Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Policy in Early Childhood Education at Aisyiyah Leksono Preschool and Pembina Selomerto Public Preschool, Wonosobo Regency

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Abstract

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program is a public policy initiative that prioritizes nutritional adequacy as a key element in human resource development. At the kindergarten level, the success of this program is measured not only by food distribution but also by collaboration among implementers, children's responses to the menu, family support, and the quality of services provided at school. This article examines the implementation of the MBG policy at Aisyiyah Leksono Kindergarten and Pembina Selomerto Public Kindergarten in Wonosobo Regency, focusing on the dynamics of collaborative governance as well as the factors that support and hinder it. This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with stakeholders, observations of the food preparation and consumption processes, and the collection of relevant documents. Analysis was conducted through data reduction, presentation, and the derivation and verification of conclusions from the available information. The results of the study indicate that this program receives support from schools, parents, nutritionists, food providers or the Nutrition Provision Service Unit (SPPG), as well as relevant government agencies. However, its implementation still faces challenges, including variations in children's food preferences, uneaten food, menu information that is sometimes communicated late, limited space and administrative staff, and suboptimal collaboration among institutions. Selomerto State Kindergarten has a reporting system that tends to be formal, while Aisyiyah Leksono Kindergarten relies on operational adjustments and support from the school community but faces constraints regarding available space. This article concludes that to strengthen the implementation of the MBG program, earlier menu information dissemination, measurable feedback mechanisms, evaluation of food acceptance, clear division of responsibilities, and monitoring that does not place an excessive burden on teachers are necessary. Program performance assessments should prioritize the quality of service delivery and the benefits received, rather than focusing solely on distribution aspects.

Keywords: *Public Policy, Free Nutritious Meals, Early Childhood Education, Policy Implementation, Collaborative Governance.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Nutritional adequacy during early childhood plays a crucial role in the development of high-quality human resources. During this phase, eating habits, exposure to various types of food, and support from families and schools all contribute to shaping children's behavior. Therefore, nutrition programs in educational institutions must be understood not merely as the provision of food, but also as a public health intervention requiring holistic management, oversight, and

educational support (Organization, 2022; Secretariat, 2025; UNICEF, 2024; Wang et al., 2021) . The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program faces complex implementation challenges. The government and service providers are responsible for food procurement and distribution, while schools are tasked with receiving, distributing, supervising consumption, and communicating with parents (Aisyiyah, 2023; Alghifari & Muhtar, 2026; Alrahamneh, 2025; Ariani & Rahim, 2026; Astuti et al., 2020) . Health workers and nutritionists play a role in ensuring nutritional adequacy and food safety. Parents, with their knowledge of their children's eating habits, can provide input for menu improvements (Utami & Madjid, n.d.; Wike et al., 2023; Yuliana & Lismayanti, 2025; Yuwono et al., 2026) . Thus, the success of this program depends on the interaction among these mutually supportive parties.

Wonosobo Regency provides an important local context for understanding this process. This article highlights two educational institutions with distinct institutional characteristics: Aisyiyah Leksono Preschool, supported by a community organization, and Pembina Selomerto Public Preschool, a government institution. A comparison of these two locations helps explain how the same policy is implemented in practice when organizational capacity, facilities, communication patterns, and social support are not fully aligned.

The study's findings indicate that implementation challenges extend beyond simply getting food to schools. Children have varied tastes; some are not yet accustomed to vegetables or certain dishes, and not all food is consumed. On the other hand, schools must manage space, supervise children, maintain hygiene, and meet reporting requirements. Information about the menu arriving late also reduces opportunities for parents and teachers to prepare support. This situation highlights a gap between policy objectives and the actual experience of day-to-day implementation. This article aims to analyze the implementation of the MBG program in both kindergartens, identify supporting and hindering factors, and formulate improvement strategies for management. This analysis adopts a perspective on policy implementation and collaborative governance, specifically the concepts proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008) regarding direct dialogue, trust-building, commitment to the process, shared understanding, and mutually beneficial outcomes.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Policy implementation is the process of translating formal decisions and objectives into actions, services, and outcomes experienced by the target group. This implementation is influenced by the clarity of objectives, the availability of resources, inter-organizational communication, the characteristics of implementers, the social context, and the attitudes of the implementers themselves (Sulistiani et al., 2025; Suwitri, 2008, 2011; Tantriati & Setiawan, 2023).

In the MBG program at the kindergarten level, these aspects are evident through the clarity of menu standards, the adequacy of available staff and facilities, the accuracy of distribution, the school's ability to support the children, and support from families. trust, commitment to the process, a shared understanding, and

mutually beneficial outcomes. In the context of MBG, practical indicators include communication between schools and SPPGs, openness to criticism, clarity regarding responsibilities, agreement on how to address issues, and tangible changes that occur after feedback is received. Collaboration is not merely about the presence of various actors, but also about their ability to agree on issues and follow through on proposed improvement efforts (Rahmah et al., 2025; Rahman, 2024; Saadah et al., 2025; Sande, 2025; Sari & Susilowati, 2025) .

C. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study design at Aisyiyah Leksono Preschool and Pembina Selomerto Public Preschool, both located in Wonosobo Regency. These two locations were selected for specific reasons: they possess distinct institutional characteristics and have prior experience in providing supplemental food before the implementation of the MBG program. These contextual differences allow the researcher to analyze how national-level policies are implemented at the school level.

Informants were selected based on their involvement with and understanding of the program, including school staff, teachers, parents or guardians, nutrition officers or service providers through the SPPG, as well as relevant government and education officials. Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations of the processes of food preparation, distribution, and consumption. Documents such as menus and activity logs were used as supplementary data. The data collection process took place over approximately one and a half months in 2026. Analysis was conducted using an interactive model developed by (Miles et al., 2020) , involving data processing, presentation of results, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. Information from informants was grouped based on themes such as implementation, communication, resources, menu acceptance, stakeholder support, and operational constraints (Sugiyono, 2023). The findings were compared across sources and linked to the collaborative governance framework. Given that the study focused on two locations and relied primarily on qualitative data, the purpose of the results is to provide a contextual understanding rather than to make statistical generalizations for all kindergartens in Indonesia.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Program Support and Implementation

The study's findings indicate that informants view the MBG as a useful initiative for meeting children's nutritional needs, particularly for those who do not receive breakfast or who require nutritional assistance at school. Both educational institutions support the program's objectives. Daily activities include receiving and distributing food, supervising students while they eat, teaching hand hygiene, praying, and cleaning up utensils after meals. These activities demonstrate that the school functions not only as a distribution site but also as a setting for learning about healthy lifestyle habits.

2. Differences in Institutional Context

Selomerto Pembina Public Kindergarten demonstrates a fairly formal approach to program implementation, including program reports and monitoring of children's development through school activities as well as support from health workers. However, these reports are still prepared by teachers due to a lack of specialized personnel. Heavy administrative burdens have the potential to reduce the time available for working with the children. On the other hand, Aisyiyah Leksono Preschool relies heavily on operational adjustments at the school and support from the community. Limited space necessitates rearranging classroom or play areas for mealtime activities. These two examples demonstrate that even identical policy standards require support tailored to the specific circumstances of each institution.

3. Food Reception and Food Waste

One important finding was that the availability of food does not always result in it being completely eaten. Informants from schools and parents reported that some children do not like vegetables, certain menu items, or foods with textures that do not suit their tastes (Budiarto, 2024; Devianti et al., 2020; Dunn, 2020) . Some children had also already eaten breakfast at home, so they were still full when the food was served. Portion sizes deemed too large for some children and a menu variety considered monotonous are also reasons why food is left uneaten. Acceptance of the menu is influenced by family habits, mealtimes, children's experiences with food ingredients, portion sizes, and how foods are introduced to children (Nagaring et al., 2026; Notha et al., 2025; Prabowo & Ghaliya, 2026; Putri et al., 2025) .

Therefore, program evaluations must consider factors related to food acceptance and food waste, in addition to the number of portions served. Simple notes on popular menu items, types of food that are often left uneaten, and suggestions from parents can serve as a basis for communicating with the SPPG and nutrition staff. Menu adjustments must always adhere to nutritional standards and food safety guidelines; children's preferences are important information but should not be the sole basis for determining the menu (Java, 2025; Modjo & Kep, n.d.; Nielsen et al., 2024; Novita et al., 2025) .

4. Communication, Coordination, and Division of Roles

Interaction between schools and the SPPG is a crucial element for the program's success. Informants stated that in the early stages, there were delays in distribution or interruptions in service, while information regarding the daily menu was sometimes communicated too late (Indonesia, 2023; Manazir, 2025; Mas'adah & Suwitri, 2024; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 2021). Coordination through communication groups supports the smooth flow of information and problem-solving, but the timing of menu dissemination needs to be improved so that schools can better convey this information to parents. Information from informants also indicates that the involvement of local education stakeholders in operational coordination is not always direct; in some cases, technical communication takes place directly between schools and the SPPG. From

the perspective of (Ansell & Gash, 2008), communication cannot be adequately assessed based solely on the availability of channels such as messaging groups. Collaboration requires dialogue that leads to agreements regarding who is responsible, when information is shared, how issues are reported, and how follow-up actions are ensured. Therefore, a clear communication flow is necessary: schedules for menu delivery and nutritional content should be provided in advance; schools should provide feedback through agreed-upon mechanisms; the SPPG should respond and explain follow-up actions; and relevant parties should evaluate recurring issues.

5. Resources, Facilities, and Workload

Limitations in facilities and human resources have emerged as operational challenges. At Aisyiyah Leksono Kindergarten, limited space has forced the school to adapt classrooms or play areas as dining spaces. At both schools, teachers handle both student supervision and some administrative and reporting tasks. These conditions indicate that program implementation requires resources that extend beyond the procurement and distribution of food. Facilities for maintaining hygiene, space management, staff, and appropriate reporting procedures also determine the quality of service.

