



SOCIAL ISSUES RESEARCH REPORT THE EFFECT OF THE FREE NUTRITIOUS MEAL PROGRAM ON THE CONDITION OF THE POCKET MONEY OF STUDENTS OF SMA NEGERI 1 CIKARANG BARAT

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Abstract. *The Free Nutritious Meal Program has been implemented in schools to improve students' nutritional intake and support their learning activities. However, the program may also affect students' financial conditions, particularly the use of their pocket money. This study aims to analyze the effect of the Free Nutritious Meal Program on students' pocket money expenditure at SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat. A quantitative research method was employed using an interview approach. Data were collected through interviews with students and analyzed to identify changes in their spending patterns before and after the implementation of the program. The findings indicate that the availability of nutritious meals at school is associated with changes in students' expenditures on food and beverages, allowing some students to save a larger portion of their pocket money or allocate it to other needs. However, responses to the program varied among students, as some continued to purchase additional food and snacks. These findings suggest that the program is related to changes in students' spending patterns, although its influence differs among individuals. Therefore, further evaluation is needed to better understand its impact on students' daily financial behavior.*

Keywords: *pocket money, Free Nutritious Meal Program, spending behavior, students, financial expenditure.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program is one of the strategic initiatives aimed at realizing the vision of the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Mr. Prabowo Subianto, towards Golden Indonesia 2045. The program was launched to support one of the eight missions of Asta Cita, namely strengthening human resource (HR) development. Education and nutrition are two fundamental pillars in the development of human resources. Adequate nutritional intake significantly affects students' learning abilities, including physical endurance, concentration, and academic achievement. Therefore, the Indonesian government has implemented the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program as an effort to address nutritional issues and improve the quality of education (Agustini, U., 2025).

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program is one of the government's priority programs aimed at improving students' health and learning outcomes through the

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provision of nutritious meals at no cost. According to the West Java Provincial Education Office (2024), the program is designed to reduce students' daily food expenses while simultaneously improving their nutritional intake (SiMantap.MBG, 2025). Furthermore, the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia (2024) stated that the Free Nutritious Meal Program targets millions of students as part of the government's strategy to enhance the quality of human resources and reduce household expenditures. The program is expected to have an impact not only on students' health but also on their daily spending patterns, particularly regarding the use of pocket money (Reni Saptati D.I., 2025).

Although the program has been implemented in various regions, its actual impact on students remains an important topic for further study. Students have different eating habits, needs, and preferences, which may lead to varying responses to the program. Some students may reduce their spending on food at school, while others may continue purchasing additional meals or snacks despite receiving meals through the MBG Program.

Pocket money plays an important role in supporting students' daily needs, including food, beverages, transportation, and other school-related expenses. Therefore, the implementation of the MBG Program may influence how students allocate and use their pocket money. However, changes in spending behavior are not determined solely by the existence of the program. Other factors, such as consumption habits, family economic conditions, lifestyle, and saving behavior, may also influence students' financial decisions.

In addition, the implementation of the MBG Program has generated various responses from the public. On one hand, the program is expected to help meet students' nutritional needs. On the other hand, several challenges have emerged, including menu variety, food quality, students' acceptance of the meals provided, distribution effectiveness, and several reported cases of food poisoning in different regions (Wantimpres, 2025). These issues indicate that the implementation of the program needs to be examined from multiple perspectives in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its impact.

Furthermore, the MBG Program has attracted public attention because it requires a substantial allocation of state funds. The large budget involved has raised discussions

regarding the allocation of public funds among various educational priorities, including school facilities, scholarships, and other educational support programs (Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, 2025).

Therefore, it is important to evaluate whether the benefits experienced by students are proportional to the resources allocated. In the context of this study, one aspect that can be examined is whether the program influences students' spending behavior, particularly in the use of pocket money. Such evaluation may provide a better understanding of the program's impact from the students' perspective and contribute to future assessments of its implementation.

