

An Islamic Legal Review of The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG): an Analysis of The Benefits and Harms for Students in Sidoarjo

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Abstract

The Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) is a national strategic policy aimed at improving students' nutritional intake, supporting their readiness to learn, and alleviating the economic burden on families. This study aims to analyze the benefits (*maslahah*) and risks (*mafsadah*) of implementing the MBG program for students in Sidoarjo Regency from the perspective of *Maqashid al-Sharia*. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design at junior and senior high schools that have implemented the MBG program. Research informants consist of students aged 12–18 years, teachers, parents, and program administrators selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation, which were then analyzed thematically based on the four dimensions of *Maqashid Syariah*: protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*), protection of the mind (*hifz al-'aql*), protection of property (*hifz al-māl*), and protection of future generations and the environment (*hifz al-nasl*). The research findings indicate that the MBG program provides benefits in the form of improved daily nutritional adequacy for students, enhanced readiness for learning, better meal discipline, and reduced household expenditures on packed lunches or snack money. However, this study also identified several risks, such as food waste resulting from menu mismatches with students' preferences, plastic or styrofoam packaging waste, distribution delays, and minor issues related to food quality. These findings indicate that the MBG program is, in principle, consistent with the objectives of public welfare under Islamic law; however, it still requires improvements in menu variety, hygiene oversight, waste management, and participatory evaluation to maximize the program's benefits and minimize its risks.

Keywords: Free Nutritious Meals, *maslahah*, *mafsadah*, *Maqashid al-Sharia*, student nutrition

INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) was launched as part of Indonesia's national strategic policy to improve the nutritional status of schoolchildren and support the development of high-quality human resources toward Indonesia Emas 2045 ([Badan Gizi Nasional, 2025](#)). A review of the literature and national planning documents indicates that the MBG program was comprehensively designed to improve students' nutritional status, enhance their ability to concentrate in class, and reduce the economic burden on families in meeting the food needs of school-age children ([Kementerian Sekretariat Negara, 2024](#)). A data-driven evaluation of the initial implementation shows that this type of school feeding program has had a positive impact on student attendance, improved daily nutritional adequacy, and the ability to focus on learning activities ([Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2024](#)). Nevertheless, in practice, this program still faces challenges related to food quality management and the continuity of distribution, including menu variety, school cafeteria

infrastructure, and coordination among stakeholders such as schools, families, and health institutions which has not yet been fully optimized (Kementerian PPN/Bappenas, 2025).

Globally, empirical evidence from systematic reviews shows that school feeding programs in low- and middle-income countries have successfully improved child health indicators such as weight gain, height, and school attendance while also potentially having a positive impact on academic achievement (World Bank, 2021). An international meta-analysis found a significant increase in physical growth and school attendance rates among children who participated in a school meal program compared to a control group that did not receive a similar intervention (Bundy et al., 2018). These findings from various regions provide a strong empirical basis for the conclusion that intervention strategies aimed at ensuring daily food security can be highly effective in the context of nutrition and educational achievement, which are closely interrelated (Food and Agriculture Organization of the & Nations, 2023).

Nevertheless, there remains a research gap in both Indonesian and international literature linking the empirical evaluation of school nutrition programs to the legal foundations of Islam, particularly through the dialectic of *maslahah* (benefit) and *mafsadah* (risk) from the perspective of Maqashid al-Sharia. Previous studies have more commonly assessed nutritional, educational, and administrative aspects separately. Research that holistically assesses cultural implications, consumption behavior, and social ethics remains very limited, including considerations of public budget efficiency, the potential for waste (*tabdzir*), and the ecological impact of schools. Yet, these issues are an integral part of the principles of *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life), *hifz al-'aql* (protection of the mind), *hifz al-māl* (protection of property), and *hifz al-nasl* (protection of future generations/the environment) within the spectrum of contemporary Islamic law (Auda, 2008). According to the principles of political jurisprudence, every public policy initiated by the government must be fully oriented toward the public interest (*al-maslahah al-mursalah*) (Al-Zuhayli, 1986). Therefore, a comprehensive assessment of these ecological and economic benefits and risks forms the basis of this innovative research, which aims not only to measure the program's physical outcomes but also to evaluate the alignment of its implementation with the principles of Islamic Sharia at the local level, particularly in Sidoarjo Regency.

On a practical level, the implementation of this strategic policy in the field still faces various operational challenges that could potentially undermine the program's original objectives. In Sidoarjo Regency, preliminary findings indicate that these challenges include limited menu variety, high volumes of food waste leading to wasteful practices (*tabdzir*), the accumulation of single-use plastic packaging waste, and food hygiene issues that are occasionally raised by parents. These various local paradoxes not only have the potential to reduce the efficiency of state budget utilization (*hifz al-māl*) but also pose health risks (*hifz al-nafs*) and secondary ecological impacts on the school environment. So far, the local literature remains dominated by evaluations based solely on public management and clinical nutritional compliance. Empirical evaluations that holistically highlight the dialectic between public interest (*maslahah*) and risk of harm (*mafsadah*) through the Maqashid al-Sharia analytical framework are still very rarely presented, thus creating an empirical-conceptual gap in food policy studies at the local level.

In light of these issues, this study aims to comprehensively analyze the implementation of the MBG program at the elementary and secondary school levels in Sidoarjo Regency through the revitalization of the Maqashid Syariah framework. The analysis focuses on reconstructing the parameters of public welfare, which encompass four fundamental dimensions: the preservation of physical health (*hifz al-nafs*), the optimization of intelligence and focus on learning (*hifz al-'aql*), budget efficiency and targeting (*hifz al-māl*), and environmental sustainability for future generations (*hifz al-nasl*). To examine this phenomenon in depth, this study employs a qualitative approach using an exploratory case study design (Creswell, 2009). Primary data

was collected directly from the research sites through structured in-depth interviews and participatory observation of key actors, including students, educators, parents, and program administrators. All field findings were then analyzed thematically to assess the degree to which benefits were achieved and harms mitigated, with the ultimate goal of developing recommendations for nutrition policies that are more equitable, hygienic, and accountable in accordance with the principles of Islamic law.

