

Evaluation of The Implementation of The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) Impact on Student Attendance

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Abstract

Education is an important foundation in human resource development, especially in developing countries. One of the challenges faced in the education sector is the low level of student attendance at school. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Free Nutritional Meal Program (FBM) on student attendance in elementary schools, analyzing Student Perspectives on the FBM Program. This study used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is defined as a methodology that aims to explore and describe the complexity of human beliefs and experiences. The data shows that the level of student attendance before the implementation of the FBM Program was 75%. After the program was implemented for six months, the attendance rate increased to 90%. This increase indicates a positive effect of the program on student attendance. From the questionnaires distributed, 40% of students and 30% of parents, respondents stated that Overall, students and teachers have a positive perspective on the FBM program. This program not only provides health benefits but also raises hopes for improving quality and accessibility.

Keywords: Free nutritious meal program (MBG), Attendance, Student.

INTRODUCTION

Education is an important foundation in human resource development, especially in developing countries. One of the challenges faced in the education sector is the low level of student attendance at school, especially at the primary school level. Good attendance greatly influences the learning process and academic development of children. Therefore, efforts to improve student attendance are a priority that must be considered by all parties. Based on students' viewpoints, we display a demonstrate that outlines the relationship between seen challenges and underpins within the work of chance and defensive variables working inside the environmental framework of SAP improvement. We emphasize how these angles can direct anticipation and mediation in supporting understudies to effectively total their instruction and move to different post-school pathways[1]. The problem of school absenteeism is associated with a variety of negative consequences, and educational practitioners play an important role in identifying and responding to these problems [2].

The issue of school truancy (SAP) could be a major challenge for numerous instructive areas due to its complexity, heterogeneity, and equivocality. One conceivable facilitated and coordinates approach to moving forward SAP and expanding school participation is to use existing school-based frameworks outlined to address numerous perspectives of person understudy working [3]. School Breakfast Programs within the Joined together States (US) give Breakfast After the Chime (BATB) to diminish starvation, give sustenance, and guarantee understudies get off to a great begin to the day. This consider pointed to survey the prove with respect to the affect of BATB on understudy dietary and scholarly results, counting interest, eat less quality and utilization, body mass file (BMI) and weight status, participation, classroom behavior, and scholarly execution [4]. Most studies examining universal free school lunch programs have found positive associations with diet quality, food security, and academic performance; however, studies focusing solely on universal free breakfast have shown mixed results. Furthermore, studies examining attendance as an outcome have also shown similar variation [5]. The Free Nutrition Meals (FBM) program is expected to be a solution to increase children's attendance in elementary schools. A study in Wisconsin showed that offering free meals to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) can reduce the risk of low attendance among students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in participating schools[6].

This program is designed to involve various elements of society, including parents, teachers, and government, in creating a conducive learning environment. By implementing this program effectively, it is hoped that there will be an increase in student participation in school, so that educational goals can be achieved. To reduce the number of students who are chronically absent from school each year, cities and counties across the United States have implemented programs, initiatives, and contributed resources to education reform aimed at increasing school attendance rates. In Sweden, our results show that the school lunch program had significant long-term benefits, with students exposed to the program during their primary years having 3% higher lifetime earnings. This impact was greater for students exposed at an earlier age and for students from low-income

families, suggesting that the program reduced socioeconomic inequality in adulthood. Exposure to the program also had significant effects on educational attainment and health, which may explain much of the program's impact on lifetime earnings [7].

This study aims to evaluate the impact of the Free Nutritional Meal Program (FBM) on student attendance rates in elementary schools. Analyze students' perspectives on the Free Nutritional Meal Program (FBM): Examine how students view the FBM program and its impact on their motivation to attend school. Through this study, it is hoped that a clearer picture can be obtained about the effectiveness of the program and the challenges faced in its implementation. In addition, the results of this study are expected to provide recommendations for policy makers and stakeholders in improving the quality of education at the elementary level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Current Study

This study uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is defined as a methodology that aims to explore and describe the complexity of human beliefs and experiences. Unlike quantitative research which focuses more on hypothesis testing, qualitative research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions that influence individual behavior. This methodology includes direct observation and discussion with participants, and uses open-ended questions to collect textual and non-standardized data. This approach allows researchers to identify influencing factors, both individual and interactional, that may have occurred previously. This is especially relevant when studying certain populations, such as marginalized groups or children, where various factors may hinder the application of quantitative approaches [8].