Based on the explanation above, it is necessary to conduct research to examine the influence of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program on the efficiency of students' pocket money usage, the benefits perceived by students, and their responses to the implementation of the program at SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat. This study is expected to provide an overview of changes in students' spending patterns after the implementation of the program and serve as a reference for evaluating the MBG Program in the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program is a strategic step by the government to ensure that Indonesian children grow up healthy and intelligent. This program is designed not only to overcome nutritional problems, but also as a long-term investment in the quality of human resources and the future of the nation. Free Nutritious Meals is basically the provision of nutritious food at no cost (Secretariat of the President of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025).

Pocket Money

Pocket money is the amount of money that parents give to students to meet daily needs at school, such as buying food, drinks, and other small necessities.

Previous Research

One relevant study is *Children's Voice Study: Putting Forward Children's Perspectives on Free Nutritious Eating Programs*. Students who receive Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) have diverse perceptions of the goals of the program. This can be seen from the report on the results of a survey by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), Wahana Visi Indonesia, and the Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development

Initiatives (CISDI) entitled *A Study of Children's Voices: Prioritizing Children's Perspectives in the Free Nutritious Meal Program*. KPAI and these institutions surveyed 1,624 respondents spread across 12 provinces of Indonesia. The respondents' criteria were 12–17 years old, from elementary to high school education levels, and had received MBG more than once. As a result, the majority of respondents assessed that the main goal of the MBG program was to save pocket money. Children's understanding in child-led research is in line with the findings of the children's voice survey, in which MBG is assessed as aiming to make children save more pocket money (16.7%). This is quoted from the report (Margaret Aliyatul Maimunah, S.S., [M.Si](#), 2025).

The previous study shows that the MBG Program is perceived not only as a nutritional support program but also as a program that can influence students' spending behavior. Therefore, the findings of the study provide an important reference for examining the relationship between the MBG Program and students' pocket money usage.

Relevant Theories

1. Consumption Theory

The theory used in this research is Consumption Theory. According to Consumption Theory, a person's consumption is influenced by the income he or she has. When basic needs such as food are borne by the government, expenditure on food consumption is reduced so that income can be allocated to other needs.

Factors of Consumption Theory

Consumption Theory is influenced by the income owned. If basic needs such as food have been borne or assisted by the government, then food consumption expenditures are reduced and the rest of the income can be used for other needs such as education, health, or savings to improve welfare (A. Asyari, 2022).

2. Implications of the Theory

Consumption Theory explains that when income increases or basic necessities (such as food) are covered by another party, such as the government, spending on those necessities will decrease and consumption can be redirected to other needs such as education, transportation, or savings (Survei BPS, 2025).

Based on this theory, the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program is expected to reduce students' food expenditures at school. As a result, students

may use their pocket money more efficiently, save more money, or allocate it to other needs. This theoretical explanation serves as the foundation for examining the influence of the MBG Program on students' pocket money usage and the benefits perceived by students at SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat.

The findings from previous studies and the application of Consumption Theory indicate that the MBG Program may contribute to changes in students' spending patterns. Therefore, this study focuses on examining whether the MBG Program encourages more efficient use of pocket money and identifying the benefits experienced by students through the implementation of the program.

3. METHODOLOGY

Interview Instruments

To obtain data that is relevant and in accordance with the research objectives, this study employs a structured interview technique using a set of predetermined questions. The interview instrument was developed based on the research problem formulations and the data needed, as presented in the following table:

No	Problem formulation	The data needed	Interview questions
1	How does the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program affect the condition of students' pocket money?	The identity of the resource person (name and class), the condition of the allowance before MBG, and changes in expenses.	1. Do you still carry the same amount of pocket money as before there was MBG? 2. Have your parents ever reduced their pocket money because of the MBG program? 3. Do you feel that you no longer need to buy food in the canteen because there is already MBG? 4. Does the MBG program make you rarely snack outside of school? 5. How much rupiah do you save when you have

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			MBG? And how much is your pocket money? 6. Do you feel that pocket money is now more regularly used because there is MBG?. 7. Does MBG help you avoid wasting pocket money? 8. Do you feel that your pocket money is more economical since the MBG program?
2.	What are the benefits and positive impact of the MBG program for students?	The impact of students' health, eating habits, and economic well-being.	1. What is the good impact of the MBG program on you? 2. Do you support the existence of MBG in this school? Why?

