The Social Meaning of the Free Nutritious Meals Program for Students

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Abstract
This study aims to understand the social significance of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program for students at SMAS Amanah Nusantara in Makassar, South Sulawesi. It employs a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation. Informants were selected via purposive sampling, comprising students as primary informants, alongside teachers, class representatives, and parents as supporting informants. Data analysis involved data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that students perceive the MBG program as a manifestation of the government's concern for their needs specifically regarding nutrition and motivation to participate in school activities as well as a symbol of social equality. Furthermore, the implementation of the MBG program fosters social experiences through communal dining and interactions among students and between students and teachers. Thus, the MBG program is interpreted not merely as the provision of free meals, but as a social practice that derives meaning from the students' experiences and interactions within the school environment.

Kata Kunci: Makan Bergizi Gratis; Makna Sosial; Interaksionisme Simbolik; Siswa; Kehidupan Sosial Sekolah.

Abstrak
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami makna sosial Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) bagi siswa di SMAS Amanah Nusantara, Makassar, Sulawesi Selatan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Informan dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling, yang terdiri atas siswa sebagai informan utama serta guru, perwakilan kelas, dan orang tua sebagai informan pendukung. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahap reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, sedangkan keabsahan data dijamin melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa memaknai Program MBG sebagai wujud kepedulian pemerintah terhadap kebutuhan mereka, khususnya dalam aspek pemenuhan gizi dan motivasi untuk berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan sekolah, sekaligus sebagai simbol kesetaraan sosial. Selain itu, pelaksanaan Program MBG membentuk pengalaman sosial melalui kegiatan makan bersama serta interaksi antarsiswa maupun antara siswa dan guru. Dengan demikian, Program MBG tidak hanya dimaknai sebagai penyediaan makanan secara gratis, tetapi juga sebagai praktik sosial yang memperoleh makna melalui pengalaman dan interaksi siswa dalam lingkungan sekolah.

Introduction

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One of the basic needs closely related to students' participation in school life is adequate nutrition.[1] Adequate nutritional intake contributes to students' physical condition, concentration, and involvement in school activities. However, the fulfillment of nutritional needs in educational settings is not merely a biological matter. Food-related practices may also become part of social interactions through which relationships, habits, values, symbols, and meanings are constructed.[2] From this perspective, school meal programs can be understood not only as nutritional interventions but also as social practices embedded in students' everyday experiences. Previous discussion of school meal programs similarly indicates that free school meals may constitute a complex social environment that affects students' academic, psychological, and social experiences.[3]

The social dimension of school meal programs becomes particularly relevant because eating activities can create opportunities for collective interaction.[4] A meal provided within the school environment may bring students together, establish particular routines, and introduce values such as togetherness, discipline, and equality in access to school facilities.[5] Thus, the provision of food can become part of the socialization process in schools, where students learn and reproduce particular patterns of behavior through their participation in collective activities. Experiences from other countries demonstrate that school meal policies may also extend beyond nutritional provision. Japan, for example, has developed Shokuiku, a comprehensive approach that connects school meals with food culture and healthy eating habits, indicating that food provision in educational institutions can carry educational and social meanings in addition to nutritional functions.

In Indonesia, school meal provision has historically been relatively limited. Previous government initiatives included the School Supplementary Feeding Program (Pemberian Makanan Tambahan Anak Sekolah/PMT-AS), which was intended to

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[1] Jose M Saavedra and Andrew M Prentice, "Nutrition in School-Age Children: A Rationale for Revisiting Priorities," *Nutrition Reviews* 81, no. 7 (June 9, 2023): 823–43, https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuac089.

[2] Martina Arcadu and Laura Migliorini, "Building Share Identities through Food: A Qualitative Analysis of Social Representations of Typical Food during Early Adolescence," *Food, Culture & Society* 29, no. 1 (January 27, 2026): 144–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2024.2444143.

[3] Imam Nurin Eyes and Zakaria Erwin nadia, "Evaluasi Program Makan Siang Gratis Di Sekolah: Dampak Terhadap Gizi, Kesehatan, Dan Motivasi Belajar Siswa," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan* 1, no. 4 (2025): 232–45.

[4] Eerang Park and Andy Widyanta, "Food Tourism Experience and Changing Destination Foodscape: An Exploratory Study of an Emerging Food Destination," *Tourism Management Perspectives* 42 (April 2022): 100964, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2022.100964.