Various international studies consistently confirm that school feeding programs are effective in improving students' nutritional status, attendance, and cognitive achievement. Meanwhile, recent domestic studies have increasingly highlighted the strategic role of nutrition policies in reducing household expenditure and fostering healthy lifestyles among children (Pramesthi et al., 2025). Nevertheless, much of the existing literature still overlooks the aspect of empirical testing based on Islamic law. This is where the scientific novelty of this study lies: mapping the dialectic between *maslahah* and *mafsadah* holistically through the analytical framework of *Maqashid al-Sharia*. This multidisciplinary integration enables a comprehensive policy evaluation process (Auda, 2008) which not only measures purely physical and academic outcomes but also addresses social behavioral transformation, budget accountability, and ecological resilience within the school environment. This comparative approach is expected to provide a foundation for policy recommendations on nutrition program governance that are more equitable, distributive, healthy, and sustainable.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. This approach was chosen because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) in Sidoarjo Regency, particularly in relation to the benefits (*maslahah*) and risks (*mafsadah*) perceived by students, teachers, parents, and program administrators. A case study design was used to examine the MBG phenomenon contextually in educational institutions that have implemented the program, so that the dynamics of implementation, the responses of beneficiaries, and technical challenges in the field can be understood more comprehensively.

The research sites were junior high and senior high schools in Sidoarjo Regency that had received and implemented the MBG Program on a regular basis. The sites were selected through purposive sampling, taking into account the schools' involvement in the program, the availability of informants, and the presence of food distribution practices that could be observed directly. The research focused on students' experiences as beneficiaries, teachers' roles in overseeing distribution, parents' views on the program's impact on their families, and administrators' accounts of the program's implementation mechanisms and challenges.

The research informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique, namely, the selection of informants based on their direct involvement in the implementation of the MBG Program. The informants consisted of 12 individuals, including students, teachers, parents/guardians, and program administrators. The student informants were between the ages of 12 and 18, corresponding to the junior high and senior high school levels. This composition of informants was used to obtain diverse data and to enable source triangulation.

Table 1. Research informant

Code	Name	Status	School	Age	Data Relevance Statement
S1	Diandra K.	Student	SMP Zainuddin	15	Sharing MBG's experience
S2	Haidar A.	Student	SMAS Hang Tuah 2	16	Focus & Perception of Readiness to Learn
S3	Emelila K.	Student	SMAS Hang Tuah 2	16	Focus & consumer experience

G1	Nurul M.	Teacher	SMP Zainuddin	32	Food Distribution & Quality Control
G2	Putri A. N. H.	Teacher	SMAS Hang Tuah 2	28	Oversight of distribution and class management
O1	Lilik U.	Parents	SMP Zainuddin	42	The Impact of MBG on Household Expenditures
O2	Nurifa	Parents	SMP Zainuddin	38	The Economic Impact & Perceptions of Food Waste
P1	Syifa'ul K.	Parents	SMP Zainuddin	–	Implementation Mechanisms & Challenges of the MBG
P2	Anonim	Administrator	SMAS Hang Tuah 2	–	Distribution and Evaluation Mechanisms

Data collection was conducted using three methods: in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide to ensure that the researcher obtained focused data, but still allowed informants the space to openly explain their experiences and perspectives. The interview questions were structured based on the four dimensions of *Maqashid al-Sharia* used in this study, namely the protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*), the protection of reason (*hifz al-'aql*), the protection of property (*hifz al-māl*), and the protection of future generations and the environment (*hifz al-nasl*). (Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi, 1997)

Non-participant observation was conducted to observe the food distribution process, food quality checks, students' reactions when receiving and consuming food, and the management of food scraps and packaging waste on school grounds. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement field data, such as menu schedules, distribution records, photos of activities, and other supporting documents relevant to the implementation of the MBG Program.

This study adhered to the principles of social research ethics, particularly because some of the informants were students aged 12–18. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, obtained consent from the informants and/or relevant parties, and ensured the confidentiality of the informants' personal data. The names of informants listed in the article are used with their permission or may be anonymized if necessary to protect the privacy of the research subjects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved reviewing all data from interviews and observations, identifying key themes, grouping findings based on the dimensions of *Maqashid Syariah*, and then interpreting the relationship between benefits (*maslahah*) and risks (*mafsadah*) in the implementation of the MBG Program. To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation and methodological triangulation (Norman K. Denzin, 1978). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing the statements of students, teachers, parents, and program administrators, while methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Through this process, the research findings are expected to provide a more objective picture of the implementation of the MBG Program from the perspective of *Maqashid al-Sharia*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mechanisms for Implementing and Monitoring the MBG Program

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) in Sidoarjo Regency shows a relatively structured distribution pattern, although technical challenges that need to be addressed are still encountered at some points. In general, food distribution begins with the preparation of meals by vendors or

the kitchens of the Nutrition Service Units (SPPG), followed by the delivery of food to schools, receipt by school officials, an initial inspection of the food's condition, and finally, distribution to students in the classroom. This pattern indicates that the MBG is not merely a program for providing free meals, but rather a nutrition service program that requires distribution management, quality control, timeliness, appropriate portion sizes, and coordination among stakeholders.

From a policy perspective, the need for sound governance is consistent with the MBG's status as a national strategic program. The establishment of the National Nutrition Agency through Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 83 of 2024 reaffirms that ensuring the nutritional needs of the public is a priority on the state's institutional agenda (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara, 2024). Furthermore, Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 115 of 2025 on the Governance of the Free Nutritious Meals Program clarifies that the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program involves not only the provision of food, but also regulations regarding its administration, monitoring, supervision, control, evaluation, reporting, funding, and the procurement of goods and services (Republik Indonesia, 2025). Thus, field findings regarding food distribution and monitoring in schools should be viewed as part of an evaluation of program governance, rather than merely as day-to-day technical issues.