Research Subjects

The population in this study is at SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat, Telaga Murni Block D, Cikarang Barat, Bekasi. This research sample uses a purposive sampling technique, or what can be called an interview whose source is selected by the researcher or has been compiled according to the researcher's criteria. The researcher interviewed 20 students of SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat: 19 females and 1 male.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique in this study uses interviews as the main method. Interviews were conducted with 20 grade XI students who received the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) at SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat in February 2026. In the interview process, the researcher asked the respondent's full name and did not apply identity confidentiality, so that the data obtained clearly listed the identity of the student. In addition, the researcher also took photos of the respondents during the interview as part

of the research documentation. The interview was conducted face-to-face with a duration of about 5 minutes for each student.

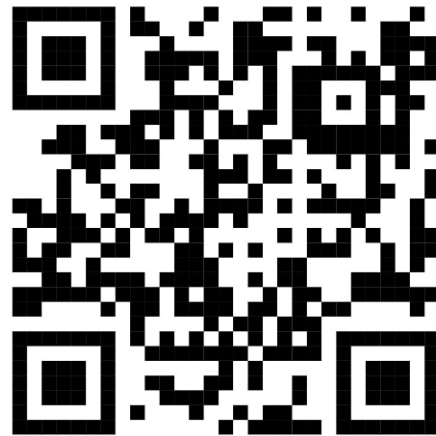
4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evidence of Interview Data

The following barcode provides access to the complete documentation of the interview results. This archive serves as evidence that the researcher has conducted interviews with the selected respondents in accordance with the procedures described in the previous sub-chapters.



Picture 1. Interview Data



Picture 2. Appendix

Students' Pocket Money Condition Before the Program

Table 1. Average Daily Food Expenditure Before the Program

Spent pocket money	Number of Students	Percentage
Less than Rp10,000	3 students	15%
Rp 10,000 – Rp 20,000	6 students	30%
More than Rp20,000	11 students	55%
Total	20 students	100%

Source: Primary Data from Interviews with 20 Students of SMAN 1 Cikarang

Barat (2026)

Based on interviews conducted with students of SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat, before the implementation of the Nutritious Food Program, most students used their pocket money to purchase food and beverages during school hours. As shown in Table 1, more

than half of the respondents (55%) spent more than Rp20,000 per day on food consumption, while 30% spent between Rp10,000 and Rp20,000, and only 15% spent less than Rp10,000. These findings indicate that students' pocket money played a significant role in meeting their daily food needs at school.

Impact of the Program on Students' Pocket Money Expenditure

Table 2. Average Daily Food Expenditure After The Program

Spent pocket money	Number of Students	Percentage
Less than Rp10,000	12 students	60%
Rp 10,000 – Rp 20,000	5 students	25%
More than Rp20,000	3 students	15%
Total	20 students	100%

Source: Primary Data from Interviews with 20 Students of SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat (2026)

Table 2 shows a significant change in students' spending patterns after the implementation of the Nutritious Food Program. The percentage of students spending less than Rp10,000 per day increased from 15% to 60%, while those spending more than Rp20,000 decreased from 55% to 15%. This suggests that the program helped reduce students' daily food expenses.

Many students reported that they were able to save part of their pocket money because they no longer needed to purchase meals or snacks from the school canteen. The remaining money could be allocated to other purposes, such as transportation costs, school supplies, or personal savings. However, several students stated that they did not experience significant savings because they were dissatisfied with the menu or taste of the meals provided and continued to purchase additional food. Overall, the findings indicate that the Nutritious Food Program influenced students' pocket money expenditure patterns and contributed to greater financial savings for most participants.

Before the program, 55% of students spent more than Rp20,000 per day on food, whereas after the program this percentage decreased to only 15%. Conversely, the proportion of students spending less than Rp10,000 increased from 15% to 60%. These results suggest that the program effectively reduced students' food-related expenses and allowed many students to save a portion of their daily allowance.

Discussion

The Effect of the Nutritious Meal Program on Students' Pocket Money

Based on the results of interviews that have been conducted, the Nutritious Food Program has an influence on the condition of students' pocket money at SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat. Before the program was implemented, most students used part of their pocket money to buy food and drinks while in school. However, after the program runs, students' food needs during school hours can be met through the food provided. As a result, some students reduce their spending on buying food in the canteen.