[5] Ernawati Ernawati, Sundari Hamid, and Andi Agustiani, "Peran Kepala Sekolah Dalam Penerapan Disiplin Positif Untuk Mengelola Perilaku Dan Pembiasaan Di Lingkungan Sekolah," *Bosowa Journal of Education* 6, no. 1 (2025): 248–56, https://doi.org/10.35965/bje.v6i1.6084.

improve nutritional intake and the nutritional status of school-aged children.[6] However, the program was primarily implemented at the elementary-school level and is no longer operating in its previous form.[7] The emergence of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (Makan Bergizi Gratis/MBG) therefore represents a broader development in the provision of food within the Indonesian education system.[8] The program is intended to ensure that students receive adequate nutritional intake regardless of their socioeconomic background.[9] At the normative level, MBG is also associated with the principle of social justice and represents the state's presence in students' everyday lives through the provision of free nutritious meals at school.[10]

The local context further strengthens the relevance of this investigation. Based on the researchers' preliminary observations, MBG was introduced at SMAS Amanah Nusantara around September 2025. The program entered the school through a process of student data collection and subsequent coordination with the school rather than through an initial proposal submitted directly by the school. Its implementation subsequently became part of the school's daily activities. The distribution of meals involved teachers or designated school personnel, reporting of student attendance, delivery of meals according to the reported number of students, administrative documentation, and the involvement of the meal provider.

Preliminary observations also indicate that the implementation of MBG at SMAS Amanah Nusantara involved a process of technical adjustment. Operational readiness, supporting facilities, and the availability of MBG kitchens affected the implementation and distribution of the program. More importantly for this study, the program created a new social situation within the school, particularly during the distribution and consumption of meals. Eating together became part of the students' routine and created

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[6] Nurya Hartika Sari et al., "Free School Meals Policy as a Learning Framework for MBG in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review," *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies* 5, no. 10 (October 22, 2025): 12939–54, https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v5i10.52310.

[7] Yuliani et al., "Dietary Diversity Dan Status Gizi Pada Siswa Yang Mendapat Program Makan Siang Dan Tidak Mendapat Makan Siang Di Sekolah Dietary Diversity and Nutritional Status of Students Receiving the School Lunch Program and Students Not Receiving the School Lunch Pr" 5, no. 1 (2021): 48–55, https://doi.org/10.18860/jim.v5i1.11534.

[8] Rassanjani, S., & Rahmi, I. (2025). Free School Meals Policy: Lessons Learned from Around the World for Indonesia. JURNAL ILMU SOSIAL, 24(1), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.14710/jis.24.1.2025.1-28.

[9] Nurul Azzahra et al., "Pelaksanaan Uji Coba Program Makan Bergizi Gratis Di SMP Negeri 4 Tangerang," *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Dan Riset Pendidikan* 3, no. 4 (June 21, 2025): 5036–44, https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v3i4.1335.

[10] Kiftiyah, A., Palestina, F. A., Abshar, F. U., & Rofiah, K. (2025). Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) dalam Perspektif Keadilan Sosial dan Dinamika Sosial – Politik. Pancasila: Jurnal KeindonesiaanKeindonesiaan, 05(1), 2797–3018. https://doi.org/: /10.52738/pjk.v5i1.726.

opportunities for interaction, while students displayed variations in participation, habits, and attitudes toward the program.

These variations raise a fundamental research problem: how do students interpret the presence of the MBG program in their everyday school lives? The question is important because the same program may be experienced differently by different students. A policy that is formally designed to provide nutritional support and promote equality may be understood by students through meanings developed from their everyday experiences. Therefore, examining MBG from the students' perspective provides an opportunity to understand the relationship between public policy and everyday social life at the school level.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the social meaning of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) for students at SMAS Amanah Nusantara Makassar, South Sulawesi. By focusing on students' experiences and interpretations, this study seeks to contribute to sociological discussions concerning the relationship between educational policy, social interaction, and meaning-making in everyday school life.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the social meaning of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (Makan Bergizi Gratis/MBG) from students' perspectives within the contextual setting of SMAS Amanah Nusantara Makassar. The case study was selected because the research focused on students' experiences, perceptions, interactions, and interpretations of MBG in their everyday school environment. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling based on their direct experience and involvement with the program. The study involved nine informants: four students as primary informants two male students from Grade X and two female students from Grade XI who had participated in MBG for at least one semester and five supporting informants consisting of one teacher involved in MBG distribution, two class leaders, and two parents. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation. The observation and interview guides were developed based on the research questions and focused on MBG implementation, student behavior, participation, social interaction, experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. Observation was conducted in the school environment, while interviews were conducted openly and flexibly to allow follow-up questions. Documentation included photographs, school-related records, and field documentation.

