

Challenges in Implementing the *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG) Program in West Bandung Regency: Between Policy Goals and Field Realities

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Abstract

Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) is one of the government's initiatives to improve school children's nutrition and reduce stunting rates in Indonesia. However, its implementation in West Bandung Regency still faces various challenges. The occurrence of mass food poisoning among students after consuming MBG meals highlights weak food quality monitoring, limited resources, and suboptimal coordination between schools, food providers, and related agencies. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the MBG program in West Bandung Regency using a descriptive qualitative approach. The findings reveal that the MBG program has not been fully implemented in accordance with the expected standards. The main inhibiting factors include weak monitoring systems, lack of food safety education, and inadequate cross-sectoral collaboration. Therefore, strengthening monitoring mechanisms, enhancing implementers' capacity, and encouraging community involvement are essential to ensure that the MBG program is safe, healthy, and sustainable.

Keywords: Free Nutritious Meal, Policy Implementation, Supervision, Food Safety, West Bandung Regency.



A. INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of human resources is one of Indonesia's national development priorities. The government seeks to achieve this through various policies in the fields of health and education. One of the strategic programs launched in 2025 is the *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG), which aims to provide balanced nutritious meals for school-aged children (Qomarrullah et al., 2025). This program is believed to play a significant role in reducing stunting rates, improving children's health status, and supporting students' concentration and academic achievement in class (Tambunan et al., 2025; Kompas.id, 2025; Khatimah et al., 2025).

Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) Program or Free Nutritious Meal Program is one of the flagship initiatives of the Prabowo-Gibran administration, designed to address malnutrition and enhance the quality of human resources (HR) in Indonesia (Kiftiyah et al., 2025). The main targets of the program are children, students, and pregnant women. This is based on data from the Ministry of Health and the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture, which showed that 41% of students experience hunger, negatively affecting the quality of education (Merlinda & Yusuf, 2025).

Conceptually, the provision of nutritious meals in schools is not a new policy. Several countries, such as Japan through the School Lunch Program and South Korea with the MBG Policy, have demonstrated that school-based nutrition interventions can improve children's health and learning outcomes (Cho, 2024; Tanaka & Miyoshi, 2012). Similar programs have also been recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) as a global strategy to improve child health and reduce nutritional disparities.

However, the implementation of MBG in Indonesia still faces serious challenges, particularly at the local level. Since its initial rollout, several cases of mass food poisoning have been reported after students consumed MBG meals. For example, in Sukoharjo, Central Java, dozens of students experienced nausea and vomiting after consuming marinated chicken served in the MBG menu (Kompas.com, 2025). By mid-2025, media reports recorded more than 5,000 students across various regions allegedly affected by food poisoning linked to MBG meals (Times Indonesia, 2025). This phenomenon raises critical questions regarding the quality of raw materials, hygiene standards, and program monitoring mechanisms.

These problems are not only technical but also structural. According to Edward III's (1980) policy implementation theory, successful policy implementation is determined by four key factors: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. If any of these factors are not functioning optimally, the policy may fail to achieve its intended goals or even cause adverse effects. In the case of MBG, communication issues can be seen from the uneven dissemination of food safety SOPs. In terms of resources, the lack of inspectors and food storage facilities has posed significant challenges (Health.kompas.com, 2025). Meanwhile, disposition or implementers' commitment has been constrained by political pressure to accelerate the program's expansion despite uneven technical readiness. Bureaucratic structures are also considered ineffective due to weak coordination between agencies, particularly the education office, health office, and catering providers (Nu.or.id, 2025).

This condition is also evident in West Bandung Regency. Although MBG has been implemented, several reports indicated cases of students experiencing food poisoning after consuming program meals (Kompas, 2025). This highlights weaknesses in the monitoring mechanism and a lack of alignment between the central program design and local implementation. Moreover, there is still limited research specifically examining MBG implementation, especially from the perspective of food safety supervision and the effectiveness of cross-sectoral coordination.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the MBG program in West Bandung Regency, with a focus on monitoring mechanisms and challenges encountered. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the study of public policy implementation and provide practical insights for local governments in improving the quality of MBG program delivery.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on public policy implementation have been strongly influenced by the model developed by George C. Edward III (1980). According to him, successful implementation is determined by four key variables: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Communication emphasizes the importance of clarity and consistency of policy information delivered to implementers. Resources refer to the availability of funding, workforce, and infrastructure to support implementation. Disposition concerns the commitment, attitudes, and motivation of policy implementers. Meanwhile, bureaucratic structure relates to organizational design and coordination mechanisms in carrying out policies (Edward III, 1980).

This model has been widely applied in implementation studies in Indonesia. For instance, Febriyanti et al. (2025) found that weak bureaucratic coordination and limited resources were the main factors hindering regional health programs. This is particularly relevant to the analysis of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program, which is cross-sectoral in nature and requires strict supervision at every stage.

