

Identify the Effectiveness of the Free Lunch Program at SDN 02 Nunukan Selatan

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT This study identifies the effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan, which aims to improve the nutritional quality of students, especially those from low-income families. The program has successfully increased student attendance by 98% and provided education on healthy eating patterns and the importance of saving. Although still in the four-month trial phase, initial results show a positive impact on learning motivation, although the direct impact on academic achievement has not been measured. Challenges include adjusting menus and arranging food distribution, but collaborative efforts between schools, government, and the community are expected to maximize the benefits of this program to create a healthier and more productive learning environment.

Keywords: Nutritious Meal Program, attendance, Learning Motivation

35 Introduction

The relationship between children's health and education is strongly influenced by the role of parents, particularly in terms of supporting their children's concentration during learning. This aspect is closely related to how parents prepare meals and provide adequate nutrition for their children. Providing healthy and nutritious food is not merely a parental responsibility, but also a crucial factor that supports the learning process and a child's overall development [1]. However, limited time and resources often become major challenges for parents in planning healthy meals for their children. To address this issue, collaboration among educational institutions, the government, and the community is needed in order to provide the necessary support and resources for parents [2].

Collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and the community is essential to address challenges such as the limited time parents have to plan healthy meals. Understanding the social components that influence children's health and education is also crucial for formulating more effective policies and creating an environment that supports children's growth and holistic development [3]. Nutrition plays a vital role in child development. When nutritional needs are met—such as carbohydrates as an energy source, proteins as body-building substances, and vitamins and minerals as regulatory agents—a child's health can be maintained [4]. This helps prevent various illnesses that could hinder their growth and development, which in turn may affect their intelligence.

Proper nutritional fulfillment for school-aged children is essential in supporting their growth and development. Childhood is considered a golden period, during which growth and development occur rapidly, requiring a well-balanced nutritional intake [5]. Adequate nutrition plays a role in maintaining physical health, strengthening the immune system, and en-

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hancing intelligence. Children are the future of a nation and therefore deserve special attention to ensure their quality of life. Nutrition and health play a crucial role in the development of high-quality human resources. Nutrient-rich food significantly affects overall nutritional status and health. Good nutritional status supports an individual's physical well-being, while an imbalanced intake—whether excessive or insufficient—can lead to health problems [6]. Therefore, school-aged children who experience either undernutrition or overnutrition may face challenges in maintaining their productivity.

To address these challenges, strong collaboration among educational institutions, the government, and the community is necessary. This collaboration aims to provide the support and resources needed by parents. Educational programs on health and nutrition, financial assistance, and efforts to raise awareness about the importance of children's health and nutrition can help create an environment that supports holistic growth and development [7]. The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is a key health and nutrition education initiative aimed at improving the quality of life for children and pregnant women in Indonesia. MBG is one of the main policies launched by the administration of President Prabowo Subianto [8]. The program's goal is to address nutritional issues and enhance the quality of human resources in Indonesia, particularly among children and pregnant women. This initiative has received support from various sources, including international backing from countries such as the United States and China [9]. U.S. President Joe Biden has expressed his commitment to Indonesia's national program that aims to provide nutritious and healthy meals for school children and pregnant women. Meanwhile, the Chinese government has also signed a funding agreement to support this initiative.

Health and nutrition education programs, financial assistance, and efforts to raise awareness about the importance of children's health and nutrition can contribute to creating an environment that supports children's holistic growth and development [10]. In order to formulate better policies at the community and school levels, it is essential to understand the social aspects that influence children's health and education [11]. With a substantial budget, the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), launched by President Prabowo Subianto, aims to improve nutritional quality and motivate students in Indonesia to learn. This program is designed to provide nutritious meals for schoolchildren, toddlers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. Based on this background, this study aims to identify the effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meal Program at SDN 02 Nunukan Selatan.