In addition, the interview results show that students have different ways of utilizing their remaining pocket money. Some students choose to save, while others use the money for other needs such as transportation, stationery, or personal needs. These findings show that the Nutritious Food Program not only plays a role in meeting students' nutritional needs, but also influences their daily financial management patterns.

However, not all students experience the same changes. Some students still use their pocket money to buy extra meals or snacks at school. This suggests that the influence of programs on the use of allowances can vary depending on the habits and needs of each student.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The results of this study are in line with various previous studies that stated that food provision programs in schools can help reduce student expenditure on consumption needs during school hours. When the needs of the school have been met, students do not have to spend extra money to buy the same amount of food as before.

In addition to reducing expenses, school meal programs can also provide indirect economic benefits for families. With the reduced need for students to buy food at school, parents can feel more helped in meeting their children's daily needs. Therefore, the Nutritious Food Program not only has an impact on the health aspect, but also on the economic aspect.

The findings of this study reinforce the opinion that food assistance programs in educational settings can provide broad benefits to students. However, further research with a larger number of respondents is still needed to get a more comprehensive picture of the impact of the program

Research Implications

1. Practical Implications

The results of this study show that the Nutritious Food Program can be one of the effective efforts to help meet the nutritional needs of students while in school. In addition to providing health benefits, the program also helps students reduce expenses to buy food so that their allowance can be used for other more important needs.

For the school, the results of this research can be considered to continue to support the implementation of the nutritious food program. Schools can also provide education to students about the importance of managing their pocket money wisely, for example by saving or using money for educational needs.

For parents, this program can help reduce the burden of daily expenses related to children's consumption while at school. Thus, the benefits of the program can be felt not only by students but also by their families.

2. Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the study of the relationship between school food assistance programs and the economic conditions of students. The results of the study show that policies that focus on meeting nutritional needs can have an impact on the behavior of students' pocket money.

This research also adds references to the benefits of the Nutritious Food Program from an economic point of view, especially in the context of the lives of high school students. The findings can be the basis for future research that wants to examine the influence of similar programs on other aspects, such as saving habits, consumption patterns, or overall student well-being.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study was limited to 20 respondents from SMAN 1 Cikarang Barat; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all students. Future studies are recommended to involve a larger number of respondents and include schools from different regions in order to obtain a broader understanding of the relationship between the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program and students' pocket money expenditure.

Based on the findings, the MBG Program is associated with changes in students' spending patterns, particularly in reducing food-related expenses during school hours.

However, the benefits were not experienced equally by all students, as some respondents continued to purchase additional food due to dissatisfaction with the menu variety or taste of the meals provided. Therefore, regular evaluations should be conducted by taking students' feedback and preferences into account so that the implementation of the program can better accommodate their needs.

In addition, considering that several cases of food poisoning have been reported in the implementation of the MBG Program in various regions, food safety and quality should become major concerns. The responsible authorities are expected to strengthen supervision of food ingredient selection, food preparation, storage, and distribution processes in order to minimize potential health risks among students.

The government is also encouraged to conduct more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the MBG Program across different regions. Such evaluations should assess food quality, distribution equity, food safety standards, and students' acceptance of the meals provided. Furthermore, mechanisms for feedback and complaints from students, teachers, and parents should be established to ensure that challenges encountered during implementation can be identified and addressed promptly.

Given the substantial budget allocated to the MBG Program, the government should ensure that public funds are utilized effectively, efficiently, and in accordance with actual regional needs. Periodic evaluations are necessary to assess whether the outcomes achieved are proportional to the resources invested. Policymakers should also consider the social, economic, and geographical differences among regions so that program implementation is not uniform but adapted to local conditions and priorities. This approach may help ensure that public spending generates broader and more equitable benefits.

Finally, the MBG Program should be evaluated not only in terms of its short-term impact, such as reducing students' daily food expenditures, but also in relation to its long-term effects on health, educational outcomes, and the efficient use of public resources. Through continuous evaluation, the program can be assessed more comprehensively by considering its benefits, challenges, sustainability, and broader implications for students and society.

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