Based on interviews with students at Zainuddin Junior High School and Hang Tuah 2 Senior High School in Sidoarjo, students generally understand the MBG distribution process as a well-organized procedure. Diandra Keysha Syafiq, a 15-year-old student at Zainuddin Junior High School, explained that the food is delivered by vendors to the school around noon, then inspected by school officials before being distributed to classrooms according to the number of students. This statement indicates that, at the beneficiary level, students are aware of the food inspection process that takes place before consumption. In other words, students are not merely passive recipients; they are also able to observe how the school manages food distribution.

A similar account was provided by Haidar Azzahra, a 16-year-old student at SMAS Hang Tuah 2 in Sidoarjo. She stated that the food distribution process was "effective and orderly," beginning with vendors preparing meals according to the order quantities, after which the food was delivered to the school via MBG vehicles, received by staff, and distributed to each classroom. According to her explanation, class representatives took turns picking up the food based on the number of students in their respective classes. This data shows that at the high school level, food distribution involves a class-representative system so that the process can proceed in an orderly manner without disrupting overall learning activities.

Emelila Kartika P., a 16-year-old student at SMAS Hang Tuah 2 in Sidoarjo, also described a relatively similar process. She said that the MBG process went "very well and was free of corruption." and food. According to her, the food starts in the SPPG kitchen, is then received and inspected by the school's MBG staff, and is subsequently picked up by class representatives to be distributed to their classmates based on the number of students. Emelila's explanation reinforces the finding that the distribution mechanism at the school relies not only on deliveries from vendors but also on the roles of school staff and class representatives in ensuring the orderly distribution of food.

From the teachers' perspective, the oversight mechanism appears more formal. Nurul Mubayyinah, a 32-year-old teacher at Zainuddin Junior High School, explained that the food is delivered from the vendor to the school in neat and good condition before lunchtime. Once the food arrives, school officials count the portions before distributing them to students. She also noted that the school ensures vendors hold valid hygiene and sanitation certificates and inspects the food upon arrival before it is distributed. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that the school's oversight encompasses two dimensions: quantitative checks ensuring the correct quantity of food and qualitative checks assessing the food's suitability and cleanliness.

Putri Anggun Nur Hidayati, a PLP teacher at SMAS Hang Tuah 2 in Sidoarjo, provided a more technical overview of how meals are distributed at the school. She explained that the MBG is placed in a designated area, and then the number of students in each class is recorded. After that, class representatives pick up the meals from the designated MBG area, under the supervision of school staff and the MBG duty teacher. She also emphasized that school staff and the duty teacher check the meals first before they are distributed to students. This information indicates the existence of a distribution mechanism based on the number of students per class and supervision by internal school staff.

Meanwhile, Syifa'ul Khudriyah, M.Pd., the program coordinator at Zainuddin Junior High School, explained that the meals delivered by the vendor are placed on classroom tables or shelves according to the number of students. During distribution, the meals are handed out during lunch or the second break. Student representatives take the food from these shelves to bring back to their respective classrooms, where it is then distributed to their classmates under teacher supervision. This distribution model demonstrates that the school is striving to establish an orderly system to ensure every student receives the food to which they are entitled. From the perspective of distributive justice, grouping students by class and class size is a crucial aspect in preventing shortages, inequities, or competition for food.

Meal scheduling is also an important part of implementing MBG. Diandra Keysha Syafiqah explained that meal times are usually aligned with break times so that students can eat in peace and not disrupt classes. Haidar Azzahra also noted that meal times are scheduled to coincide with class hours so as not to interfere with learning activities. At the administrative level, Syifa'ul Khudriyah mentioned that the lunch schedule at Zainuddin Junior High School runs from 11:55 a.m. to 12:10 p.m. Meanwhile, Nurul Mubayyinah stated that the lunch schedule is set during the second break before the *zuhur* prayer. These findings indicate that the school strives to align MBG with students' learning rhythms and religious activities.

However, the effectiveness of the distribution mechanism does not mean the entire process runs smoothly. Tian Nuraini, a 16-year-old student at Zainuddin Junior High School, noted that there is an issue with portion sizes: some *ompreng* portions are small, while others are larger. She also described the MBG process in greater detail, from production and packaging, to transportation and delivery, handover at the school, distribution within the school grounds, serving at students' desks, and post-consumption. Tian's account is significant because it demonstrates that students are able to view MBG as a service chain, not merely as food received at their classroom desks. At the same time, the observation regarding unequal portion sizes indicates that the aspect of distributive justice still needs to be monitored.

Other challenges arose regarding timeliness and the return of containers. Diandra Keysha Syafiqah noted that delays in food deliveries sometimes occurred. Syifa'ul Khudriyah also confirmed that the school had experienced delivery delays, which slightly disrupted the class schedule, although this only happened twice. At SMAS Hang Tuah 2 Sidoarjo, Putri Anggun Nur Hidayati mentioned a problem involving a shortage of *ompreng* when they were returned. These findings show that the technical challenges of the MBG program are not only related to food as a consumable product but also to logistics, timeliness, and the management of serving utensils.

There is also room for improvement in the oversight of production kitchens. Syifa'ul Khudriyah stated that the school has never conducted on-site inspections of the MBG or SPPG kitchens. However, school officials continue to engage in intensive discussions via group chats regarding the meals and nutritional content to be served daily by SPPG. This data indicates that oversight is communication-based but not yet fully grounded in direct verification at the production source. In the context of school food management, oversight should ideally not only take place when food arrives at the school but should also cover the production, storage, packaging, and delivery processes. Without comprehensive oversight, schools risk only

knowing the final condition of the food, without fully understanding how it was processed before reaching the students.