36 Literature Review

Free lunch programs such as Ka Ora, Ka Ako in New Zealand have been shown to contribute to improving children's nutritional status, while also helping to address issues of food insecurity and malnutrition [12]. Systematic reviews indicate that school feeding programs significantly enhance students' nutritional status, which plays a critical role in supporting their health and academic performance. In Indonesia, similar programs have been implemented in various regions, including 3T areas (Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost regions), in an effort to expand access to nutritious food and quality educational services [13].

37 Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to identify the effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meal Program at SD 02 Nunukan Selatan. Qualitative descriptive research is a method that describes the actual events or conditions of the research object based on real-life situations observed during the study [14]. The research subjects include students who participate in the program, their parents, and teachers. Data collection techniques involve in-depth

interviews with students, parents, and teachers to explore their experiences and satisfaction with the program; participatory observation to monitor the program's implementation and student interactions during mealtime; and the collection of relevant documents such as activity reports and attendance records.

38 Result and Discussion

Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), initiated by President Prabowo Subianto, is a strategic initiative aimed at improving nutritional quality and motivating students across Indonesia. With a significant budget allocation, the program is designed to provide nutritious meals to school children, toddlers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers—particularly targeting students at the primary and secondary school levels. Currently, the Free Nutritious Meal Program is still in the pilot phase at several schools across Indonesia, including SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan. This study analyzes how the program contributes to enhancing students' learning motivation. The trial implementation at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan has been ongoing for nearly four months, starting on January 6, 2025, and remains active to date.

During this period, approximately 521 children have been receiving nutritious meals daily. The program has been running smoothly, with a dedicated school team of six members overseeing the implementation. Meals are distributed in two sessions: the first at 9:00 AM and the second around 11:00 AM. Many students reported that the program has been highly beneficial, especially those who often struggle to access nutritious food at home. According to various respondents, the program was welcomed with great enthusiasm by students. This was particularly evident at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan, where the majority of the community works as fishermen and seaweed farmers. Around 90% of the students' parents are employed in these occupations, which often prevents them from providing breakfast for their children. In addition, many students tend to consume unhealthy snacks. Interview results with students further support this finding; they expressed happiness about the program because the meals provided help curb their hunger before lessons begin.

Student Satisfaction with the Free Nutritious Meal Program at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan

This program is very beneficial because students eat regularly every day with menus provided during the trial phase of the Free Nutritious Meal Program, consisting of healthy foods, including various side dishes whose nutritional content has been regulated by the catering service. According to the students, the program also provides fruits and vegetables, and the food is healthy, which makes them satisfied. These fruits and vegetables help meet their nutritional needs. The quality of the food provided is a key factor in student satisfaction. Nutritious, varied meals that align with students' preferences tend to make them happy and content. After enjoying the provided meals, students feel more enthusiastic about participating in the learning process.

Health Impact of the Free Nutritious Meal Program at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan

This nutritious meal program not only fulfills students' nutritional needs but also offers a healthier alternative compared to buying snacks, leading to greater satisfaction and reducing their temptation to purchase unhealthy food. By saving money, students can reduce their spending on snacks at school, which also contributes to lowering plastic waste in the school

environment. This creates a cleaner environment and promotes a healthy lifestyle among students. However, improvements in students' nutritional status cannot yet be measured due to the lack of health data before and after the implementation of this program.

Student Attendance in the Free Nutritious Meal Program at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan

During the pilot phase, the most noticeable impact has been an increase in student attendance, with nearly 98% of students attending school regularly. The 2% absenteeism is generally due to illness or other reasons. This indicates a high level of enthusiasm for the program, with attendance becoming more consistent compared to before. Thus, the program successfully attracts students' attention and provides additional motivation for them to attend school. However, despite this improvement, further observation is needed. The 2% absenteeism poses a new challenge because the meals allocated for absent students are redirected to teachers. As absenteeism increases, more meals remain unused.

