

Implementation of MBG and its Influence on the Socio-Emotional Development of Elementary School Children in the Panyabungan Around

Siti Alya Lubis *, Marwah, Nur Azizah, Fadia Hannum, Hilya Sahri Ramadhani, Nailah Azmi,
Rahmad Fauzan, Dewi Yusnah, Ansor Hasibuan

Program Studi Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah
Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal
Jalan Prof. Dr. Andi Hakim Nasution, Komplek Stain Madina, Pidoli Lombang, Panyabungan, Kabupaten Mandailing Natal, Sumatera Utara 22976, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program is a government initiative aimed at improving nutritional intake among elementary school children through the provision of daily balanced meals. This study explores the implementation of MBG in several elementary schools around Panyabungan, Mandailing Natal, and analyzes its influence on students' social-emotional development. Using a qualitative approach with an observational method, data were collected through direct observation of students, teachers, and SPPG officers responsible for food distribution. The findings show that MBG implementation runs systematically through coordination among schools, local government, and SPPG kitchens (Pidoli, Dalan Lidang, Sipolupolu, Jalan Abri, Sigalapang). The program not only ensures standardized nutritional provision but also fosters improved student motivation, enhanced peer interaction, and better emotional regulation. Thus, MBG contributes positively to students' well-being and social-emotional growth, highlighting its relevance as a strategic support program for school-age children.

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Corresponding Author:

Siti Alya Lubis
Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal
Email: sitialyalubis05@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is a government program that provides ready-to-eat meals to students every school day with the aim of meeting children's nutritional needs equitably (Palestina, Firda Ayu, Faris Ulul Abshar, 2025, p. 2). This program is designed using standardized menus prepared by nutritionists, hygienically prepared by the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG), and regularly distributed to schools. The MBG focuses not only on providing food but also manages the process, from menu planning, processing, packaging, distribution, and implementation supervision by schools. Through this approach, the MBG is expected to support the health, learning readiness, and well-being of students throughout Indonesia (Rahmah et al., 2025, p. 2).

Meeting the nutritional needs of elementary school children is a crucial factor in supporting their growth and development, learning abilities, and social-emotional development. The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is a government intervention to ensure children receive nutritious, hygienic, and nutritionally measured

meals every school day. Mandailing Natal, particularly the Panyabungan area, is one of the areas actively implementing this program, supported by the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) kitchens located in several locations.

In the context of socio-emotional development, good nutrition and a regular mealtime atmosphere can help children manage their emotions, build positive interactions with peers, and increase their motivation to learn. However, the success of the MBG program lies not only in the menu provided, but also in the implementation pattern, distribution discipline, school involvement, and student response to the program.

This research is based on the need to comprehensively understand how MBG implementation occurs in the field and its impact on the behavior and socio-emotional well-being of elementary school students in the Panyabungan area.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with direct observation. All data were obtained through observation without interviews or supporting documentation (Gagah Daruhadi, 2024). The details of the method implementation are as follows:

Observation Subjects

The subjects observed included:

1. Elementary school students at several elementary schools around Panyabungan who received MBG.
2. Teachers, especially those tasked with overseeing the distribution process and implementation of communal meals.
3. SPPG officers, who distribute food from the kitchens to schools.

Subjects will not be named or identified specifically in accordance with qualitative research ethics.

Observation Locations

Observations were conducted at several elementary schools in the Panyabungan area, Mandailing Natal, as well as distribution activities from the following SPPG kitchens:

1. SPPG Pidoli
2. SPPG Dalan Lidang
3. SPPG Sipolupolu
4. SPPG Jalan Abri
5. SPPG Sigalapang

These five kitchens serve as the primary providers and support for the sustainability of MBG in this area.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were obtained through non-participant observation. Researchers observed the distribution of food, how students received and consumed food, interactions between students, teacher supervision procedures, and the distribution process carried out by the Food Service Providers (SPPG).

The focus of the observations included:

1. Food Distribution Process

The food distribution process was observed from the preparation stage until the food was received by the students. Researchers noted how the SPPG managed the distribution process, the timeliness of distribution, and coordination between staff to ensure the process ran smoothly. Furthermore, they noted any obstacles such as long lines, delays, or other technical difficulties that could impact the smooth distribution process.

2. Student Hygiene and Dining Etiquette

In this aspect, researchers observed the extent to which students maintained hygiene before and during meals, including handwashing habits, the use of cutlery, and how they consumed food. Researchers also observed students' compliance with school dining rules, such as sitting orderly, refraining from excessive talking, and maintaining the cleanliness of the dining area after meals.

3. Student Responses to the Menu

Student responses were observed through their expressions, comments, and behaviors when receiving and consuming food. Researchers observed whether students appeared enthusiastic, accepted the menu without complaint, or were picky about their food. Observations also included how much food was consumed, whether any food was left untouched, and how menu variations affected student acceptance.

