

Original Article

A PANCASILA AND EDUCATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S FREE NUTRITIOUS MEAL PROGRAM**Melisa^{1)*}, Hendra¹⁾, Ahmad Zabidi Abdul Razak²⁾**¹⁾ Pancasila and Citizenship Education Study Program, University Jambi, Indonesia²⁾ Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur

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ABSTRACT

Background. The Government's Free Nutritious Meal Program represents a strategic public policy aimed at improving children's nutritional status while supporting human resource development in Indonesia.

Research Purpose. This study aims to review the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program from the perspectives of education and Pancasila values.

Research Method. Using a qualitative approach through a literature review and case study. The analysis focuses on how the program reflects the principles of Pancasila, particularly social justice, humanity, cooperation, and equitable access to education.

Findings. The Free Nutritious Meal Program contributes positively to students' learning concentration, school participation, and educational equity, especially among vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. From a Pancasila perspective, the program embodies the values of social justice and collective responsibility by ensuring equal nutritional access for students across regions. However, challenges remain in terms of program sustainability, quality control, and inter-sectoral coordination.

Conclusion. The Free Nutritious Meal Program has strong relevance to educational development and the implementation of Pancasila values, provided that continuous evaluation and policy refinement are carried out to ensure its effectiveness and long-term impact.

Keywords: Free Nutritious Meal Program, Pancasila Values, Education, Social Justice.

BACKGROUND

Pancasila, the foundation of the Indonesian state, serves as the guiding principle for all aspects of Indonesian governance, including legislation. Pancasila reflects the Indonesian nation's role in social, national, and state life. The values embodied within Pancasila serve as a benchmark for the Indonesian people in their governance. Consequently, state governance must not deviate from the values of divinity, humanity, unity, democracy, and justice. Pancasila is considered sacred, and every citizen must memorize and adhere to its contents. However, most Indonesians view Pancasila solely as a state ideology, ignoring its meaning and benefits in life. Without realizing it, the values contained within Pancasila are profoundly useful and beneficial [1,2].

Pancasila contains numerous values, all of which are embodied in the five main points of national and state life. The struggle for independence is inseparable from the values of Pancasila. From the colonial era to the present, we have always upheld these values. Indonesia lives amidst diverse ethnicities, nations, cultures, and religions. Despite all of this, Indonesia stands united, united within a solid unity under the auspices of Pancasila and its motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Pancasila keeps Indonesia steadfast and

united amidst cultural diversity. It serves as the foundation of culture, uniting all cultures. Because of this unity, Pancasila inspires the diverse cultures of Indonesia [1,3].

Nationalism in national and state life encompasses several values, including developing a love for the homeland and nation, adhering to and complying with state regulations, fulfilling and internalizing the values enshrined in the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila, and fostering a sense of brotherhood, solidarity, peace, and non-violence among community groups within the spirit of these regulations. There are many other nationalistic values that Indonesian citizens must possess [4].

An Indonesian citizen with an Indonesian passport does not necessarily mean that they are Indonesian. A person can be considered Indonesian if they consider themselves part of the Indonesian nation. This means that they share a unity of interests and sympathy for the common goals of the Indonesian people. Nationalism can be defined as an ideology that creates and maintains a nation's sovereignty by realizing a shared identity for a group of people [5].

Efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia remain a significant challenge. Various obstacles, such as limited access, poor quality, and disparities between urban and rural areas, remain issues that must be addressed. To address these issues, the values of Pancasila can serve as a guideline for improving the quality of education in Indonesia [6].

The values of Pancasila, consisting of social justice, unity, belief in one God, democracy, and just and civilized humanity, can serve as the foundation for equitable educational development. Social justice is a crucial Pancasila value in creating a just and equitable education system. Efforts to provide equal educational opportunities for all, including those from remote or underprivileged areas, can help improve access to better education [7].

Furthermore, the values of unity and belief in one God can also help create a harmonious and respectful educational environment. Education based on religious and moral values can shape the character of students who are good and responsible towards themselves and society. Democracy is also an important Pancasila value in education. A participatory educational process can help create an inclusive and diverse educational environment [8].

Finally, just and civilized humanitarian values can also help create a more humane and forward-looking education. Education that holistically addresses students' needs can help them become better human beings and gain a broader understanding of the world. Overall, efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia can be achieved through the implementation of Pancasila values [9], improving the health quality of school children, and supporting the continuity of education. The urgency of this program lies in addressing nutritional inequality, improving concentration, and reducing school dropout rates due to limited access to nutritious food.

