

## SURVEY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FREE NUTRITIONAL MEAL PROGRAM (MBG) FOR STUDENTS AT MUHAMMADIYAH HEALTH VOCATIONAL SCHOOL, KOTA JUANG DISTRICT, BIREUEN REGENCY YEAR 2025

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### ABSTRACT

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is a crucial intervention to improve students' nutritional status through the provision of balanced meals. It aims to create a school environment that supports optimal growth and development and serves as a preventative measure against the risks of malnutrition, such as anemia and chronic energy deficiency. This study aimed to determine student satisfaction with the implementation of the MBG Program at Muhammadiyah Health Vocational School in Bireuen . This study used a quantitative descriptive method, with 60 students drawn from a stratified random sampling method ( 30 grade X students and 30 grade 1 XI students) from a total population of 145 students. Survey results indicated that the MBG Program was positively received and strongly supported by respondents. High levels of satisfaction were observed, with the majority of respondents satisfied with the quality and nutrition of the food (66.7%) and the overall implementation of the program (73.3%). The program also generated direct benefits, with 66.7% of respondents experiencing positive impacts on health and learning. However, significant gaps remain; 53.3% of respondents did not experience benefits across the social, psychological, and economic dimensions, indicating the need for more comprehensive interventions to maximize its multidimensional impact.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's efforts to realize the Golden Generation Vision 2045 depend heavily on the quality of productive and competitive human capital. However, this foundation faces a fundamental challenge in the form of high rates of malnutrition among school-age children. National data shows that the prevalence of stunting and anemia in elementary school-aged children and adolescents remains at levels that require radical intervention (Ministry of

Health, 2023). *Chronic* malnutrition not only limits physical growth but also impairs the development of brain structure and function . This results in cognitive deficits , decreased working memory , and difficulty maintaining concentration during the teaching and learning process ( Suryana & Budiarto, 2023) .

Cognitive deficits caused by malnutrition create a vicious cycle: students struggle to reach their full academic potential, which in turn worsens their future economic prospects. This situation is further exacerbated by socioeconomic factors; families with high poverty levels often cannot afford a balanced nutritional intake, which can also increase absenteeism or dropout rates due to fatigue or hunger (Sabates et al., 2022). Therefore, investing in the nutrition of school-aged children is a critical and strategic investment for national development.

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From a human capital perspective, investment in school meal programs aims to create a social safety net that can reduce barriers to educational access caused by poverty and food insecurity. International studies show that school meal interventions consistently correlate with improved student attendance and cognitive performance. The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is implemented as a public policy initiative focused on balanced nutrition and universal access.

Although extensive policy analysis on the MBG program has been conducted, there is a gap in the literature regarding empirical evaluation at the beneficiary level. The success of this program cannot be measured solely from a logistical perspective; it must also be assessed by how its benefits are perceived by students. Therefore, this study aims to analyze student perceptions and satisfaction levels regarding the implementation of the MBG program at Muhammadiyah Health Vocational School in Bireuen, as well as to examine the extent to which the intervention impacts the school's health and academic contexts.

In response to the complexity of these issues, the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program was implemented as a comprehensive, cross-sectoral public policy initiative. The program is designed with mechanisms that focus on two main aspects: Balanced Nutrition and Universal Access. The "Nutritious" aspect ensures that the meals served meet the recommended daily Nutritional Adequacy Intake (RDA) standards to cover energy and micronutrient deficits, rather than simply providing food. The "Free" aspect guarantees full accessibility for all school children without exception, making it an effective social safety net to reduce the economic burden on underprivileged families (Wibisono, 2024).

Hypothetically, MBG is expected to have significant multidimensional impacts:

1. Health Impact: Immediate improvement in macro and micro nutritional status, reduction of anemia, and enhancement of the immune system.
2. Educational Impact: Improved learning readiness, memory, concentration, and decreased absenteeism (Chen & Smith, 2021).
3. Local Economic Impact: Building a local food supply chain through the concept of home-grown school feeding, empowering local MSMEs and farmers.

While extensive policy analysis on MBG has been conducted, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding empirical evaluation at the beneficiary level. The success of this massive program cannot be measured solely in logistical terms but must be assessed based on the actual benefits experienced by students, parents, and teachers in the field.

Therefore, this study aims to conduct a MBG Program Benefit Survey to factually measure: (1) Changes felt in students' nutritional and health status, (2) Perceptions of menu quality and acceptability, and (3) Correlation with increased student motivation and attendance .

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study used a quantitative descriptive method with a cross-sectional design to analyze students' perceptions and satisfaction levels towards the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG) at Muhammadiyah Bireuen Health Vocational School . This study was conducted on October 27 , 2025, after the program had been running for one month .

