

Perceptions of Teachers on the Free Nutritious Meal Program Implementation in Indonesia: Benefits and Challenges

Yohanes Freadyanus Kasi^{a*}, Maria Elisabet Ga'a^b, Titiyaka Binti Jajuri^c, Delviana Vivi Bai^b

^a Fisheries Science Study Program, Institut Nasional Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

^b Agricultural Science Study Program, Institut Nasional Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

^c Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

yohaneskasi@gmail.com*; mariagaa87@gmail.com; titiyakajajuri@student.usm.my; vivibai93@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

Article Info

Article history:

Submission Sep 23, 2025

First Revised Oct 9, 2025

Accepted Oct 19, 2025

Published Oct 31, 2025

Keywords:

free nutritious meal program

nagekeo

student nutrition

teacher perceptions

ABSTRACT

Good nutrition has been shown to support concentration, memory, and academic achievement, making nutritious meal programs in schools one strategy for improving educational quality. One of the government's efforts in this area is the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). This study aims to analyze teachers' perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges of implementing the program in schools. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach. The data collection technique used a structured interview guide. Participants in this study were purposively selected, including teachers from elementary to secondary school levels. The interview procedure in this study was carried out in three stages: preparation, implementation, and closing. The results showed that the majority of teachers considered the MBG program a good initiative and needed to be implemented immediately. The main benefits identified included meeting students' nutritional needs, improving concentration and academic achievement, equalizing access to education, and building social character through communal mealtimes. However, teachers also highlighted a number of challenges such as budget limitations, the readiness of facilities and staff, food hygiene, distribution in remote areas, and the potential for misguided motivation among students who come to school solely for food. The study concluded that teachers' perceptions of the MBG program were both optimistic and realistic: optimistic about the significant benefits it could bring to students and the educational system, yet realistic about the technical and structural barriers that must be overcome. Therefore, the success of the program depends on careful planning, cross-sector support, and consistent monitoring and evaluation so that its implementation is effective, sustainable, and on target.

© 2025 Authors.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY-SA)



How to cite:

Kasi, Y. F., Ga'a, M. E., Jajuri, T. B., & Bai, D. V. (2025). Perceptions of teachers on the free nutritious meal program implementation in Indonesia: Benefits and challenges. *Pedagonal : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 9(2), 180–187. <https://doi.org/10.55215/pedagonal.v9i2.54>

Introduction

Education is a systematic effort to create a conducive learning environment, enabling students to actively develop their potential (Chan-Anteza (2020)). The goal is to shape individuals with strong character, noble morals, broad knowledge, and skills needed to contribute to society (Abd Rahman et al., 2022). Through education, students are expected to hone their spiritual abilities, self-control, and intellectual abilities to become well-rounded individuals who are beneficial to their environment. Education is a crucial aspect in shaping the quality of citizens. In addition to imparting knowledge and skills, education also plays a role in shaping students' character and behavior.

However, the quality of education is determined not only by internal factors such as curriculum and teaching methods, but also by external factors such as the environment and students' physical condition (Abd Rahman et al., 2022; Safian et al., 2023; Chamidy et al., 2023). One external factor influencing the quality of education is students' nutritional status. Good nutritional status is crucial for supporting the instructional process and improving the quality of citizens. Therefore, a nutritious meal program is one effort that can be undertaken to improve the quality of education and the quality of citizens (Arifin et al., 2025; Islam & Tanveer, 2024; Zavitsanou & Drigas, 2021). Proper nutrition for school-age children is crucial to supporting their growth and development. Childhood is a golden period, during which active growth and development occur, requiring a balanced nutritional intake. Adequate nutrition plays a role in maintaining physical health, boosting immunity, and enhancing intelligence (Zavitsanou & Drigas, 2021; Islam & Tanveer, 2024).

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (*Makan Bergizi Gratis* – henceforth MBG) is one of the flagship initiatives launched by President Prabowo Subianto's administration. This program aims to address nutrition issues and improve the quality of human resources in Indonesia, particularly among pregnant women and children. The program implementation plan has seen some progress since its initial announcement (Merlinda & Yusuf, 2025). The program targets pregnant women, toddlers, and children in kindergarten, elementary, junior high, and high school. This sparked controversy, generating numerous opinions and debates, particularly on social media (Nursinggah et al., 2024).

One of the crucial elements supporting educational success is adequate nutrition for students, which serves to improve their cognitive abilities, energy, and learning endurance. Providing adequate nutrition allows students to concentrate more on the learning process, thus enabling them to better understand the material (Qomarullah et al., 2025). The impact of the MBG program will not be immediately visible in the short term, but rather, this program will be felt by the Indonesian people in the long term, especially in preparing the golden generation of 2045, who will be better prepared with adequate nutrition from an early age (Aji, 2025). Therefore, students' nutritional needs can be accommodated, giving them a greater opportunity to improve their learning abilities and also improve their health (Kiftiyah et al., 2025).