4. Social dynamics during mealtimes
Social dynamics were observed through interactions between students during mealtimes. Researchers observed how students communicated, collaborated, and shared food, including whether certain groups emerged or whether students tended to isolate themselves. Furthermore, positive interactions such as helping each other and maintaining order were also part of the observations to understand the social situations that developed.
5. Changes in students' socio-emotional behavior after the program began
At this point, researchers observed changes in students after the MBG program had been running for some time. These changes could include increased discipline, independence in managing mealtimes, and better interaction with peers. Researchers also examined whether the program had an impact on students' emotional aspects, such as increased self-confidence, empathy, or mutual respect during mealtimes.

RESULTS

Implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG) in Elementary Schools in the Panyabungan Region

Based on field observations, the Free Nutritional Meal (MBG) program in the Panyabungan region demonstrates a structured and coordinated implementation pattern. MBG operates through a collaborative effort involving schools, local governments, and the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) as the food provider (Ikka Febryanti et al., 2025, p. 3).

Five SPPG kitchens Pidoli, Dalan Lidang, Sipolupolu, Jalan Abri, and Sigalapang—are responsible for providing meals to schools within their respective jurisdictions. Each kitchen performs functions ranging from ingredient preparation, processing, and distribution in accordance with established operational standards.

Distribution Structure and Mechanism

Observations indicate that the MBG distribution process involves several important stages:

1. Weekly Menu Preparation
Menus are designed by nutritionists to meet energy and macro- and micronutrient needs. The menus also consider variety to prevent children from getting bored and are in line with local eating habits.
2. Food Processing
Food is prepared in the SPPG kitchen using fresh ingredients and adhering to proper hygiene procedures. Staff wear gloves and head coverings, ensuring a hygienic kitchen environment.
3. Packaging
Food is packaged in safe, sealed, and reusable containers. These containers make it easier for the school to distribute food to students quickly and orderly.
4. Distribution
Every morning, distribution vehicles deliver food to schools along predetermined routes. Observations indicate that distribution is timely and highly dependent on the readiness of the kitchen.

Daily MBG Menu Variations

The menu varies daily, for example:

1. Monday: Rice, fried chicken, stir-fried tempeh, vegetables, orange
2. Tuesday: Rice, fried fish, tofu and tempeh, vegetables, salak (snake snake fruit)
3. Wednesday: Rice, chicken rendang, vegetables, orange
4. Thursday: Rice, stir-fried quail egg, capcay, stir-fried tempeh, grapes
5. Friday: Fried rice with shredded chicken, fried egg, vegetables, nuts/crackers, orange, and snacks (biscuits, sponge cake, milk cartons, quail eggs).

Friday is the day with the most complete menu because it includes snacks.

Mechanism for Class Division

Observations show that the MBG is usually divided into two time periods:

- Low grades (I–III): around 10:00 AM
- High grades (IV–VI): around 11:00 AM

This time allocation is adjusted to the students' energy needs and physical condition. Teachers play an active role in guiding students, from washing their hands and praying to maintaining order during meals.

Student Responses and Behavior

Observations revealed several important findings regarding student responses:

1. Students eagerly awaited mealtime.
Observations revealed that mealtime was the most anticipated moment for students. They appeared excited as mealtime approached, indicated by cheerful expressions, frequent clock checks, and gathering in the dining area before the activity began. This enthusiasm reflected that the communal meal program provided a positive experience and was a fun activity for them.
2. Many students demonstrated curiosity about the daily menu.
Each time food was distributed, students appeared curious about the menu. They frequently asked their friends or teachers what food they would receive that day and showed enthusiastic reactions when they saw new menu variations. This curiosity indicated a significant interest in the variety of foods served.
3. The communal mealtime atmosphere was lively but orderly.
During the mealtime, the classroom and dining area were relatively lively as students chatted and enjoyed their time with friends. However, the noise remained under control, and students maintained order according to the teacher's instructions. The mealtime proceeded smoothly without any significant disturbances or disturbances.
4. Social interaction increases, as evidenced by conversations and the habit of waiting for each other.
Eating together provides a space for students to interact more intensely with their peers. They are seen actively discussing food, school activities, and other matters. Furthermore, some students have developed a habit of waiting for their friends before starting to eat, demonstrating the solidarity and social awareness that is beginning to develop among them.
5. Students follow dining rules and demonstrate basic manners, such as not fighting over food.
Observations show that students comply with applicable dining rules, such as sitting neatly, not shouting, and disposing of trash properly. They also demonstrate polite behavior, such as not fighting over food, lining up orderly, and treating food dispensers with respect. This indicates that the dining together program contributes to the development of student character and discipline.