Parental Perception of the Free Nutritious Meal Program at SDN 002 Nunukan

Parents generally have a very positive perception of the Free Nutritious Meal Program at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan. Many view the program as an appropriate step toward improving their children's health and well-being. The program also positively impacts student attendance, as children are more motivated to attend school with the expectation of receiving nutritious meals. The quality of the food provided often receives praise, with varied menus that are appealing and suited to children's tastes. However, some parents wish to be more involved in menu selection and provide input, so the program better meets students' needs. Overall, parents feel the program benefits not only their children's health but also supports their learning process.

Impact of the Free Nutritious Meal Program on Student Learning Outcomes

The Free Nutritious Meal Program, implemented at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan for nearly four months in its pilot phase, has yet to show conclusive effects on student learning outcomes. The program aims to provide better nutritional intake for students, especially those from low-income families, with the expectation of supporting their physical and mental health and ultimately positively impacting academic achievement. However, since the program has been running for a relatively short time, its direct influence on academic performance remains unclear. As stated in [15], nutritious food significantly affects students' physical health and well-being, supporting academic achievement and holistic welfare. Although the direct impact on learning outcomes may not yet be measurable, improved nutrition is crucial for fostering students' physical and mental health. Changes in academic performance usually take longer to manifest because they involve various other factors, such as teaching methods, students' psychological conditions, and the overall learning environment. Additionally, it is important to note that the success of this program depends not only on providing nutritious food but also on how students integrate healthy eating habits into their daily lives. Therefore, continuing this program is essential to ensure that all students can fully benefit from it. A comprehensive evaluation of the program should thus be maintained.

Challenges in Implementing the Free Nutritious Meal Program and Its Impact on Student Learning

While the Free Nutritious Meal Program at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan has positively influenced student attendance, it has also presented several challenges. One initial challenge was the de-

layed delivery of meals. Meals were supposed to be delivered at 9:00 AM during the students' break, but due to logistical issues, deliveries were made later in the day. However, the catering service has resolved this issue, and meal delivery is now back on schedule. This improvement is crucial for ensuring children receive nutritious food as planned. Additionally, in the early phase of the program, the use of disposable food containers added challenges to waste management, both from leftover containers and food waste. The increased volume of waste became a significant issue, as many students were not fully aware of the importance of disposing of waste properly. This created difficulties for the school in maintaining cleanliness and managing waste effectively. Therefore, more intensive education is needed to raise students' awareness of their responsibility to keep the school environment clean.

Use of Plastic Containers and Improvements

The use of plastic containers at the beginning of the program caused the side dishes and rice to often mix together and spill easily. However, improvements have been made by replacing the plastic containers with metal lunchboxes (compreng besi). This change has made food presentation more hygienic and easier for students to eat, while also addressing waste management related to the food containers. The program does not involve the school in menu planning, but the school can provide input regarding foods that are generally favored by students. This was initially a challenge, as some students disliked certain meals. However, this issue was addressed through teachers' initiatives to introduce students to healthy foods and explain their benefits, motivating students to eat the meals provided. According to [16], teachers play an important role in overcoming students' food preferences by introducing healthy foods and their benefits. Through education on the importance of healthy eating, students are motivated to try and adopt healthier eating habits, fostering a positive attitude toward nutritious food choices. Furthermore, through this program, students are also taught the importance of saving money. Previously, they were usually given pocket money to spend at school, but after the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program, students prefer to save their money rather than spend it on snacks.



Figure 13: Part of Food Menu and Food Distribution

39 Conclusion

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) implemented at SDN 002 Nunukan Selatan is running well. By providing nutritious meals every day, the program helps meet the nutritional needs, especially for students from underprivileged families. Although still in the pilot phase, positive impacts are already visible, such as increased student attendance reaching 98%. The program also plays a role in educating students about the importance of healthy eating habits and saving money, which results in reduced spending on unhealthy snacks and less plastic waste at school. While the direct impact on students' academic performance and health cannot yet be

measured, the increased enthusiasm and mental well-being of students are expected to contribute to better learning outcomes in the future. The success of this program requires ongoing evaluation and active involvement from teachers and the community to ensure that its benefits are maximized for all students. Thus, this program not only supports nutritional needs but also creates a healthier and more productive learning environment.

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