When viewed through the lens of *Maqashid al-Sharia*, the mechanisms for implementing and overseeing the MBG are closely tied to the principle of *hifz al-nafs*, or the protection of life. In the context of the school meal program, the protection of life cannot be interpreted merely as the availability of food; it must also encompass food safety, hygiene, suitability for consumption, timely distribution, and appropriate portion sizes. Food that is delivered on time, inspected before distribution, and received by students in proper condition is part of the effort to maintain students' physical health. Conversely, delays, inappropriate portion sizes, or weak oversight of production kitchens can reduce the program's overall benefit.

In addition to *hifz al-nafs*, the MBG distribution mechanism is also linked to the principle of *'adalah*, or justice. Justice in this program does not only mean that all students receive food, but also that the food is distributed in relatively equal portions, of equivalent quality, and at times that do not disrupt the learning process. Findings by Haidar Azzahra and Emelila Kartika P. indicate that food is distributed according to the number of students and in relatively equal portions. However, findings by Tian Nuraini regarding differences in *ompreng* portions suggest that the principle of fairness still requires ongoing technical oversight.

Thus, the implementation of the MBG program in Sidoarjo Regency can be considered to have a fairly sound basic mechanism in place through coordination among vendors or SPPG kitchens, schools, teachers, program administrators, class representatives, and students. However, interview data also indicate that program governance still needs to be strengthened in several areas, namely on-site inspections of SPPG kitchens, standardization of portion sizes, timely distribution, documentation of technical challenges, and periodic evaluations of the *ompreng* return process. These improvements are essential so that the MBG program functions not merely as a food distribution activity but truly serves as a means of ensuring safe, orderly, and equitable nutrition that aligns with the principles of public welfare under Islamic law.

The Benefits of MBG for Protecting Students' Mental and Emotional Well-Being

Research findings indicate that the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) provides direct benefits to students, particularly in terms of meeting their physical needs and enhancing their readiness to learn. Within the framework of *Maqashid al-Sharia*, these benefits can be understood through two main dimensions: the protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*) and the protection of the mind (*hifz al-'aql*) (Auda, 2008). Physical well-being relates to meeting students' basic needs for clean, adequate, and nutritious food, while mental well-being relates to programs that support students' concentration, mental readiness, and participation in the learning process.

In terms of *hifz al-nafs*, the MBG program is perceived by students as a program that helps maintain their physical well-being while at school. Diandra Keysha Syafika, a 15-year-old student at Zainuddin Junior High School who has participated in the MBG program for 15 months, stated that some students appear healthier because they receive regular meals. This statement shows that regular food intake is one of the key benefits of the MBG program. In a school setting, not all students have the same eating habits before heading to school. Therefore, the availability of food during school hours can help ensure that students maintain a more consistent daily intake.

Similar findings were reported by Emelila Kartika P., a 16-year-old student at SMAS Hang Tuah 2 in Sidoarjo. She noted that since participating in the MBG program, she has felt "fitter and less prone to fatigue." This quote indicates that students associate the MBG program with increased energy levels during school activities. Although this data is based on perception and not measured using medical indicators such

as body mass index, hemoglobin levels, or laboratory-based nutritional status, the students' testimonies remain important because they reflect the beneficiaries' firsthand experiences of changes in their physical condition.

Haidar Azzahra, a 16-year-old student at SMAS Hang Tuah 2 in Sidoarjo, also said that after eating, she feels more energized while studying. For students, the physical benefits of MBG go beyond simply feeling full; they also relate to the ability to maintain energy levels during class hours. This is important because school days are quite long, so students who do not get enough to eat may experience a drop in energy, hunger, or physical discomfort that can interfere with their learning.

The data from these students was corroborated by teachers' observations. Nurul Mubayyinah, a teacher at Zainuddin Junior High School, noted that students seemed more enthusiastic about learning after receiving MBG. She also explained that adequate nutrition helps students maintain their concentration during class. Teachers' observations are important because they provide an external observer's perspective on student behavior in the classroom. This means that the benefits of the MBG are not only felt subjectively by the students but are also observed by teachers during the learning process.

From the perspective of *hifz al-nafs*, providing meals at school can be understood as a form of protection for students' physical health. The MBG program helps provide more regular access to food, especially for students who may not always bring a packed lunch or purchase adequate meals. If the food provided meets standards for hygiene, nutritional composition, and safety for consumption, then this program contributes to maintaining students' health. Thus, MBG is not only relevant as a social program but also as a basic instrument for protecting students' physical well-being.

In the dimension of *hifz al-'aql*, the benefits of MBG are evident from students' accounts of improved focus and reduced hunger during class. Diandra Keysha Syafiqah stated that after lunch, students tend to be more focused and do not get hungry as easily during class. Haidar Azzahra also said, "After eating, I'm more focused and don't get hungry as easily during class." This quote is important data because it shows a direct relationship between meeting nutritional needs and students' readiness to participate in learning.

Haidar's statement shows that hunger is one factor that can disrupt students' attention in class. When their need for food is met, students feel better prepared to follow the lesson. In this context, it cannot be directly claimed that the MBG program improves academic achievement, as this study did not use academic performance measures or statistical tests. However, the interview data indicate that the program supports the prerequisites for learning: a more comfortable physical state, reduced hunger, and readiness to participate in classroom activities.

Emelila Kartika P. also noted slight changes in focus, memory, and participation after eating. The phrase "slight changes" is worth noting because it indicates that the impact of MBG on cognitive aspects is not always significant or uniform across all students. This data is actually important from an academic perspective because it keeps the analysis balanced. In other words, MBG has the potential to support learning readiness, but the extent of its benefits depends on many factors, such as the type of menu, mealtime, breakfast habits, classroom conditions, and students' interest in the subject.