In the educational context, teachers, as educators, have a unique and significant perspective on the implementation of this program. They not only act as instructors but also as supervisors of students' physical and mental development (Desiani & Syafiq, 2025). With increased awareness of the importance of nutrition, teachers can contribute to creating a healthy learning environment. Good nutrition supports students' concentration, memory, and academic performance. Therefore, the nutritious meal program aims not only to meet nutritional needs but also to build a healthier and more productive generation. Through the teacher's perspective, we can understand the challenges and opportunities inherent in

implementing this program, as well as its impact on students' character and intelligence development. As agents of change, teachers are expected to foster collaboration between schools, parents, and the community in supporting the success of the free nutritious meal program. In this way, this program can directly contribute to improving the quality of human resources and, ultimately, strengthening the foundation of the nation (Arifin et al., 2025).

As educators, teachers play a direct role in assessing the program's impact on students' health, concentration, and motivation in the classroom. Teachers' perspectives also reflect the program's ability to support holistic learning and child development. Therefore, exploring teachers' perceptions is crucial for understanding the effectiveness and challenges of implementing the free nutritious meal program in schools. Specifically, this study aims to analyze the perceptions of teachers from elementary to high school levels regarding the benefits and challenges of implementing the free nutritious meal program in Indonesia.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach, deemed appropriate for in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions of the Free Nutritious Meal Program and its impact on improving the quality of life for citizens. The data collection technique used an interview guide designed to explore teachers' perceptions and views on the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals program in schools. The interviews were conducted using a structured interview, with all questions prepared in advance by the researcher.

The indicators and interview questions used were as follows: 1) The planned timeline for implementing the free nutritious meal program in schools; 2) Respondents' general opinions regarding the program; 3) The benefits students will receive if the program is implemented; 4) Challenges or concerns if the program is implemented in schools; 5) School readiness to implement the free nutritious meal program, including facilities, support staff, and coordination; 6) Specific roles planned for the program; 7) The form of support most needed by the school to successfully implement this program; 8) Types of food suitable to be provided to students; 9) Suggestions or hopes for the free nutritious meal program to run smoothly and have a positive impact.

Participants in this study were purposively selected, including teachers from elementary to secondary school levels involving teachers from each sub-district within Nagekeo Regency. Table 1 below presents the number of teachers interviewed, categorized by educational level, length of teaching experience, and subjects taught.

Table 1. Research Respondents

Educational Level		Number of teachers	Long time teaching	Subject
Kindergarten		6	4-8 years	Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Arts and Crafts, Character Education
Elementary school		11	3-10 years	Indonesian, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Civics, Religious Education, Physical Education, Arts and Culture
Junior high school		10	4-7 years	Indonesian, English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Civics, Religious Education, Physical Education, Arts and Culture
Senior High School		6	2-8 years	Indonesian, English, Mathematics, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Economics, Geography, Sociology, Civics

The interview data collection procedure for this study was carried out in three stages: preparation, implementation, and closing.

The preparation stage, began with developing an interview instrument in the form of a structured list of questions aligned with the research objectives. Then, the researcher

obtained a research permit from the university or relevant institution. This letter was then submitted to the principal of the school where the research took place to obtain approval for the interviews. Coordination with the school was conducted to determine the interview schedule and select teacher respondents based on their educational level.

In the Implementation Stage, interviews were conducted in person at the school according to a predetermined schedule. Prior to the interviews, the researcher briefly explained the purpose of the study, data confidentiality, and the interview procedure. The interviews were structured using a pre-prepared questionnaire. During the interviews, the researcher took notes on the respondents' responses and, if permitted, used a voice recorder to ensure data accuracy.

In the Closing Stage, the researcher verified the interview results to ensure clarity and completeness of the information. The researcher then thanked the teachers and school administrators for their participation and cooperation. The interview data were then transcribed and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis methods used in this study.

The data analysis in this study was conducted qualitatively, by examining the results of interviews with teachers based on their educational level. This analysis aimed to understand the meaning, views, and perspectives of respondents regarding the implementation of the free nutritious meal program in schools. The analysis process was carried out in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and simplified interview data according to the research focus, such as knowledge, responses, benefits, challenges, and expectations regarding the program. The reduced data were then presented in narrative form to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships between findings. Then, the researcher interpreted the findings to draw meaningful conclusions and verified them with field data. To increase the validity of the results, the researcher also applied source triangulation by comparing answers between respondents from various educational levels.

Results and Discussion

The interviews focused on their perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges of implementing the free nutritious meal program in Indonesia. Based on data obtained through open interviews with teachers at various schools in Nagekeo Regency, diverse perceptions regarding the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program were found. In general, the program is viewed positively because it helps meet students' nutritional needs, improves learning concentration, and supports academic and non-academic achievement. However, a number of concerns and challenges were also expressed, such as hygiene, budget sustainability, food distribution, and potential changes in students' motivation to participate in school activities.