The provision of nutritious meals in schools is a global strategy to improve children's health and support academic achievement. According to WHO (2021), school feeding programs provide dual benefits: reducing malnutrition while enhancing school participation. International experiences also show diverse approaches to implementation. In Japan, the School Lunch Program has been in place since the post-World War II period and is now regarded as a successful model for improving children's nutritional status (Yamaguchi, 2020). South Korea's Free School Meal Policy, meanwhile, focuses on equitable access to nutrition and has demonstrated positive outcomes in improving students' health and reducing social inequality (Cho, 2024).

Since its launch in 2025, the MBG program has drawn significant public attention. While expectations were high, its implementation has generated controversy. Media reports indicate that more than 5,000 students across different regions allegedly suffered from food poisoning after consuming MBG meals (Times Indonesia, 2025). Fatimah et al. (2024) emphasize that weak food quality control mechanisms at the local level were the primary factor behind such risks.

Political dynamics also play a role. As Fauzi (2024) points out, populist policies are often implemented hastily for electoral purposes, with technical aspects and field readiness overlooked. This can be observed in MBG, where mass distribution targets were prioritized over the establishment of a strong monitoring system.

Several previous studies have examined the MBG program or similar initiatives from different perspectives. Maharani et al. (2024) highlight MBG as a progressive step in improving social welfare, particularly in reducing hunger among students and young children, while enhancing health and academic performance. Their focus lies on the program's social and educational impacts. Fauzi (2024) analyzed MBG through the lens of modern education policy and innovation diffusion, emphasizing the role of infrastructure readiness, budget priorities, and cultural appropriateness. A key

critique raised was the risk of state dependency and the lack of adaptability if the program is not aligned with Indonesia's social context.

Fatimah et al. (2024) provide a more specific perspective on MBG's regional implementation, underscoring coordination gaps between local governments, schools, and catering providers. Their findings indicate that weak cross-sector communication led to uneven program execution and fostered public distrust. Similarly, Andin et al. (2025) examine MBG's role in reducing social inequality by ensuring equal access to nutritious meals for students from low-income families. Their study highlights the dimension of social justice, where every child is entitled to proper nutrition regardless of socioeconomic background.

Furthermore, Khatimah et al. (2025) argue that MBG represents a rational policy that positively contributes to student welfare, particularly in terms of nutrition, learning motivation, and social equity. However, their study takes a more normative and macro perspective, focusing on the rationality of the policy without addressing the technical challenges of field-level implementation.

Compared to earlier research, most studies primarily focus on socio-economic impacts, educational values, equity, and structural aspects of policy. This study is distinct in that it concentrates on food safety supervision, distribution mechanisms, and community responses to mass food poisoning incidents in the implementation of MBG in West Bandung Regency. By employing Edward III's (1980) policy implementation framework, this research not only highlights the benefits of MBG but also critically examines the practical weaknesses that affect policy legitimacy and public trust. This constitutes the novelty of the study compared to prior research.

Accordingly, this research seeks to address the existing gap by analyzing the implementation of MBG in West Bandung Regency through Edward III's theoretical lens, with a focus on monitoring mechanisms, bureaucratic challenges, and factors influencing program effectiveness at the grassroots level.

C. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study method, focusing on the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program in West Bandung Regency. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of policy dynamics, particularly concerning monitoring issues that became critical following incidents of mass food poisoning in several schools. As Yin (2018) argues, case studies enable researchers to understand contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not entirely clear.

The research was conducted in West Bandung Regency, selected due to the occurrence of actual cases that drew significant public attention to the MBG program. The study involved multiple stakeholders, including policymakers from the Education Office, Health Office, and Food Security Office of West Bandung Regency; technical implementers at the school level such as principals, teachers, and catering providers; program beneficiaries including students and parents; as well as

supporting stakeholders such as local health centers (puskesmas) and community organizations engaged in program oversight.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, direct observations in schools receiving the program, and document analysis of official reports, regulations, and media coverage related to MBG. To ensure data validity, the study applied source and method triangulation, along with member checks by confirming interview results with the respective informants.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis was guided by Edward III's (1980) policy implementation framework, which highlights four key aspects: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Through this framework, the study sought to assess the extent to which MBG implementation in West Bandung Regency aligned with policy objectives, while also identifying barriers that contributed to weak monitoring and the emergence of problems in the field.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Free Nutritious Meal or *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG) Program was launched by the central government and implemented in various regions as a strategic effort to improve human resource quality from an early age. In West Bandung Regency, the program began in the 2024/2025 academic year targeting students in public elementary schools. Its primary objectives are to enhance nutritional intake, reduce stunting, and support more effective learning processes through the provision of healthy and balanced meals. However, the program's implementation in this region has encountered significant challenges. Interviews with schools, parents, and local agencies indicate that monitoring mechanisms remain weak, both in terms of food quality control and distribution processes. Incidents of mass food poisoning in several schools highlight that food safety has yet to become a policy priority.

This gap underscores the disconnection between national policy design and local implementation realities. As Grindle (1980) argues, public policy outcomes are shaped by contextual factors such as bureaucratic capacity, resource availability, and socio-political dynamics at the local level.