Social-Emotional Changes in Students

Some visible results:

1. More stable emotions; students rarely complain of hunger.
After the MBG program was implemented, students appeared to have more stable emotions, especially because their basic food needs were met regularly. They rarely complained of hunger, so they were less prone to fussiness or displaying sensitive behavior. This helps create a calmer learning environment and supports positive emotional development.
2. Concentration and focus improve after eating.
Observations show that after receiving and consuming food, students appear better able to concentrate in class. They are more focused on assignments and less easily distracted. Adequate nutritional intake also supports increased stamina and readiness to learn, allowing the learning process to proceed more effectively.
3. Sharing and tolerance develop.
Eating together also fosters social values such as sharing and tolerance. Many students demonstrate caring by sharing snacks, helping friends who have difficulty opening containers, or waiting for friends before starting to eat. These habits demonstrate the development of more mature social skills.
4. Aggressive behavior decreases, especially in lower grades.
As nutritional needs are met and the atmosphere becomes more structured, aggressive behavior such as irritability, arguing, or fighting over items appears to decrease, especially in younger students. They become more patient, more manageable, and demonstrate better self-control in various situations.
5. Teachers report a better classroom atmosphere.
Teachers reported that the classroom atmosphere has become more conducive since the nutritious meal program was implemented. Students are calmer, more prepared to learn, and less anxious before mealtimes. This allows for smoother and more comfortable teaching and learning activities for both teachers and students.

Small Economic Impact on Families

Although not the primary focus of observations, it appears that students from low-income families benefit significantly from the MBG. Children no longer need to bring extra supplies or money, thus reducing the family's economic burden.

DISCUSSION

Effectiveness of MBG Implementation

Observations indicate that MBG implementation in Panyabungan is proceeding quite well. Solid coordination between the school and the SPPG ensures that students receive food on time and in a condition fit for consumption. This demonstrates that the MBG organizational structure is functioning as designed:

1. The kitchen serves as the processing center,
2. The school serves as the final implementer,
3. Students serve as the beneficiaries.

Timely distribution is an indicator of system readiness and the quality of operational management.

1. **The Importance of Menu Variation to Meet Children's Nutritional Needs and Eating Interests**
Menu variation not only prevents boredom but is also crucial for meeting daily nutritional needs. Side dishes such as chicken, fish, eggs, and tempeh contain protein, which supports children's physical growth and cognitive development. The addition of fruit daily ensures fiber and vitamin intake. Friday snacks add to students' happiness, which indirectly supports their socio-emotional well-being.
2. **The Effect of MBG on Student Attendance and Motivation**
Student enthusiasm for the program indicates that MBG not only provides nutritional benefits but also acts as a motivational factor. Many students arrive early or are more enthusiastic because they anticipate the daily menu. Motivation to attend school is an indicator of socio-emotional well-being. This finding aligns with the literature that meeting basic needs will influence learning motivation.
3. **Eating Together as a Builder of Positive Social Interactions**
Observations show that mealtimes provide a space for effective social interaction. Children learn to share, take turns, and communicate without academic pressure (Santoso, 2025, p. 6). This atmosphere creates healthy social relationships, strengthening basic social skills such as:
 1. Cooperation
 2. Empathy
 3. Manners
 4. Language skills and tolerance.
 The interactions that occur during mealtimes reflect that MBG is not only a nutritional intervention, but also a social intervention.
4. **The Role of Nutritional Intake in Emotional Regulation**
Regular nutritional intake has been shown to impact children's emotional stability. Children who are well-fed and well-nourished are more focused, less prone to anger, and better able to follow teacher directions. This aligns with the concept that energy and nutritional deficiencies can hinder a child's ability to control emotions and concentrate. MBG helps reduce stress caused by hunger, thereby improving children's mental readiness to learn.
5. **MBG's Contribution to Family Economic Well-being**
Although not the primary goal, MBG reduces family expenses, especially for breakfast and daily school supplies. For families from low-income backgrounds, this program provides peace of mind knowing that children's lunch needs are guaranteed to be met. Emotional calm at home can directly impact children's emotional well-being while learning.
6. **Challenges to Consider**
From several observations, there are minor challenges that can be recommended:
 1. Some students dislike certain types of vegetables.
 2. Teacher supervision should be maximized to ensure students eat appropriate portions.
 3. The availability of clean water for handwashing must always be sufficient.
 These challenges are common in large-scale program implementations and can be addressed through regular evaluation.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in elementary schools in the Panyabungan area has been implemented quite effectively through structured coordination between schools, the local government, and the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG). Timely distribution, hygienic food preparation, and nutritionally adequate menu preparation demonstrate that the MBG operational system is operating according to established standards.

Observations indicate that the MBG has a significant positive impact on students' behavior and socio-emotional development. Students demonstrate high enthusiasm for mealtimes, social interactions become more positive through shared mealtimes, and emotional regulation improves as daily nutritional needs are met. Teachers also experience a more conducive classroom atmosphere, with reduced aggressive behavior and increased student concentration after the program.

Furthermore, the MBG provides indirect economic benefits to families, particularly students from low-income backgrounds. The daily availability of nutritious food reduces the need to bring lunch or purchase food outside of school, thereby reducing household expenses.

Overall, the MBG program not only serves as a nutritional fulfillment program but has also proven to be instrumental in supporting students' social-emotional development, learning motivation, and overall well-being. However, several challenges, such as the acceptance of certain menus and the need for increased supervision, require ongoing evaluation to optimize MBG implementation.

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