The research design used is descriptive, which is one of the simplest forms of observational study design. This design allows researchers to study and describe the distribution of one or more variables without considering causal or other hypotheses [9]. This approach was chosen to analyze the implementation of the Learning Mobilization Program (MBG) and its contribution to student attendance in elementary schools.

The sample in this study included all students in elementary schools that were part of the sample of schools that had implemented the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG) in Karawang Regency. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which considered schools that were actively running the program. The number of samples was determined based on certain criteria, namely schools that had implemented the MBG Program for at least six months. Respondent Profile

From 100 respondents involved in this study, consisting of 40% students, 30% parents, and 30% teachers. The majority of respondents were female (60%) and aged between 30-50 years (70%).

Respondent Data Table

Respondent Category	Amount	Man	Woman
Student	40	10	30
Parent	30	0	30
Teacher	30	5	25
Total	100	15	85

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Student Attendance Level

Data shows that the student attendance level before the implementation of the MBG Program was 75%. After the program was implemented for six months, the attendance level increased to 90%.

This increase shows a positive effect of the program on student attendance.

Class	Januari	Maret	April	Mei	Juni
Class* 1	1174	1690	1703	1715	1743
Class* 2	1536	1545	1554	1565	1587
Class* 3	1406	1418	1439	1451	1471
Class *4	2065	2070	2081	2121	2151
Class *5	1440	1447	1455	1467	1485
Class* 6	1135	1143	1155	1163	1200
Amount	8756	9313	9387	9482	9637

Percentage	75 %	86 %	88 %	91 %	94 %

Student Perspectives on the MBG Program

From the questionnaire distributed, 40% of students and 30% of parents of respondents stated that overall, students and parents have a positive perspective on the free nutritious meal program, This program not only provides health benefits but also raises expectations for improving quality and accessibility. Recommendations for program development include increasing menu variety and nutritional education for students.

DISCUSSION

Student Attendance Rate

The results of the study showed that the Free Nutritious Meals Program (FFM) contributed to an increase in student attendance in primary schools. The average student attendance increased from 75% to 90%. In detail, student attendance in April reached 88%, increased to 91% in May, and reached 94% in June. This finding is different from the results of a study in Scotland, where despite a large increase in food consumption, there was no significant increase in student attendance rates. This finding suggests that although there are financial savings for families that can encourage attendance, the impact is too small to be considered economically meaningful [10]. In Kyrgyzstan, a free meal program for elementary school students resulted in lower odds and rates of absenteeism. Results from the panel regression models indicate that students who participated in the program had lower odds and rates of absenteeism in subsequent years [11].

In Wisconsin, the second year of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) was associated with a 3.5 percentage point decrease in the number of students with low attendance rates, particularly among students from economically disadvantaged conditions [12]. In addition, existing literature suggests that universal provision of food can improve student attendance in primary schools [12], [13], although it is unclear whether these positive effects generalize to the secondary school setting [14]. The Free Nutritional Meal Program is expected to be one of the effective interventions. By providing healthy and nutritious food, this program not only aims to meet students' nutritional needs but also to prevent illnesses that can lead to absenteeism. Research shows that good food intake can improve physical and mental health, making students more likely to attend and actively participate in class. When students feel satisfied with the food they eat, it creates a positive relationship between them and the school environment. : Schools that create supportive and academically stimulating environments can improve student attendance. Student attendance can be improved when schools evaluate policies that may inadvertently hinder attendance, when students feel heard by school staff, and when they are given opportunities to build positive relationships with caring adults, both inside and outside the classroom [15].

In Tasmania, the School Lunch Project did not show a significant difference in student attendance between those receiving and not receiving lunch. Mean student attendance in schools with the lunch project showed only a small difference in 2022 and 2023, and there was no significant difference compared to schools without the lunch project [16]. In this systematic review, universal free meal provision (UFSM) was associated with increased meal participation, small or no increases in attendance, and decreased obesity prevalence and suspension rates; the certainty of the evidence for lunch participation was moderate, while it was low or very low for other outcomes. Several studies did not report on important outcomes, such as diet quality and food safety, indicating the need for high-quality research that includes policy-relevant indicators [17].