Findings from PLP teachers also revealed varying perceptions. Putri Anggun Nur Hidayati stated that there was no significant change in students' focus and motivation, although students appeared more enthusiastic because they were eager to receive MBG. This observation should be included so that the discussion does not focus solely on the program's positive aspects. In qualitative research, data variation is an important element for illustrating the complexity of a phenomenon. Thus, this study does not conclude that the MBG program automatically improves students' intelligence, but rather that it provides nutritional and psychological support that can help enhance learning readiness among some students.

Theoretically, these findings align with the view that school feeding programs are multidimensional interventions that relate not only to food consumption but also to education, social protection, and human development. The World Bank (2024) explains that school feeding programs are among the large-scale social protection interventions linked to human resource development. The WFP (2024) also positions school feeding programs as a cross-sectoral instrument that can support children's health, learning, and well-being. In the context of this study, these benefits are evident in the experiences of students who feel healthier, more energetic, more focused, and better prepared to participate in lessons after receiving the school meals.

When viewed through the lens of the *Maqashid al-Shari'ah*, the benefits of MBG for the body and learning readiness demonstrate a connection between *hifz al-nafs* and *hifz al-'aql*. These two are not independent of one another. Better physical health can support mental readiness, while mental readiness is a prerequisite for more effective learning. In Islamic law, the protection of the mind is not only related to the prohibition of things that harm the mind, but also to the promotion of conditions that allow the mind to develop optimally. Therefore, providing nutritious food for students can be understood as part of the effort to create an educational environment that supports mental development.

However, claims regarding the benefits of MBG must still be made with caution. Since this study employs a qualitative approach, the term "significant" should not be used in a statistical sense. A more appropriate formulation is that MBG is "indicated to be beneficial," "felt to be helpful," or "perceived to support" students' health and readiness to learn. In this way, the analysis remains grounded in valid data from the interviews, without exceeding the scope of the research method.

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The Benefits of Implementing the MBG Program: Family Economy and the Formation of Thayyib Culture

In addition to benefiting students' physical health and readiness to learn, the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) also brings benefits in terms of family economic well-being and the development of clean living habits. Within the framework of *Maqashid al-Sharia*, these economic benefits can be linked to *hifz al-māl*, which refers to the protection of a family's wealth or economic resources. Meanwhile, changes in students' behavior regarding mealtime discipline, hand-washing habits, and responsibility for food waste can be understood as part of fostering a culture of *thayyib* that is, good, clean, orderly, and responsible living habits.

In terms of family finances, interview data show that parents feel the practical benefits of the MBG program. Lilik Umiati, a 42-year-old parent of a student at Zainuddin Junior High School, stated that the program is "very helpful" because parents no longer have to go to the trouble of packing lunches, and their children's allowance needs have decreased. This statement indicates that the benefits of the MBG program are felt directly in family routines, particularly during morning activities when parents typically prepare school lunches. With the MBG program in place, some of the burden of daily meal preparation is alleviated, providing parents with relief in terms of both cost and time.

A similar statement was made by Nurifa, a 38-year-old parent of a student at Zainuddin Junior High School. When asked to what extent the MBG program helped alleviate parents' daily expenses, she replied, "It helps a lot." Although this answer was brief, its significance remains important because it indicates positive acceptance of the program among parents. In qualitative research, brief responses from informants can still be used when contextualized alongside other data that reinforces the pattern of findings. In this case,

Nurifa's statement reinforces Lilik Umiati's assertion that the MBG program has a practical economic impact on beneficiary families.

From the teachers' perspective, these economic benefits are also evident. Nurul Mubayyinah, a teacher at Zainuddin Junior High School, stated that the MBG program helps because parents can redirect the money they would have spent on school lunches toward other needs. This observation is important because it shows that the economic benefits of the MBG program are not only felt by parents but are also recognized by teachers as part of the program's social impact. With meals provided at school, family spending on daily school lunches or snacks can be reduced or redirected toward other needs considered a higher priority.

Economic benefits are also evident in the students' experiences. Haidar Azzahra, a student at SMAS Hang Tuah 2 Sidoarjo, stated that this program helps reduce her spending on snacks, allowing her to save money. Emelila Kartika P., also a student at SMAS Hang Tuah 2 Sidoarjo, provided a more concrete example. She explained that since the MBG program began, her mother no longer has to cook early in the morning to prepare a packed lunch because food is already available at school, while her allowance is used only to buy drinks. Emelila's statement highlights two benefits at once: a reduction in the family's domestic workload and savings on students' daily expenses.

However, field data also indicates that the economic benefits of MBG should not be viewed in overly absolute terms. Syifa'ul Khudriyah, M.Pd., a program coordinator at Zainuddin Junior High School, noted that the school has never directly discussed the reduction in financial burden with parents. According to her, from the students' perspective, MBG does indeed save on pocket money because funds previously used to buy lunch can now be redirected toward other expenses. However, she believes that its impact on reducing the financial burden on parents cannot yet be considered significant. This point is important to maintain a balanced analysis. In other words, while the MBG is indeed perceived as helping family finances, the extent of the savings can vary from one family to another, depending on pocket money habits, the practice of bringing packed lunches, and students' consumption patterns at school.

From the perspective of *hifẓ al-māl*, the economic benefits of the MBG program can be understood as an effort to reduce the burden of routine household expenses. This program provides meals for students during school hours, so families do not have to fully cover their children's lunch needs through packed lunches or pocket money. However, the protection of wealth does not only mean reducing household expenses, but also ensuring that the public funds allocated to the program actually yield benefits. Therefore, the economic benefits of the MBG must always be considered in relation to issues of efficiency, targeting accuracy, menu quality, and minimizing food waste.

Conceptually, these findings align with the literature on school meal programs, which position school meals as part of social protection. The World Bank (2024) explains that school meal programs are one of the large-scale social protection interventions linked to human development. The WFP (2024) also notes that, globally, school meal programs are not only about food provision but also about social support for children and families. Research by Cohen et al. (2021) on universal school meals also shows that the provision of free meals at school can be associated with financial benefits for households, particularly low-income families. In the context of this study, these benefits are evident through a reduction in the need to pack lunches, a decrease in spending on snacks, and a reduced burden on parents in preparing meals before their children leave for school.