Data trustworthiness was established through source and technique triangulation, involving comparison of information from students, teachers, class leaders, and parents and cross-checking interview findings with observations and documentation.[11] Inconsistencies were examined through further clarification with relevant informants. Ethical procedures included explaining the research objectives and procedures to participants, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw, protecting confidentiality through pseudonyms or participant codes, and using the data solely for research purposes. Data analysis followed four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Interview data were transcribed and organized into relevant units, followed by coding and categorization of recurring meanings, experiences, interactions, and behavioral patterns related to MBG. The resulting categories were interpreted in relation to the research questions and Blumer's symbolic interactionism, particularly the processes through which meaning emerges, is negotiated through social interaction, and is modified through individual interpretation. Findings were continuously compared across participants and data sources to establish credible and consistent interpretations. As this was an empirical qualitative case study, SLR, bibliometric analysis, and meta-analysis procedures were not applicable.

Results and Discussion

Results

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program at SMAS Amanah Nusantara began around September 2025. The program was introduced to the school through government coordination and student data collection. Before the current implementation was established, the school experienced a temporary interruption because the initial food provider faced difficulties related to funding. The school subsequently established cooperation with another food provider through a network connected to the school community.

The meals are delivered to the school in the morning, temporarily stored in the school kitchen, and distributed to students around the second lesson or approaching the break period. The distribution schedule was adjusted to maintain the role of the school canteen. Before distribution, the school checks the number and condition of the meal

[11] J. D. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage Publications., 2017).

containers (ompreng). Daily administrative records are also prepared during the handover process, including the number of meals received and menu-related evaluations.

During the last two to three months of the research period, differences were observed between student and teacher meal packages. Student packages were marked with a red tie, while teacher packages used a yellow tie and generally contained larger portions. This differentiation was associated with the practices of the food provider and therefore cannot be generalized as a uniform arrangement across all MBG implementation sites.

The findings indicate that MBG acquired several meanings within students' everyday school experiences. These meanings included government attention, nutritional fulfillment, encouragement, shared provision, and an alternative to breakfast. MBG was understood as a form of government attention toward students. This meaning emerged from the change in students' everyday food practices, particularly the transition from bringing food from home to receiving meals at school.

The program was therefore understood not only as the provision of food but also as a government initiative that became visible in students' everyday school activities. Nevertheless, the meaning attached to the program was not completely uniform, as the program could also be perceived simply as a government program without creating a strong personal attachment.

Nutritional fulfillment emerged as one of the dominant meanings of MBG. The program provided students with access to food without requiring direct payment during school hours. The meals were perceived as a source of nutritional intake and as part of efforts to meet students' nutritional needs.

This meaning demonstrates that the program was associated with more than the provision of free food. The availability of meals at school created an understanding that students' nutritional needs were being supported during their educational activities.

The provision of MBG was also associated with feelings of enjoyment, satiety, and increased interest in school activities. The availability of food during school hours reduced feelings of hunger and could create enthusiasm related to receiving meals and discovering the daily menu. However, this meaning varied in intensity. While some experiences reflected enjoyment and increased enthusiasm, others regarded MBG as an ordinary part of the school routine. Therefore, the motivational meaning of MBG was

not experienced equally by all students. The distribution of MBG created a shared experience among students because meals were provided collectively within the school environment. Students received and consumed meals as part of the same school-based program rather than relying entirely on individual purchasing capacity.

This shared provision can be interpreted as creating a symbolic experience of equality among students. However, this equality is more appropriately understood within the student group rather than as absolute uniformity across all members of the school community. The existence of differences between student and teacher meal packages demonstrates that the implementation also contained distinctions based on school roles.