This study presents a novel qualitative contribution by integrating Pancasila-based ideological analysis with educational policy evaluation of the Government's Free Nutritious Meal Program. Unlike existing studies that predominantly emphasize nutritional outcomes, health impacts, or administrative effectiveness, this research reconceptualizes the program as an education-oriented and value-based public policy. Through a qualitative literature review, the study synthesizes interdisciplinary perspectives from education, Pancasila philosophy, and public policy to develop a conceptual framework that positions nutritional provision as a medium for promoting social justice, humanity, equality, and collective responsibility within the educational system. Furthermore, the inclusion of a qualitative case

study adds empirical novelty by examining how Pancasila values are operationalized in program implementation at the school level. Rather than focusing solely on measurable outputs, the study explores stakeholders' perspectives on ethical governance, educational equity, and character formation. By framing the Free Nutritious Meal Program as both a welfare intervention and a pedagogical instrument, this research offers a new theoretical and practical perspective on the role of national ideology in shaping education-centered public policy in Indonesia.

Encouraging community involvement in supporting the provision of sustainable, nutritious food. However, there are obstacles in the aspects of funding, availability of local food ingredients, and distribution mechanisms that need to be improved so that the program can run optimally [10]. This study contributes to the literature on education and public policy by introducing a Pancasila-based analytical framework for evaluating the Government's Free Nutritious Meal Program (hereinafter referred to as MBG) as an education-centered and value-driven policy. By integrating a qualitative literature review with a case study approach, the research extends existing studies that primarily focus on nutritional or administrative outcomes, offering a deeper understanding of the program's ideological, educational, and ethical dimensions. The findings demonstrate how Pancasila values, particularly social justice, humanity, equality, and mutual cooperation, are operationalized at the school level and influence educational equity, learning participation, and character formation. Methodologically, the study illustrates the relevance of qualitative approaches in capturing normative and contextual aspects of policy implementation, while practically providing evidence-based insights for policymakers and educators to strengthen value-oriented governance and sustainable educational interventions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, specifically a case study design, to explore the multifaceted impacts of the Free Nutritious Meal Program within the framework of Pancasila education [10]. This method is particularly suitable for investigating the nuanced social and humanitarian issues that arise from government initiatives, allowing for the generation of descriptive data concerning the program's progress and alignment with national educational mandates. This approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena by focusing intensively on a specific group, organization, or social event, thus enabling a holistic and detailed portrayal of the observed reality. The qualitative design, utilizing an explanatory case study strategy, draws upon primary data from in-depth interviews with stakeholders and program recipients, alongside direct observations and secondary data analysis to ensure comprehensive data triangulation.

Data Collection Methods used observations, direct observation of the case in its natural setting, to understand behaviors and interactions. Document Analysis by review of existing documents (reports, emails, policy documents) to supplement data. Data Analysis Techniques used Narrative Analysis, examining the stories and personal accounts to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences. Steps in Conducting Case Study Research: 1) Define the Research Question: Clearly articulate what you aim to discover, 2) Select the Case: Choose a case that is relevant and can provide rich insights, 3) Collect Data: Use various methods to gather comprehensive information, 4) Analyze Data: Apply appropriate analysis techniques to extract meaningful findings, 5) Report Findings: Present the insights in a way that addresses the research question, often using narratives and quotes to illustrate points.

FINDINGS

One case that has garnered intense public attention occurred in Cianjur Regency. In that area, a food poisoning incident involving a number of students has been declared an Extraordinary Event (KLB). This status not only reflects the high number of victims but also highlights the limited capacity of local health facilities to respond quickly to escalating cases. The students reportedly experienced a range of clinical symptoms common to food poisoning, such as nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dizziness, and physical weakness. These symptoms indicate the possibility of biological or chemical contamination of the food consumed, which could be related to inadequate kitchen sanitation, substandard food quality, or violations of storage and distribution procedures. More broadly, empirical data released by the National Agency for Food Safety (hereinafter referred to as BGN) provides a more comprehensive picture of the scale of the problem affecting the MBG program nationally. Between January and September 2025, 70 incidents were recorded directly related to food safety during the program's implementation, with a total of 5,914 victims. These figures reflect a recurring pattern of incidents and indicate that food safety issues are not incidental but rather structural. This indicates weaknesses in quality control mechanisms, both at the food supplier level, local managers, and the supervisory agency responsible for program implementation at the regional level [11,12].

In the context of public administration and government, this data provides a strong foundation for a comprehensive evaluation of program governance. This evaluation must encompass not only the technical aspects of food provision but also institutional, regulatory, and inter-agency coordination. The MBG program's implementation structure, which involves multiple layers of bureaucracy from the central government to schools as the final distribution units, demands alignment in incident reporting standards and more effective monitoring capacity. Failure in any of these links could potentially pose a significant risk to student health.

In response to the increasing number of food poisoning reports, the central government, through President Prabowo, acknowledged that such incidents continue to occur sporadically in several regions. This acknowledgement conveys administrative significance, indicating that the government recognizes gaps in program implementation that must be addressed immediately [13].