One of the most critical findings of this study concerns the weak control system over catering providers. The selection process tends to emphasize administrative compliance and cost efficiency, while field verification of kitchen hygiene, raw material quality, and storage capacity is rarely conducted thoroughly. In practice, many catering providers use medium-to-low quality ingredients due to cost pressures. Some food supplies are not fresh, and reports have surfaced regarding the use of expired or unlabeled processed meat. Field observations in one catering kitchen revealed unhygienic practices: rusty cooking utensils, workers without gloves, and poor sanitation systems.

These findings resonate with Handayani and Putri (2022), who argue that weak technical regulations and inadequate supervision often drive school food providers to

prioritize profit over quality. At the international level, Gelli et al. (2019) also emphasize that the success of school feeding programs strongly depends on the reliability of food service providers.

Distribution poses another major problem. In West Bandung Regency, MBG schools are spread across rural areas with limited transportation access. Meals are often delivered without refrigerated vehicles, resulting in reduced freshness or, in some cases, spoiled food upon arrival. Teachers reported that meals sometimes arrived after the first recess, by which time students had already purchased snacks outside the school. This undermines program effectiveness and increases contamination risks, contributing to food poisoning cases affecting hundreds of students in the early stages of implementation. Such incidents triggered parental concerns and public criticism over the local government's inability to guarantee food quality. Bundy et al. (2018) stress that food safety throughout the supply chain, including distribution, is essential to prevent school feeding programs from generating more harm than benefit.

Parents' responses to MBG are ambivalent. On the one hand, many appreciate the program as it eases family economic burdens and provides children with relatively more nutritious meals than those typically brought from home. On the other hand, mass food poisoning cases have eroded trust in the program. Many parents now prefer to provide their children with home-packed meals for safety reasons, with some refusing to allow their children to consume MBG meals despite availability. This illustrates that public trust is as critical as the substantive content of a policy. As Nugroho (2020) notes, policy legitimacy rests on the government's consistency in delivering quality services. Without trust, even well-intentioned programs risk failure.

Using Edward III's (1980) framework, MBG implementation in West Bandung can be analyzed across four dimensions: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. First, communication is weak: coordination among the Education Office, Health Office, and catering providers is inconsistent. Information about nutritional standards, distribution procedures, and monitoring mechanisms is often not clearly conveyed to schools or parents, leading to uneven practices and weak community involvement in quality assurance. Second, resources are inadequate: there are insufficient food inspectors, testing laboratories, and refrigerated vehicles, leaving food quality checks ineffective. Third, disposition among implementers is largely procedural, focusing on fulfilling distribution targets rather than ensuring food safety and student welfare. This reflects a bureaucratic orientation toward compliance rather than substantive outcomes. Fourth, bureaucratic structure is fragmented, with overlapping authority slowing emergency responses. During food poisoning incidents, delayed inter-agency coordination worsened community dissatisfaction and eroded trust in the program.

Collectively, weaknesses across all four dimensions hinder MBG implementation in West Bandung Regency from achieving its intended goals. These findings carry important implications. First, the monitoring system must be

strengthened, with the Health Office playing a more active role in inspecting catering kitchens and testing food quality. Second, distribution should be supported by appropriate infrastructure, including refrigerated vehicles, to maintain freshness. Third, stronger community involvement—particularly by parents—can enhance social accountability and help restore public trust.

Academically, this study reinforces the argument that local policy implementation is often constrained by unanticipated technical and structural challenges. This aligns with Lipsky's (1980) concept of street-level bureaucracy, where frontline implementers, constrained by limited resources, make compromises that diverge from policy ideals. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on food safety monitoring within a free school meal program. Whereas most prior studies (e.g., Gelli et al., 2019; Bundy et al., 2018) emphasize nutritional outcomes, sustainability, or academic impacts, this study shows that without robust oversight mechanisms, such programs can produce adverse outcomes such as mass food poisoning and declining public trust.

By integrating Edward III's implementation framework with empirical evidence from West Bandung, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of MBG's shortcomings. Its contribution to the literature lies in demonstrating that the success of free school meal programs depends not only on budget and food availability but also on the governance of food safety, requiring coordinated efforts among government agencies, providers, schools, and the community.

E. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program in West Bandung Regency is conceptually a strategic government effort to improve children's nutrition, reduce stunting, and support learning outcomes. However, field findings reveal critical gaps, particularly in the supervision of catering providers, unhygienic distribution processes, and weak stakeholder coordination. The occurrence of mass food poisoning stands as concrete evidence that nutritional standards, food safety, and monitoring mechanisms have not been consistently enforced. This underscores that the program's noble objectives remain only partially achieved due to limited resources, lack of transparency, and weak accountability among implementers.

At the same time, public responses—especially from parents—reflect growing doubts about the program's sustainability. A policy designed to foster trust and promote children's development instead faces resistance triggered by technical shortcomings and managerial weaknesses. Strengthening MBG's implementation therefore requires participatory monitoring systems, capacity building for catering providers, and continuous evaluation mechanisms involving schools, local agencies, and communities. Only through such comprehensive improvements can the MBG program regain public trust and fulfill its strategic role in advancing human resource development.

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