MBG also influenced students' daily eating schedules. Some students who previously did not regularly eat breakfast began to rely on the meal provided at school. The availability of MBG therefore influenced the timing and pattern of food consumption. This finding indicates that MBG functioned not only as a school meal but also as an alternative source of food for students who might otherwise have skipped breakfast. At the same time, this change represents a behavioral adjustment in which the availability of MBG became incorporated into students' daily routines.

The social impacts of MBG appeared in household economic practices, peer relationships, teacher-student interaction, snacking behavior, school canteen activities, and students' responses to the menu.The availability of MBG reduced some students' dependence on pocket money and food purchases during school hours. Some students no longer regularly requested money for snacks or relied on food brought from home.

This condition indicates that MBG provided an economic benefit for some families by reducing the need to allocate additional money for food during school hours. However, the impact was not uniform because some students continued to bring or use pocket money.Therefore, MBG did not completely eliminate students' previous food-purchasing practices but contributed to changes in the frequency and purpose of school-related food expenditure.

The distribution and consumption of MBG created opportunities for increased interaction among students. The process involved collective activities such as carrying ompreng, distributing meals, sitting together, and eating collectively.Food sharing also became part of the interaction surrounding MBG. Students sometimes exchanged fruit or other food items during meals. These activities indicate that MBG functioned as more

than a nutritional intervention because the process of receiving and consuming food also created opportunities for cooperation and social interaction.

MBG also created additional opportunities for interaction between students and teachers. The distribution process sometimes involved students assisting with the transportation and distribution of ompreng. These activities created forms of interaction outside the formal teaching and learning process. In some cases, the interaction contributed to greater familiarity between students and teachers. However, the effect was not uniform because some students experienced little change in their relationship with teachers.

The findings show that MBG becomes an additional meal rather than a complete replacement for snacking. Some students continued to use pocket money to purchase fried foods, drinks, or other snacks after receiving MBG, while others reduced or stopped purchasing snacks. This variation demonstrates that the presence of MBG did not eliminate the existing school-snacking culture. Instead, it altered students' eating practices to different degrees. The program became one component of the school food environment alongside snacks, pocket money, and food available through the canteen.

The presence of MBG required adjustments to the role of the school canteen. The distribution schedule was arranged to allow the canteen to continue operating. Students also continued purchasing drinks and snacks, indicating that the canteen remained part of the school food environment. Menu acceptance also varied. Repeated menus, particularly dishes involving eggs, tempeh, and tofu, could produce boredom among some students. Greater menu variation, including chicken and fish, was preferred. In some situations, meals were not completely consumed because of fullness or differences in food preferences. Overall, the findings demonstrate that MBG affected the school food environment without completely replacing existing eating practices. The program became integrated into a broader system involving breakfast, school meals, snacks, pocket money, the canteen, and everyday social interaction.

Discussion

The findings can be understood through Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism, particularly the proposition that people act toward something based on

the meanings that the thing has for them.[12] Meaning is not inherent in an object or program but emerges through social interaction and is subsequently interpreted and modified through experience. From this perspective, MBG does not have a single predetermined meaning simply because its formal objective is to provide nutritious food. At SMAS Amanah Nusantara, the program acquired several meanings through students' everyday experiences. It was understood as government attention, nutritional fulfillment, encouragement, shared provision, and an alternative to breakfast. These meanings demonstrate that a public program becomes socially meaningful when it enters everyday interaction.

The interpretation of MBG as government attention illustrates that students did not perceive the program only in terms of food.[13] The provision of meals was interpreted as an action directed toward their everyday needs. The meaning emerged partly from the contrast between previous practices of bringing food from home and the new experience of receiving meals at school.[14] This finding is important sociologically because it shows how a government policy can become visible at the micro level. A national program is experienced through concrete and repeated practices: receiving food, opening the meal container, eating during school hours, and discussing the menu. Consequently, the government is encountered not as an abstract institution but through a routine practice that becomes part of students' daily school lives.

At the same time, the finding that some students regarded MBG simply as a program indicates that institutional meaning is not automatically internalized in the same way by everyone. The same policy can produce different interpretations depending on personal experience. The second major finding concerns the relationship between MBG and social interaction. The distribution of meals required cooperation, particularly when students carried *ompreng* from the delivery point to classrooms. Eating together and sharing food further transformed the meal into a social activity.