The population in this study was 145 students , with a sample of 60 respondents taken using the stratified random sampling method (30 class X students and 30 class XI students ). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire as a research instrument . This instrument was tested for validity and reliability to ensure consistency of measurement results . Respondents provided responses using a scale that measured their level of satisfaction with the nutritional quality , health benefits , and socio-economic aspects of the program.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency and percentage calculations to describe the distribution of respondents' answers . In addition , cross - tabulation analysis was conducted to compare satisfaction perceptions across grade levels for a more in - depth interpretation . The results of the analysis were then presented in the form of a frequency distribution table and a bar chart .

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Overall , the survey results show that respondents have a very positive view and a high level of satisfaction with the programs/ activities evaluated .

Table 1. Food Quality and Nutrition

No	Food Quality and Nutrition	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	40	66.7
2	No	20	33.3
	Total	60	100.0

Data Source : Primary Data 2025

Based on table 1.1, it can be seen that the majority of 40 respondents (66.7%) of 60 respondents gave a satisfactory assessment of the Quality and Nutrition of Food and 20 respondents (33.3%) of 30 respondents were not satisfied .

Table 1.2 Health and Learning Benefits

No	Health and Learning Benefits	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	40	66.7
2	No	20	33.3
	Total	60	100.0

Data Source : Primary Data 2025

Based on table 1.2, it can be seen that the majority of 40 respondents (66.7%) of 60 respondents gave a very useful assessment of the Health and Learning Benefits and only a few 20 respondents (33.3%) of 60 respondents stated that this aspect was not useful .

Table 1.3 Social , Psychological and Economic Aspects

No	Social , Psychological and Economic	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	28	46.7
2	No	32	53.3
	Total	60	100.0

Data Source : Primary Data 2025

Based on table 1.3, it can be seen that the majority of respondents, 32 respondents ( 53.3%) of the 60 respondents, did not feel the positive benefits from the social , psychological and economic aspects studied , while only 28 respondents (46.7%) of the 60 respondents stated ' Yes ' that they felt it .

Table 1.4 Aspects of Program Implementation and Satisfaction

No	Program Implementation and Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	44	73.3
2	No	16	26.7
	Total	60	100.0

Data Source : Primary Data 2025

Based on table 1.4, it can be seen that the majority of respondents, 44 respondents (73.3%) of 60 respondents stated ' Yes ', which indicates that they are satisfied with the implementation of the program . This figure is much higher than the respondents who stated ' Not ', which is 16 respondents (26.7%).

The results of the study showed a high level of satisfaction with the operational aspects of the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG), with 73.3% of respondents expressing satisfaction with the implementation mechanism , and 66.7% expressing satisfaction with the quality and nutritional value of the food . These findings support the hypothesis that school nutrition interventions can contribute to improved learning readiness , with 66.7 % of respondents reporting a direct positive impact on their health and concentration in class . These results

align with international studies that suggest that school meal programs consistently correlate with improved student attendance and cognitive performance .

However , this study also identified a significant gap , with 53.3 % of respondents not yet experiencing benefits in the social , psychological , and economic dimensions . This gap can be explained by several factors . First , the program's one - month implementation period is likely insufficient for students to internalize the long - term effects of the social safety net . Second , the economic benefits of the program , such as savings in household food expenditures , may be felt more directly by parents than by the students themselves .

Therefore , evaluation of the program 's effectiveness cannot be limited to student perceptions of food quality . The multidimensional impact of the MBG program, particularly in the social and economic spheres , requires a longer intervention period and a more comprehensive evaluation method that includes the perspectives of parents or guardians as indirect beneficiaries . The implications of these findings suggest that future program success needs to be measured through broader indicators , including objective attendance data and community involvement in the local food supply chain .

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the survey conducted , it can be concluded that the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) at Muhammadiyah Bireuen Health Vocational School received a positive response from students , especially in operational aspects and direct benefits to health and learning . The high level of respondent satisfaction (73.3%) with the implementation of the program and positive assessment (66.7%) of the nutritional quality indicate that this program was successfully well received by students as a form of school nutrition intervention.

However , this study also identified that the perception of benefits in the social , psychological , and economic aspects is still limited , where 53.3 % of respondents have not felt a significant impact on these dimensions . This limitation indicates that the MBG program requires a longer implementation period and a more comprehensive evaluation , involving various stakeholders such as parents / guardians of students to fully internalize the impact of the social safety net . Further research is recommended to use a study design that involves objective data and a wider scope of respondents to strengthen the findings regarding the multidimensional impact of the program.

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