research instruments. Participant counts and characteristics, the interview and observation schedule, the extent of documentary access, and the basis for a pre-program comparison remain unspecified. Establishing these details is necessary to evaluate credibility and transferability.

3.3 Analysis and Credibility Procedures

The described analytical approach is qualitative and thematic, involving data reduction, presentation of findings, and conclusion drawing, consistent with the framework discussed by Miles *et al.*, (2014). Source triangulation and member checking are also reported as credibility procedures (Sugiyono, 2019). However, the available account contains neither de-identified interview excerpts nor coded examples, a documented theme-development process, or records supporting the credibility checks. The reported themes are therefore interpreted cautiously, without assuming that missing procedures or supporting records can be reconstructed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Research Result

4.1.1 Reported Changes in Eating Regularity and Menu Acceptance

The case narrative contrasts irregular meal routines, missed breakfasts, and reliance on snacks with the more predictable availability of school meals through MBG. It describes scheduled food provision as a change in the daily school routine. However, the narrative does not present documented baseline counts or dated observations that would establish the extent of any change across participating students.

Menu variety and communal dining are described as associated with more favorable reception of vegetables, fruit, and other foods characterized as nutritious. Peer presence is discussed as a possible influence on students' willingness to try unfamiliar items. These remain reported observational themes rather than quantified measures of acceptance or systematic consumption.

4.1.2 Reported Classroom Attention and Participation

Teachers' classroom observations describe distraction, restlessness, and reduced concentration around later lesson periods before the program's implementation. Subsequent descriptions emphasize longer periods of apparent attention and greater participation during lessons. These observations are relevant to hunger-related interruption, but independent attention-span measurements, student-level paired data, and a comparison group are not established.

Improvements in analytical ability, cognitive resilience, or the attainment of literacy and numeracy goals cannot be inferred because those constructs were not independently assessed. The reported qualitative finding is narrower: teachers perceived stronger classroom engagement alongside a more regular meal schedule.

4.1.3 Operational Features of Meal Delivery

Three implementation features recur in the reported account: the timing of distribution relative to lessons, menu variety and taste, and the amount of food left after eating. Timely meal delivery is described as relevant to classroom routines and perceived hunger-related distraction. Menus adapted to students' preferences are described as more readily accepted, while limited leftovers are characterized as an encouraging sign of consumption.

No numerical waste audit, nutritional assay, glucose test, or comparative delivery log is provided. Consequently, the reported presence of limited plate waste does not establish how much energy or which nutrients were consumed or absorbed. These operational observations are useful for generating school-level monitoring questions, but they do not constitute physiological evidence.

4.2 Discussion

The case suggests that school meal delivery and learning experiences intersect through routine, acceptance, and classroom comfort. A regular meal schedule may reduce the need for students to seek snacks or attend lessons while hungry, but the present qualitative material does not isolate meal provision from other determinants of attention, such as sleep, teaching methods, household conditions, or classroom management. This distinction is consistent with the broader literature, in which measured program effects require explicit designs and outcome indicators (Arifin *et al.*, 2025; Mohammed *et al.*, 2023; Wang *et al.*, 2024).

From an implementation-management standpoint, the most relevant contribution is the connection between operational decisions and how the service is experienced at school. The reported themes of delivery time, menu responsiveness, and student acceptance are consistent with policy studies that treat organizational capacity and monitoring as central to MBG implementation (Akbar, 2026; Febryanti *et al.*, 2025; Suprpto *et al.*, 2025). These links support practical questions for school administrators: whether meals arrive when planned, whether menus are suitable for intended recipients,

and whether food left uneaten is routinely documented. They do not show that the particular schools studied achieved any measurable efficiency or economic benefit.

Menu diversity and shared meals also merit attention as forms of social and behavioral experience. The broader literature on sensory acceptability and plate waste suggests that food provision and actual intake should not be conflated (Fibrianto *et al.*, 2025; Kesa *et al.*, 2026). Likewise, program evaluations in Indonesia indicate that nutrition education and implementation oversight are distinct components of school-feeding design (Habib *et al.*, 2025; Pramesthi *et al.*, 2025). The present case provides a local narrative compatible with these concerns, not a test of their independent effects.

The findings are bounded by the evidence available for this case study. Sample composition, observation dates, baseline comparisons, de-identified interview evidence, and the analytic audit trail are not documented sufficiently to establish an independently verifiable chain from data to themes. These limitations constrain credibility and transferability and prevent causal conclusions. The account should therefore be treated as a provisional, context-specific interpretation until its underlying fieldwork evidence can be corroborated.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative case account describes a perceived relationship among regular school meal provision, food acceptance, and classroom engagement at elementary schools in Batununggal District, Bandung. Its most actionable insight concerns program implementation: distribution timing, menu suitability, and student uptake are relevant operational dimensions for school-level monitoring. The narrative does not demonstrate that MBG caused improvements in attention, cognition, nutritional status, or academic performance.

For practice, the reported themes motivate closer attention to meal schedules, menu feedback, and food-leftover documentation alongside classroom observations. The contribution is context-specific, and stronger claims depend on transparent substantiation of the fieldwork. Future research would benefit from well-described sampling, ethical safeguards, a traceable qualitative evidence base, and, where causal questions are pursued, independently measured learning outcomes with appropriate comparisons.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

During the preparation of this work, the author used generative artificial intelligence tools to support the scientific writing process. All interpretations, analyses, and conclusions presented in this study are the sole responsibility of the author.