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) began on January 6, 2025. This date was designated by the government as the starting date for the first phase of the MBG program across Indonesia. January 6, 2025, marked a significant milestone as it marked the first official implementation of the national program, which aims to improve children's nutritional status, support learning, and accelerate the reduction of nutritional issues such as stunting. The government, through the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), began operating a number of Nutrition Fulfillment Service Units (SPPGs) as public kitchens in various districts/cities to prepare nutritious meals for distribution to students and other target groups [14].

Internal conflicts of the MBG Government Program are community support factors. The community generally welcomed the MBG policy, especially the target population, namely, children in various schools designated for implementation. Although the MBG policy generated both pros and cons within the community [15], this did not disrupt its implementation, and the community supported its implementation. Children, as the subjects of the MBG policy, welcomed it as part of the government's efforts to ensure adequate nutrition for children, which would impact their growth and development. Therefore, community support for the implementation of the MBG policy became a driving factor in its implementation in various regions across Indonesia. The six factors described above are

driving the current implementation of the MBG policy. These factors need to be maintained in the future to achieve the goals and objectives of the MBG policy. This will not only ensure adequate nutrition but also improve the quality of Indonesia's human resources so they can compete with those of other countries [16].

External Conflicts of the MBG Government Program are policy strategies. Policy strategies to improve the health of school children and support the continuity of education. The urgency of this program lies in addressing nutritional disparities, improving concentration, and reducing school dropout rates due to limited access to nutritious food. This study aims to analyze the long-term impact of the MBG program on students' health and educational aspirations. The results indicate that the MBG program has the potential to reduce stunting and malnutrition rates among school children, increase student attendance, and improve their academic achievement. Furthermore, the program also encourages community involvement in supporting the provision of sustainable, nutritious food. However, there are obstacles in the aspects of funding, availability of local food ingredients, and distribution mechanisms that need to be improved so that the program can run optimally [10].

The MBG program serves the following functions: Increase Student Interest and Motivation to Learn. The MBG program directly increases student interest in learning because students arrive at school feeling hungry, making them more prepared to participate in learning. Research in Lombok showed that after the MBG program was implemented, student attendance increased, and early childhood children became more active, enthusiastic, and easily guided during learning activities. Teachers also reported increased motivation to learn because children arrived feeling more physically comfortable after receiving nutritious food [12].

Support Concentration and Learning Readiness. Providing adequate nutrition before the learning process has been shown to help students focus, remain calm, and be able to persist in class activities until the end. In policy studies, providing nutritious food improves learning readiness because adequate nutrition supports energy stability, brain health, and student absorption during the educational process. The MBG program also helps reduce physical complaints such as weakness or difficulty concentrating due to an empty stomach [11].

Improving the Effectiveness of the Learning Process. Elementary school teachers reported that the presence of the MBG program helped improve learning effectiveness because students found it easier to follow instructions, were more active in asking questions, and did not feel sleepy during lessons. Regularly providing nutritious meals helped create a more conducive school environment, especially for students from low-income families who often came to school without breakfast [17].

Providing Local Economic Impact Through Food Procurement. The MBG program not only impacts students but also provides economic benefits to the local community. Procuring food from farmers and MSMEs encourages microeconomic growth, increases household income, and strengthens local supply chains. Economic studies show that MBG has a significant multiplier effect, especially in areas that supply fresh food to participating schools [15].

Supporting Pancasila-Based Education Governance. The MBG program also serves as a manifestation of the state's responsibility to ensure the welfare and equal access to education for all Indonesian children. Legal studies show that MBG implements the values of social justice (the fifth principle of Pancasila) and protects vulnerable groups. This strengthens the state's legitimacy in fulfilling citizens' basic rights in education and nutrition.

DISCUSSIONS

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), initiated by the government to improve students' health and concentration, has sparked widespread conflict and controversy within the community. One of the most glaring root causes was the emergence of mass food poisoning cases affecting hundreds of students in several regions, sparking serious concerns about food safety. These incidents not only highlighted alleged negligence in food preparation but also sparked criticism of kitchen hygiene standards, the quality of food ingredients, and the weak oversight of relevant parties. Incidents like these raised public questions about the technical readiness of a program that was supposed to provide health benefits but instead posed risks to students. These concerns were further strengthened by findings by the Indonesian Ombudsman, which revealed potential maladministration in the MBG's implementation, such as unstandardized operational procedures, irregular distribution records, and kitchen sanitation that did not meet food safety standards. Furthermore, reports of the presence of "foundation brokers" in the process of appointing kitchen managers further exacerbated negative public perceptions, suggesting that a program of this magnitude was prone to irregularities or the exploitation of vested interests [14].