In addition to economic benefits, the MBG program also contributes to fostering positive behavior among students. Several informants noted that students have become more disciplined during mealtimes, more accustomed to washing their hands, and more responsible toward the food they receive. Diandra Keysha Syafiq, a student at Zainuddin Junior High School, stated that students have become more disciplined during

mealtimes and have started to get into the habit of washing their hands. Haidar Azzahra also noted that this program has helped her get used to living a cleaner lifestyle, such as washing her hands before meals. Emelila Kartika P. added that students have become more mindful of hygiene since participating in the MBG program.

The student's account was corroborated by the teacher. Nurul Mubayyinah stated that the students have become disciplined about washing their hands before eating and can clean up their own food scraps. This statement shows that MBG is not merely a meal program but also a space for fostering behavioral habits. When students eat together at specific times, the school has the opportunity to foster collective habits, such as washing hands, eating in an orderly manner, keeping the classroom clean, and cleaning up food scraps after meals.

Syifa'ul Khudriyah also emphasized that children must be disciplined when eating because the school sets specific time limits. This data shows that discipline is not developed automatically, but rather emerges through the school's regulation of mealtimes. In other words, MBG is part of the socialization process because students learn to follow rules, value time, and adapt to the rhythm of school activities.

From an Islamic perspective, this practice can be linked to the culture of *thayyib*. The concept of *thayyib* refers not only to food that is good in substance but also to a manner of consumption that is clean, orderly, moderate, and environmentally responsible. Nutritious food loses some of its benefits if consumed without regard for hygiene, generates excessive waste, or is not managed responsibly. Therefore, the MBG program has the potential to serve as a vehicle for character education if schools not only distribute food but also instill in students the habits of maintaining cleanliness, valuing food, and taking responsibility for food waste.

The practice of handwashing before meals is also relevant to school health standards. The CDC emphasizes the importance of schools establishing a routine of handwashing with soap and water, especially at key times such as before lunch. In this context, the practice of handwashing before meals reported by students and teachers demonstrates an alignment between the behavioral education benefits of MBG and basic health principles in the school setting.

However, the benefits of fostering a *thayyib* culture must also be interpreted with caution. Not all informants observed significant behavioral changes. Putri Anggun Nur Hidayati, a PLP teacher at SMAS Hang Tuah 2 in Sidoarjo, stated that positive changes in student behavior were not significantly noticeable, although students appeared more motivated due to their enthusiasm for earning MBG. This observation is important because it indicates that fostering a *thayyib* culture requires consistent guidance. The MBG program does not automatically foster clean and disciplined behavior if it is not accompanied by teacher guidance, handwashing facilities, supervision during meals, and sustained reinforcement.

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Drawbacks in the Implementation of the MBG Program: Risks Related to Hygiene, Wastefulness, Waste, and Distribution Inequality

In addition to providing a number of benefits for students, the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) in Sidoarjo Regency also reveals several potential drawbacks that need to

be critically examined. From the perspective of *Maqashid al-Sharia*, potential harm does not necessarily mean that a program must be rejected in its entirety. Potential harm is more accurately understood as a risk, weakness, or unintended consequence that could diminish the quality of the benefits if not managed seriously (Al-Zuhayli, 1986). Therefore, the analysis of the potential harms of the MBG program in this study is aimed at assessing the program's vulnerabilities, particularly in terms of food safety, food waste, environmental hygiene, equitable portion sizes, and the development of students' attitudes toward food.

The first finding relates to food hygiene and safety. In general, some informants stated that the food received by students was in good condition, neatly presented, and safe to eat. However, some informants also mentioned that instances of spoiled food had occurred, although not on a regular basis. Diandra Keysha Syafiq, a student at Zainuddin Junior High School, stated that "there have been cases of spoiled food," but that such incidents "do not happen often and are usually handled immediately by the school." This statement indicates that the school has response mechanisms in place, but at the same time, there are still gaps in food quality control before the food reaches the students.

Tian Nuraini made similar remarks. She mentioned that some students had found food that was "stale and unfit for consumption." According to Tian, the issue of food quality is not only about whether the food is stale or not, but also concerns unpleasant taste and odor. She noted the presence of "unpleasant taste and odor" as well as variations in portion sizes between one serving and another. This finding is significant because the risk of stale food and unpleasant odors is directly related to the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* the protection of life and health. School meal programs should not be evaluated solely based on the availability of food; they must also ensure that the food is safe, fresh, and fit for consumption.

From the teachers' perspective, Nurul Mubayyinah also acknowledged that there have been instances where food particularly vegetables was "already slightly smelly (stale)," prompting the school to urge students not to eat it. This finding shows that teachers serve as the final filter before food is consumed by students. However, in an ideal food management system, oversight should not rely solely on final inspections at school. While final inspections are important, critical points for food safety also lie in the production, storage, packaging, and delivery processes from the SPPG kitchen or vendors to the school. Thus, even small-scale incidents involving spoiled food should be viewed as a sign that the system is improving, rather than merely as technical issues that can be ignored.

This issue becomes even more relevant when considered in light of the statement by Syifa'ul Khudriyah, the program coordinator at Zainuddin Junior High School. She explained that the school had once discovered vegetables with a slight odor and advised students not to eat them. However, she also emphasized that this incident occurred only once and did not result in the entire meal being discarded, as the other dishes were still safe to eat. This statement indicates that the school took mitigating action, but it also highlights the need to strengthen the food quality monitoring system in a more preventive manner. In Islamic jurisprudence, the principle of *al-darar yuzāl* asserts that harm must be eliminated (Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, 1990). This means that even the slightest health risk in the school meal program must be anticipated from the very beginning, not just addressed after the food arrives at the school.