This finding is consistent with research describing school meals as social occasions in which eating is connected with peer relationships, conversation, and

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[12] Morrione, T. J. (2021). Herbert Blumer, symbolic interactionism, and 21st-century sociology. Routledge.

[13] Andi Sri Adinda and Nursuciyani Jamal, "Effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program Policy on Improving Students' Health Quality and Learning Productivity," *Golden Ratio of Data in Summary* 6, no. 1 (January 22, 2026): 35–45, https://doi.org/10.52970/grdis.v6i1.1996.

[14] Lely Wahyuniar and Endahing Noor Iman Pustakasari, "Effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program on Nutritional Status, Learning Concentration, and Student Attendance in South Jakarta Elementary Schools," *Jurnal Medisci* 3, no. 3 (December 2, 2025): 201–21, https://doi.org/10.62885/medisci.v3i3.973.

interaction. Studies of school lunch practices have also shown that the social environment surrounding meals can influence students' food experiences and choices. From Blumer's perspective, these interactions are important because meaning develops through social processes.[15] The meaning of MBG is therefore not produced solely by the food's nutritional content. It is also produced when students carry the meals together, sit together, exchange food, and participate in the same activity. The meal consequently becomes a medium through which relationships are reproduced in everyday school life.

The findings also demonstrate that students did not interpret MBG uniformly. Some experienced happiness, satiety, and increased enthusiasm, while others considered the program ordinary.[16] Differences were also visible in snacking practices and menu acceptance. This variation is consistent with Blumer's third premise: meanings are handled and modified through interpretation. Students continually evaluate MBG based on their experiences.[17] A meal that is considered enjoyable may strengthen positive perceptions, whereas repetitive menus can produce boredom. Similarly, a student who continues to buy snacks may assign a different practical meaning to MBG from a student who no longer uses pocket money for food.

Thus, the meaning of MBG is dynamic rather than fixed. The program may initially be interpreted as a government initiative, subsequently become a routine source of food, and then acquire additional meanings based on the quality of meals, social interactions, and individual eating preferences. One important social impact is the reduction of some families' food-related expenditure during school hours. The availability of free meals reduced the need for some students to request pocket money or purchase food at school.[18] This finding indicates that MBG can influence household economic practices beyond the immediate provision of food. However, the findings do not support the conclusion that MBG completely replaces students' previous food-purchasing behavior. Some students continued to buy snacks and drinks. Therefore, the more accurate interpretation is that MBG reorganizes the function of pocket money and school snacks rather than eliminating them.

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[15] Morrione, *Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, and 21st-Century Sociology*.

[16] Wafa Hammedi, Thomas Leclercq, and Nadia Steils, "Gamification Myopia: Satiation Effects in Gamified Activities," *Journal of Service Research* 27, no. 2 (May 1, 2024): 213–30, https://doi.org/10.1177/10946705231190873.

[17] Evelyn Ivett Rojas Vázquez, "Integrating Psychosocial Perspectives in Medication Management Model" (University of Antwerp, 2025), https://doi.org/10.63028/10067/2164670151162165141.

[18] Michelle Marcus and Katherine G. Yewell, "The Effect of Free School Meals on Household Food Purchases: Evidence from the Community Eligibility Provision," *Journal of Health Economics* 84 (July 2022): 102646, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2022.102646.

This distinction is sociologically significant. Food consumption at school is not determined solely by hunger. It is also connected to habit, taste, peer interaction, and the availability of the school canteen. Consequently, providing a free meal does not automatically remove the social practices surrounding snacks. The adjustment of the school canteen illustrates how the introduction of MBG interacted with an existing social and economic environment. The school deliberately adjusted the distribution time so that the canteen could continue operating. This indicates that implementation involved negotiation between the objectives of the meal program and established school practices. The canteen should therefore not be understood only as a place where students buy food. It is part of the school's everyday food environment. The continued purchase of snacks and drinks demonstrates that MBG and the canteen coexist rather than operate as mutually exclusive systems.