Conflicts arise not only from technical and managerial aspects, but also from social dynamics in certain regions. In Papua, for example, a number of students openly rejected the MBG program, believing that their primary need was not free meals, but rather access to more appropriate and affordable education. This rejection was reinforced by distrust of the central government and discomfort with the involvement of security forces in food distribution, which was perceived as creating a sense of intimidation. These social and historical factors indicate that the implementation of the MBG cannot be carried out uniformly without considering the local context, especially in regions with socio-political vulnerabilities [17].

Beyond social aspects, another criticism that has sparked debate is the budget issue. The MBG is considered to be extremely costly, leading some to worry that these funds will divert allocations to more priority education sectors, such as improving teacher quality, improving school infrastructure, and providing learning facilities. Academics, students, and public policy observers have questioned whether the free meal program is truly a long-term investment or simply a populist policy that has not been thoroughly prepared in various aspects. With cases of poisoning, allegations of maladministration, rejection in certain regions, and concerns about education budget cuts, public opposition to the MBG has become increasingly widespread and complex. A program originally designed to improve student welfare has instead raised major questions about the effectiveness, safety, relevance, and governance of public policy at the national level [18].

Factors contributing to the occurrence of Free Nutritional Meals (FFM) include food contamination, bacterial growth, poor kitchen sanitation, and problems in food distribution. The following is a more detailed explanation of these factors:

- a) Contamination: Contamination of raw materials or the food processing environment can cause food poisoning.
- b) Bacterial Growth: Improper storage temperatures and times, as well as suboptimal processing, can trigger the growth and spread of bacteria in food.
- c) Poor Kitchen Sanitation: Poor hygiene and sanitation in food service kitchens are also important factors causing food poisoning.
- d) Delayed Food Distribution: Food cooked too early but distributed too late can cause food poisoning.

- e) Lack of Supervision: Weak oversight of the safety of raw materials and the food production process also contributes to food poisoning cases.
- f) Snacks Sold Outside the FFM Program: Children who consume snacks sold outside the FFM program that are not guaranteed to be clean can also experience food poisoning.

In addition, other factors such as the number of services that are not balanced with the number of waiters, long distances for food distribution, and lack of communication regarding food allergies in children can also influence the occurrence of MBG poisoning cases[19].

The poisoning incidents during the Free Nutritional Meals (MBG) Program have drawn significant attention from both the government and educators, as they concern the safety of students in schools. The government, through President Prabowo Subianto, apologized for the incident and emphasized that the MBG program would continue with comprehensive improvements, including improved hygiene standards, evaluation of the food production chain, and stricter oversight of school food providers[9].

From an educational perspective, teachers and schools stated that the repeated poisoning incidents demonstrate weak regulations and minimal controls on food processing, placing them under additional burdens in monitoring, checking food quality, and providing initial treatment for students experiencing symptoms of poisoning. Furthermore, the Indonesian Teachers' Union Forum (FSGI) emphasized that victimized teachers and students have the right to demand state compensation, as the poisoning is considered a failure of public service. They also emphasized the importance of a systemic evaluation to prevent similar incidents from occurring again[3].

The Free Nutritional Meals (MBG) Program presents a significant initiative, but the potential for food poisoning incidents highlights gaps in the guarantee of this right and raises crucial issues regarding state responsibility. This case study examines poisoning incidents from the perspective of state responsibility. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews. The study findings indicate that Indonesia's legal framework provides a strong normative foundation for this right. However, its implementation still faces significant challenges in oversight, resource allocation, and technical capacity, increasing the risk of food poisoning. State accountability can be outlined in administrative, civil, and criminal law, but its implementation is hampered by bureaucratic complexity, lack of legal literacy, and limited access to justice. Systemic reforms are needed, including specific implementing regulations, increased oversight capacity, and more responsive compensation mechanisms, to achieve comprehensive protection and tangible state accountability in the Free Nutritional Meals Program[7,8,20].

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, as a qualitative literature review, the analysis relies on the availability, scope, and quality of existing academic publications, policy documents, and official reports. As a result, the findings may be influenced by publication bias and may not fully capture undocumented practices or recent developments in the implementation of the Government's Free Nutritious Meal Program. Second, the case study approach focuses on a limited number of educational settings, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader national contexts. The results, therefore, provide context-specific insights rather than statistically representative conclusions.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes normative and ideological analysis based on Pancasila values, which involves interpretive judgment and may be subject to researcher

subjectivity despite efforts to ensure analytical rigor. The absence of quantitative outcome measurements, such as nutritional indicators or academic performance scores, also limits the ability to assess causal relationships between the program and educational outcomes. Consequently, future research is encouraged to adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal designs and include comparative regional data to strengthen empirical validation and expand the scope of analysis.

CONCLUSION

The Indonesian education system, including the implementation of the MBG program, requires strengthening in terms of policy, implementation, and supervision to be able to produce a superior generation with character and ready to compete at the global level. Strengthening periodic evaluation and transparency is essential for the implementation of MBG to be effective, accountable, and on target.

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