The majority of teachers believe that the Free Nutritious Meal Program is a good initiative and needs to be implemented immediately because it provides various important benefits for students. One of the main benefits is nutritional fulfillment, where teachers believe this program can reduce students' consumption on unhealthy meals and ensure they receive a balanced nutritional intake, as conveyed by one teacher at SMPS Hanura Danga and SDK St. Theresia Danga. In addition, teachers also observed the potential for improving students' learning quality through increased concentration, motivation, and achievement of students with healthier eating patterns, as expressed by teachers at SMKN 1 Aesesa, SMPN 3 Aesesa, and SDN Tongananga. This program is also seen as achieving equal access to education because students from low-income families can receive free nutritional support, as emphasized by teachers at SMPN 1 Aesesa Selatan and SDN Jawakisa. Furthermore,

several teachers emphasized that communal mealtimes at school had the potential to foster values of togetherness and sharing among students, as expressed by a teacher at Natakup Renduwawo Elementary School. Thus, the MBG program is perceived not only as an effort to improve nutrition and the quality of learning, but also as a means of developing students' social character. As stated by [Sanjaya \(2021\)](#), providing proper nutrition during school age is a long-term investment in developing a generation that is not only physically healthy but also mentally resilient.

According to [Hardinsyah \(2022\)](#), adequate nutritional intake can improve student's concentration and cognitive abilities, which correlate with improved academic achievement. This aligns with survey findings showing that students who receive nutritious meals at school tend to be more focused and enthusiastic about learning. [Soekirman \(2021\)](#) also emphasizes that school nutrition program is an effective strategy for improving the nutritional status of schoolchildren, which in turn contributes to the development of quality human resources.

Although the majority of teachers gave positive assessments, they also expressed a number of challenges and concerns regarding the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program. One of the main issues was the hygiene and quality of the food, including the timeliness of distribution, which is needed to be closely monitored to avoid negative impacts on students' health. This is emphasized by teachers at Hanura Danga Junior High School and St. Stefanus Nangadhero Elementary School. Furthermore, limited regional budgets and the readiness of infrastructure, such as healthy kitchens and staff were also important concerns expressed by teachers at SMPN 1 Aesesa Selatan, SDN Tongananga, and several schools in the Keotengah sub-district. Another concern is the emergence of misguided motivations among students, such as coming to school only to get food, not to learn, as reminded by teachers at SDK St. Theresia Danga and SDN Jawakisa. [Aritonang \(2023\)](#) stated that funding issues were often a critical factor in determining the sustainability of nutrition programs in schools. Furthermore, logistical and distribution aspects, limited facilities and management staff, and unhealthy eating habits that have already formed in students are also obstacles that need to be addressed. The lack of nutrition education among students and parents, according to [Khomsan \(2023\)](#), also affects the success of school nutrition programs.

On the other hand, food distribution issues, particularly in remote areas, are also feared to be a challenge, as expressed by teachers at Natakup Renduwawo Elementary School. Therefore, while the teachers fully support the program, they continue to emphasize the need for thorough planning, strict supervision, and adequate facilities and resources to ensure the MBG's implementation is truly effective, sustainable, and on-target.

In addition to highlighting the benefits and challenges, teachers also outlined the various forms of support needed to ensure the optimal implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program. The most frequently cited support was the provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure, including the construction of healthy kitchens at schools to ensure food quality and hygiene, as suggested by teachers at SMAK Aesesa Selatan. Furthermore, teachers emphasized the importance of nutrition education from the Health Office, both for students and program implementers, as well as close collaboration between schools, the government, parents, and the community, as expressed by teachers at SMKN 1 Aesesa and SMPN 3 Aesesa. Furthermore, teachers encouraged the MBG program to utilize local food ingredients to ensure not only the freshness and quality of the food but also support the local economy, as emphasized by teachers at SMPSK Hanura and SMKN 1 Aesesa. Teachers also hoped that the program would be implemented sustainably, transparently, and equitably,

with regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability. Therefore, comprehensive support from various parties and careful planning are key to the success of the MBG program in improving student nutrition and education quality. Wahab (2023) emphasized the importance of a participatory approach in school programs to develop student character. Implementing programs with a curriculum through projects, discussions, or writing assignments is also recommended to strengthen the impact of effective learning. Furthermore, ongoing nutrition education, collaboration with various parties, including parents and the private sector, and regular evaluation are considered essential to ensure the program is running according to its objectives. Jalal (2023) stated that investing in child nutrition is one of the most effective forms of investment in human development. Despite facing various challenges in its implementation, with the right strategy and support from various parties, this program can be a crucial element in preparing a healthy, intelligent, and characterful next generation.