The second harm relates to *tabdzir*, or the wasteful consumption of food (Yusuf al-Qaradawi, 2001). In the context of the MBG program, food waste occurs when meals provided through the state budget are not consumed optimally by students. There is no single cause. Several informants cited factors such as the menu not matching students' tastes, students already being full, the time between breakfast and the MBG meal being too short, and portion sizes that do not always meet each child's needs. Diandra Keysha Syafiq stated that "quite a lot of food is wasted every day" because some students do not particularly like the menu offered. This statement suggests that the problem of food waste is not always caused by a lack of gratitude on the part

of students, but may also be related to menu design that does not fully take into account the preferences of the beneficiaries.

Nurifa, a parent of a student at Zainuddin Junior High School, even estimated that about “30%” of the food is wasted because some students do not like certain menu items. Although this figure is based on the informant’s perception rather than quantitative measurements, this statement remains important as an initial indicator that some parents are aware of potential food waste. From the perspective of *hifz al-māl*, food waste does not only mean the physical loss of food, but also the loss of budgetary value, production labor, distribution costs, and the opportunity to utilize resources for other needs. Therefore, *tabdzir* in school meal programs must be viewed as both an issue of consumption ethics and a matter of public accountability.

Lilik Umiati’s statement reinforces these findings. She explained that students leave food uneaten because they are “already full” or “not particularly hungry.” She also noted that if large amounts of food continue to be wasted, the use of the state budget becomes “all the more regrettable” because those funds could actually be allocated to other programs. This statement demonstrates parents’ awareness that the MBG must be managed in a targeted manner to prevent waste. Within the framework of Islamic law, the public interest in budget allocation requires that benefits be targeted appropriately. If the food provided is not consumed, there is a disconnect between the program’s objectives and the reality of student reception.

However, field data also show that the level of food waste is not uniform across all contexts. Syifa’ul Khudriyah stated that “on average, there is almost no leftover food” and that trash cans mostly contain fruit peels or nut shells, rather than main dishes. Nurul Mubayyinah also noted that there is no leftover food because the students enjoy the meals provided. These differing accounts indicate that food waste in the MBG program is context-dependent: on certain days, with certain menus, or at certain schools, food waste can be quite significant, whereas in other contexts, it is relatively minimal. Therefore, the solution required is not a blanket conclusion that the program is wasteful, but rather a system for daily monitoring of food waste so that menu items that are frequently not finished can be evaluated.

The third form of harm relates to environmental impact, or *mafsadah al-bi’ah*. Some students and parents noted that packaging waste can disrupt the cleanliness and comfort of the school. Diandra stated that piles of plastic or Styrofoam packaging make the school environment look “less tidy and comfortable.” Tian Nuraini also noted that the impact is negative because it can “bother the sense of smell.” Meanwhile, Putri Anggun Nur Hidayati, a PLP teacher at SMAS Hang Tuah 2 in Sidoarjo, explained that packaging waste can make the school environment dirty and attract pests such as flies. These findings indicate that the issue of waste not only affects the school’s aesthetics but can also be linked to comfort, cleanliness, and environmental health risks.

However, as with the issue of *tabdzir*, the environmental impact is also not uniform. Nurul Mubayyinah stated that school meals do not use plastic or Styrofoam because the food is served in *ompren*; if pudding is served, the containers are returned to the vendor. Syifa’ul Khudriyah also noted that because school meals do not use plastic or Styrofoam, school waste is not significantly affected. This information indicates that the use of *ompren* is a best practice that can reduce the generation of single-use waste. Thus, environmental harm in the MBG program appears more as a risk that arises when packaging is not consistently eco-friendly, rather than as an impact that is absolutely inherent to the program.

From the perspective of *hifz al-nasl*, protecting future generations means not only preserving their biological lineage but also safeguarding the environment in which they grow up. Programs aimed at promoting students’ health must not simultaneously create new ecological burdens on the school environment. Therefore, the use of reusable containers, returning pudding containers to vendors, sorting waste, and processing food scraps into compost or animal feed can be viewed as forms of mitigating *mafsadah al-bi’ah*. This is in line

with Nurifa's recommendations that the program avoid monotonous menus, implement a menu selection system for students, carry out integrated waste management, and provide water treatment facilities.

The fourth drawback relates to disparities in portion sizes, taste, and perceptions of fairness. Some informants stated that the distribution of MBG had been fair because the food was distributed according to the number of students and the portions were relatively equal. Haidar Azzahra, for example, stated that she did not see any unfairness because the portions given were the same. Putri Anggun Nur Hidayati also noted that there was no inequality because the MBG was measured out in equal portions. Syifa'ul Khudriyah echoed this sentiment, stating that the portions served were "even and uniform." These findings indicate that, in some contexts, the principle of distributive justice has been implemented by tracking student numbers and distributing rations by class.

However, there were also informants who noticed differences in portion size or taste. Tian Nuraini stated that some *ompreng* portions were small, while others were larger. Diandra also mentioned that there were sometimes differences in portion size or taste, though these did not lead to conflict only complaints. Lilik Umiati even stated that disparities in taste or portion size did indeed "exist." These differing accounts indicate that fairness in the MBG program is not determined solely by formal distribution mechanisms, but also by students' experiences when receiving food. If students feel that the portions or quality of the food vary, their perception of fairness can be compromised, even if the administrative distribution system is functioning properly.

From the perspective of *Maqashid al-Sharia*, the principle of justice is an essential prerequisite for the sustainability of the public interest. The food distributed to students should not only be sufficient in quantity but also relatively equitable in terms of quality, portion size, and suitability. Even minor inequalities, if left unaddressed, can lead to complaints, dissatisfaction, or social jealousy. Although no major conflicts were found in this study, student complaints should still be interpreted as important data. Strengthening portion standardization, random weight checks, taste testing, and daily complaint logging can serve as improvement mechanisms to ensure that the principle of justice is not merely present in the program's intent but is also tangible in students' experiences.