This finding also explains why the phrase "MBG becomes an additional meal rather than a replacement for snacks" is important. The program changed the structure of food availability at school but did not completely replace the existing social practice of snacking. The finding that some students waited for MBG rather than eating breakfast at home requires particular attention. On one hand, MBG ensured that students received food during school hours. On the other hand, the program could encourage changes in breakfast routines when students expected to receive a free meal later in the morning. This demonstrates that the social effects of a policy may extend beyond its intended objectives. Students actively interpreted the availability of MBG and incorporated it into their daily routines. In symbolic interactionist terms, the program became meaningful not only as a source of nutrition but also as a temporal reference for organizing eating practices.[19] Therefore, the existence of MBG does not automatically produce the same behavioral outcome for all students. Its effects depend on how students incorporate the program into their existing routines. The collective distribution of MBG can create an experience of shared access among students. Receiving the same program at school may reduce visible differences in students' ability to obtain food during school hours. In this sense, MBG can acquire a symbolic meaning associated with equality within the student population.[20] Nevertheless, the finding of different teacher and student portions

[19] Sarah Hewitt et al., "Grounded Theory Method and Symbolic Interactionism: Freedom of Conceptualization and the Importance of Context in Research," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 23, no. 3 (2022), https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-23.3.3807.

[20] Wina Fadila Aulia, Sintayana Muhardini, and Sukron Fujjiaturrahman, "MBG Program: Identifying Values of Togetherness and Motivating Elementary School Student Attendance," *Moestopo*

introduces an important qualification. Equality should not be interpreted as absolute uniformity across every member of the school community. The observed distinction between student and teacher packages demonstrates that implementation practices can create differentiated treatment according to social position.

This finding shows that the social meaning of equality is produced within a particular context. What is experienced as equal access among students may coexist with differentiated treatment between students and teachers. Such variation illustrates the importance of examining how policy implementation is interpreted and negotiated at the local level rather than assuming that formal program objectives produce identical experiences everywhere. The study contributes to the application of Blumer's symbolic interactionism to the analysis of a public food program in a school setting. The findings demonstrate that the social meaning of MBG is produced through ordinary interactions rather than determined exclusively by its formal policy objectives.

The program becomes meaningful through several everyday processes: receiving meals, carrying *ompreng*, eating together, sharing food, interacting with teachers, deciding whether to purchase snacks, and evaluating the menu.[21] Through these processes, students interpret and continuously modify what MBG means to them. The study therefore extends the symbolic interactionist understanding of public policy by showing how a macro-level government program acquires micro-level meanings through everyday school interactions. The meaning of policy is consequently not only located in policy documents but also in the social practices through which the policy is experienced.

The findings suggest that the implementation of MBG needs to consider the social environment in which meals are provided. Menu variation is important because repeated menus can influence students' acceptance and consumption. Distribution schedules also need to consider the coexistence of MBG with the school canteen and existing eating routines. Furthermore, the implementation of the program can benefit from maintaining opportunities for positive social interaction during meal distribution. The collective activities surrounding MBG can become an additional social dimension of the program rather than being treated solely as logistical procedures. Overall, the findings indicate that the social consequences of MBG extend beyond nutritional provision. At the school level,

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International Review on Social, Humanities, and Sciences 6, no. 1 (April 14, 2026): 101–13, https://doi.org/10.32509/mirshus.v6i1.165.

[21] Ewa Czarniecka-Skubina et al., "Do Food and Meal Organization Systems in Polish Primary Schools Reflect Students' Preferences and Healthy and Sustainable Dietary Guidelines? The Results of Qualitative Research for the Junior-Edu-Żywienie (JEŻ) Project," *Foods* 13, no. 1 (December 22, 2023): 61, https://doi.org/10.3390/foods13010061.

the program becomes embedded in family economic practices, student relationships, teacher-student interaction, breakfast routines, school-snacking culture, and the organization of the school food environment. These consequences emerge through students' everyday interpretation and interaction with the program.

Conclusion

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program at SMAS Amanah Nusantara has acquired broader social meanings beyond food provision, including government attention, nutritional fulfillment, encouragement, shared provision, and an alternative to breakfast. These meanings emerge through students' everyday experiences, interactions, and interpretations. MBG also encourages peer cooperation, student–teacher interaction, and changes in food-related practices, although students continue to purchase snacks and adapt their routines to the program. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, MBG becomes socially meaningful through everyday interaction and interpretation rather than through its formal policy objectives alone. However, this study is limited to one private senior high school in Makassar; therefore, the findings are context-specific. Future research should examine MBG across different schools and regions and explore its longer-term effects on eating behavior, social relations, household expenditure, and student participation.

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