Conclusion

Teachers' perceptions of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program are generally positive, as it is seen as beneficial in meeting students' nutritional needs, improving learning concentration, supporting academic achievement, helping to equalize access to education, and fostering a sense of community within the school. However, teachers also highlighted several challenges, including budget limitations, the availability of facilities and staff, food hygiene and quality, distribution in remote areas, and the potential for misguided motivation among students who come to school solely for food.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (*Kemdiktisaintek*) through the Directorate General of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (*Ditjen Diktisaintek*) for providing grant assistance so that this research can be carried out smoothly.

References

- Abd Rahman BP, Munandar, S., A., Fitriani, A., Karlina, Y., & Yumriani. (2022). Pengertian pendidikan, ilmu pendidikan dan unsur-unsur pendidikan. *Al Urwatul Wutsqa: Kajian Pendidikan Islam*, 8.
- Aji, W. T. (2025). Makan bergizi gratis di era Prabowo–Gibran: Solusi untuk rakyat atau beban baru? *NAAFI: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa*, 1(3), 215–226.
- Arifin, M. N., Rifa'i, M., & Pratama, H. D. (2025). Perspektif guru terhadap program makan bergizi dalam meningkatkan kualitas warga negara. *Menulis: Jurnal Penelitian Nusantara*, 1(5), 20–25.
- Aritonang, E. (2023). Analisis pembiayaan program gizi di sekolah dasar. *Jurnal Ekonomi Pendidikan*, 8(2), 112–125
- Chamidy, T., Yaqin, M. A., & Suhartono, S. (2023). The influence of internal and external factors on learning achievement. In *4th Annual International Conference on Language, Literature and Media (AICOLLIM 2022)* (pp. 562-573). Atlantis Press.

- Chan-Anteza, T. K. (2020). Management of a conducive classroom environment: A meta-synthesis. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(26), 54–70.
- Desiani, N., & Syafiq, A. (2025). Efektivitas program makan gratis pada status gizi siswa sekolah dasar: Tinjauan sistematis. *MANUJU: Malahayati Nursing Journal*, 7(1), 27–48.
- Hardinsyah. (2022). Gizi dan kecerdasan anak sekolah. *Jurnal Gizi dan Pangan*, 17(2), 45–57.
- Islam, K., & Tanveer, S. K. (2024). Importance of proper nutrition in human health. *Development and Dissemination of Biofortified varieties of different crops in SAARC Member States: SAARC Agriculture Centre*, 70.
- Jalal, F. (2023). Investasi gizi untuk pembangunan SDM Indonesia. *Jurnal Pembangunan Manusia*, 9(1), 34–48.
- Khomsan, A. (2023). Edukasi gizi dan perubahan perilaku makan anak sekolah. *Jurnal Media Gizi Indonesia*, 18(2), 97–109.
- Kiftiyah, A., Palestina, F. A., Abshar, F. U., & Rofiah, K. (2025). Program makan bergizi gratis (MBG) dalam perspektif keadilan sosial dan dinamika sosial-politik. *Pancasila: Jurnal Keindonesiaan*, 5(1), 101–112.
- Merlinda, A. A., & Yusuf, Y. (2025). Analisis program makan gratis Prabowo Subianto terhadap strategi peningkatan motivasi belajar siswa di sekolah: Tinjauan dari perspektif sosiologi pendidikan. *Ranah Research: Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 7(2), 1364–1373.
- Nursingah, L., Ruuhwan, R., & Mufizar, T. (2024). Analisis sentimen pengguna aplikasi X terhadap program makan siang gratis dengan metode naïve Bayes classifier. *Jurnal Informatika dan Teknik Elektro Terapan*, 12(3), 1615–1622.
- Qomarullah, R., Suratni, W., Wulandari, L. S., & Sawir, M. (2025). Dampak jangka panjang program makan bergizi gratis terhadap kesehatan dan keberlanjutan pendidikan. *Indonesian Journal of Intellectual Publication*, 5(2), 130–137.
- Safian, N., Ngah, N. S., Hussain, A. M., Yaacob, M. A., Ramdan, M. R., & Rahmat, N. H. (2023). Is there a relationship between internal and external factors in learning. *Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(9), 1546–1564.
- Sanjaya, W. (2021). Nutrisi dan pembentukan karakter generasi unggul. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, 6(1), 23–35.
- Soekirman. (2001). *Ilmu gizi dan aplikasinya: Untuk keluarga dan masyarakat*. Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, Departemen Pendidikan Nasional.

Wahab, A. A. (2023). Pendekatan partisipatif dalam program sekolah untuk pengembangan karakter. *Jurnal Civics*, 10(2), 67–79.

Zavitsanou, A., & Drigas, A. (2021). Nutrition in mental and physical health. *Technium Soc. Sci. J.*, 23, 67.