The fifth drawback relates to the possibility of a change in students' attitudes toward food. Some informants noted that free meals do not make students spoiled or cause them to take food for granted. Haidar stated that this program does not cause students to take food for granted because many students enjoy it. Putri Anggun also noted that students actually appreciate the food more. Tian even mentioned that this program makes children more independent. These findings indicate that the MBG program does not necessarily lead to negative dependency. In many cases, the program is actually viewed as a form of the government's care for students.

Nevertheless, other data indicate a potential for dependency or a diminished appreciation for food among some students. Diandra stated that the availability of free meals "can cause students to appreciate food less," although this is not the case for all students. Syifa'ul Khudriyah also noted that children often ask when the MBG program will resume after a holiday or when there are disruptions to the SPPG program, suggesting they appear to be "more reliant" on the MBG program. These findings should not be interpreted as a moral failing on the part of the students, but rather as a social consequence of a regularly implemented aid program. If not balanced with education on table manners, awareness of the need to avoid waste, and the responsibility to clean up food scraps, even a well-intentioned program can foster less reflective consumption habits. This can be linked to several components of the *maqashid al-sharia*.

Table 2. The components of maqashid al-sharia.

Dimensions of Maqashid	public interest	Consequences/Risks	Recommendations
<i>hifz al-nafs</i>	There are indications that students' physical health is improving	Stale or smelly food; hygiene standards are inconsistent	Hygiene checklist, SPPG kitchen inspection, SOP for unfit food
<i>hifz al-'aql</i>	Students' focus and readiness to learn are supported	The cognitive effects are not yet uniform	Periodic assessment of learning outcomes
<i>hifz al-māl</i>	Household spending has decreased	Food waste → budget waste	Student menu survey, food waste records
<i>hifz al-nasl</i>	Orderly and hygienic eating habits	Packaging waste/food waste	Recycling is mandatory; sort your trash; compost or use it as animal feed
<i>'Adalah</i>	Relatively orderly distribution by class	Complaints about uneven portions or taste	Standardized portion sizes, random testing, complaint channel

Thus, the *mafsadah* in the implementation of the MBG program in Sidoarjo Regency can be categorized into five main categories: food hygiene risks, food waste, the impact of packaging waste, disparities in portion sizes or taste, and the potential for students to become dependent on food aid. These five *mafsadah* do not indicate that the MBG program contradicts Islamic law. On the contrary, these findings indicate that the MBG program has a strong basis in public interest but requires risk management to prevent recurring harm. According to the principle of Islamic jurisprudence, *dar' al-mafāsīd* muqaddam 'alā *jalb al-maṣāliḥ* that is, preventing harm must take precedence over seeking benefit. This principle does not mean that the MBG program should be discontinued, but rather that every benefit of the program must be accompanied by systematic risk mitigation.

Based on these findings, the *mafsadah* of the MBG program is best understood as operational in nature, rather than substantive. Substantively, the MBG program remains consistent with the objectives of Sharia law because it supports nutritional needs, readiness for learning, and economic relief for families. However, operationally, this program still requires improvements in food quality standardization, menu evaluation based on student preferences, supervision of SPPG kitchens, recording of food leftovers, management of food scraps and waste, and education on consumption ethics. With these improvements, MBG will not only be a free meal program but can evolve into a program for nutrition education, character education, and environmental education that aligns with the *maqashid* of Sharia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) in Sidoarjo Regency, in principle, has a strong public welfare orientation because it contributes to meeting students' nutritional needs, improving their readiness to learn, fostering more regular eating habits, and reducing families' daily expenses. From the perspective of Maqashid al-Sharia, these benefits align with the objective of *hifz al-nafs*, as the

program helps maintain students' physical health by providing nutritious meals; *hiḏf al-'aql*, as adequate nutrition supports focus, participation, and enthusiasm for learning; and *hiḏf al-māl*, as some parents find it helpful in reducing the need for packed lunches or pocket money for their children.

The implementation of the MBG program in schools has also demonstrated a relatively orderly distribution mechanism. Food is delivered from vendors or the SPPG kitchen, received by school officials, inspected first, and then distributed to students through school staff, teachers, or class representatives. Meal schedules are generally aligned with recess times so as not to disrupt learning activities. These findings indicate that schools play a crucial role as a link between program administrators and students as beneficiaries. However, the program's effectiveness is determined not only by the availability of food but also by the quality of oversight, the timeliness of distribution, the appropriateness of portion sizes, food hygiene, and the school's ability to address technical challenges.

On the other hand, this study identified several potential *mafsadah* that warrant serious attention. These risks include instances of spoiled or foul-smelling food, food waste resulting from menus that do not align with students' tastes, potential *tabdzir* in the use of public funds, packaging waste that may compromise the cleanliness of the school environment, portion size discrepancies that lead to complaints, and the possibility of students becoming dependent on free meals. These potential drawbacks do not indicate that the MBG program contradicts the principles of Islamic law, but they underscore that the program's benefits still need to be refined through more systematic risk management.

Thus, the MBG can be viewed as a public policy aligned with the objectives of *Maqashid al-Sharia*, provided its implementation is guided by the principles of public benefit, justice, integrity, accountability, and sustainability. This program should not be viewed merely as the provision of free meals, but rather as an instrument for generational protection, nutrition education, fostering healthy lifestyles, and strengthening social responsibility toward food and the environment. To optimize the program's benefits, periodic evaluations are needed regarding menu variety, hygiene monitoring from the kitchen to the school, recording of food waste, standardization of portion sizes, reduction of packaging waste, and the involvement of students, teachers, parents, and administrators in the feedback mechanism. With these enhancements, the MBG has the potential to become a program that not only meets students' nutritional needs but also more fully reflects the principle of public interest in Islamic law.

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