Within the framework of policy implementation, teachers' workload is a matter of operational capacity. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's eating habits and hygiene practices; therefore, time spent on student supervision should not be continually eroded by administrative tasks that can be simplified or delegated to other staff members (Grindle, 2022; Hasibuan & Dalimunte, 2025; Herdiana, 2025; Irawan, 2025) . Monitoring must be simple enough to be conducted consistently and to yield useful information, rather than merely fulfilling documentation requirements.

6. Significance of the Findings from a Collaborative Governance Perspective

The findings reveal a foundation for collaboration in the form of support for program objectives, direct communication between schools and providers, a willingness to accept feedback, and parental involvement in explaining children's eating habits. These elements indicate a certain level of commitment and shared understanding. However, the quality of collaboration is not yet consistent across all stages. Inter-institutional engagement, the regularity of feedback, and the division of roles still need to be strengthened so that issues raised by schools do not remain merely informal communications.

Intermediate program outcomes should not be defined solely as food reaching the school. Inter-program outcomes also include more timely distribution, menu information available prior to implementation, evaluation of leftover food, established hygiene practices, and problem-solving mechanisms known to all stakeholders (Edwards, 2021; Fataruba, 2025; Febryanti et al., 2025; Furkan et al., 2025) . These results can serve as a foundation for strengthening trust. Conversely, if repeated feedback does not lead to change or if responsibilities remain unclear, trust and commitment risk weakening.

7. Enabling and Limiting Factors

Enabling factors identified include government support for the program, the dedication of schools and nutrition staff, the SPPG's openness to suggestions, parental participation, the availability of handwashing facilities, and prior experience with supplementary feeding activities. These elements constitute institutional and social assets that can be leveraged to improve implementation.

Barriers include variations in children's food preferences, uneaten food, menu information that sometimes arrives late, limitations in space and administrative resources, and technical coordination that is not yet fully organized (Abdy et al., 2025; Agustini & Mulyani, 2025; Alifa & Afifah, 2025; Aliyah et al., 2025). The mountainous geography of Wonosobo also needs to be taken into account in planning broader distribution, although there have been reports of improvements regarding delays at the study site following a change in service providers. Geography cannot be cited as the sole reason; its impact depends on school location, distribution routes, provider capacity, and scheduled timelines.

8. Policy Implications

First, the BGN and SPPG should ensure that information regarding menus, nutritional content, and schedule changes is provided to schools well in advance through regular, official channels. Second, schools need to prepare a concise feedback form to record menus, children's responses, leftover food, distribution challenges, and relevant special needs. These records should be discussed regularly with the SPPG so that adaptations can be monitored and evaluated.

Third, local governments, education agencies, the Regional Education, Youth, and Sports Coordination Office (Korwilbidikpora), health workers, schools, and parents need to agree on the division of responsibilities. Inter-sectoral coordination must have clear points of contact, schedules, and follow-up methods, while respecting each party's respective authority. Fourth, the reporting system must be simplified and tailored to schools' capabilities. Schools with limited space and resources require different operational support compared to those with better facilities.

Fifth, nutrition education must be conducted continuously and tailored to children's developmental stages. Schools and families can collaborate to introduce various types of food, establish healthy eating habits, and promote good hygiene. Monitoring of nutritional status should be conducted by authorized personnel through proper procedures; the MBG program cannot serve as the sole basis for concluding changes in nutritional status or health effects. This study focuses primarily on the implementation process and the experiences of those involved, rather than on measuring the direct impact of the program on nutritional status or academic outcomes.

E. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the MBG policy at Aisyiyah Leksono Kindergarten and Pembina Selomerto Public Kindergarten received support from school administrators

and stakeholders and has been integrated with meal guidance activities and clean living habits within the school environment. However, the implementation revealed that food provision is only one aspect of the existing services. Children's acceptance of the menu, the accuracy of information delivery, available facilities, teachers' workloads, and coordination among implementers also play a role in determining the quality of implementation.

The differences between the two schools highlight the importance of tailoring support to the institutions' capacities. Selomerto Pembina Public Kindergarten has a more formal reporting system but faces administrative challenges; meanwhile, Aisyiyah Leksono Kindergarten relies on operational adjustments and community support but is constrained by limited space. Supporting factors include commitment from implementers, government support, transparency from the SPPG, and parental participation. Major obstacles consist of varying food preferences among children, food waste, menu information that is sometimes not provided on time, limitations in facilities and staff, and coordination that is not yet well-organized.

From a collaborative governance perspective, the sustainability of the MBG program requires dialogue focused on problem-solving, trust built through follow-up, shared commitment, and continuous evaluation of results. Priorities for improvement include providing menu information earlier, recording food intake and leftovers, establishing a traceable feedback mechanism, defining clear roles, streamlining administrative processes, and providing nutrition education that involves families. Given that this study focused on two kindergartens, future research should involve more educational institutions and integrate process data with measurable indicators to assess the program's impact more comprehensively.

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