Student Perspectives on the MBG Program

Based on the results of the study, students stated "I like a variety of different foods every day, the quality of the food is good, usually there are fresh vegetables and fruits". These findings differ from those found in California. Students wanted fresh and healthy school lunches. Students defined "fresh" as foods that were freshly prepared, from raw ingredients, and not packaged or frozen, while "healthy" was defined as foods that included fruits and vegetables. Many students considered the main course to be the least healthy and fresh part of the school lunch, while fruits and vegetables were considered the healthiest and freshest part. However, some students reported that the fruits and vegetables were not always fresh or tasty [18].

In Scotland, The lunch format was viewed negatively, particularly regarding the replacement of hot lunches with cold sandwiches, portion sizes, choice and perceived value for money. Concerns were also raised about the acceptability of the meal and how much it contributed to food safety [19]. In England, pupils want more choice and variety in menus, including more fruit and vegetables Food provision can influence the amount and type of food offered to students, and has the potential to increase healthy eating behaviors in the dining hall.

The important roles of school food providers, caterers, students, and parents need to be recognized to improve the provision and acceptance of school meals, which will ultimately result in increased student participation in school meal programs [6].

Students exposed to the free nutritious food program showed changes in their attitudes toward healthy food choices and what they and their families consumed. Students reported an increase in their sense of empowerment, willingness to try new foods, and knowledge. Although students enjoyed the program, they suggested increasing the length and frequency of lessons and integrating peer education. They also felt that the appeal of unhealthy foods was a barrier to making healthier food choices [20]. Students' views focused on feelings of fullness during lunch. Students viewed participation in the experiment as a personal choice: students' decisions to participate were influenced by the flexible and free design of the experiment, the availability of preferred foods, and their perceptions of the healthiness of the foods [21]. They experienced immediate benefits from the food provided, which contributed to increased energy and concentration while studying. This is in line with previous research showing that good nutritional intake can improve academic performance.

A large body of literature documents the positive impacts of school lunch programs, which are associated with improved academic performance (Gordanier et al., 2020; Makhafola et al., 2025; Ruffini, 2022; Schwartz & Rothbart, 2020). In contexts where not all eligible students receive free school meals, universal provision aims to achieve several desired outcomes for students, such as improved educational achievement, development of social and behavioral skills, and provision of healthy foods. If free school meals can lead to healthier eating patterns for children—especially those who do not have access to healthy foods through their home diet—this may contribute to improved school outcomes through multiple channels. Better nutrition may improve cognitive development. There is little literature focusing on the impact of universal free school meal policies on pupil behaviour in the US [22], [23] or South Korean [24] contexts.

Overall, free school lunches were perceived positively by children, particularly in terms of nutritional quality and satisfaction with food services. However, challenges related to presentation, variety, and food infrastructure need to be addressed to further increase the program's acceptability and effectiveness. Continued efforts to improve the quality and availability of free school meals can ensure that they meet the dietary needs and preferences of all students. In line with previous findings that: School meals contributed significantly more energy to the diets of FI and MS students compared to FS students, at 22%, 20%, and 13% respectively. Food intake from school meals in all groups was of higher quality compared to non-school meals. [25].

Parent Perspective

Parents Say “I see positive impacts in terms of my child's health and energy. He is now more active and less hungry during school hours, which helps him focus on learning. My child is now more motivated to go to school every day. Previously, he often missed school because he was hungry or unmotivated. I don't see any significant negative impacts. However, I am concerned that if the menu is not varied”, children can get bored quickly. It is important to keep an eye on them to make sure they are enjoying the food provided. In the United States, the Free and Diminished Cost (F&RM) School Dinners program found that guardians by and large had negative sees of school dinners, indeed in spite of the fact that they concurred that they met students â needs. Multivariate investigation uncovered contrasts in recognitions with respect to support in F&RM, counting the significance of the nourishment component. Including guardians in food-related encounters and decision-making may progress their recognitions and increment children âs support within the school lunch program [26]. In Unused York, five topics developed, counting three benefits of summer dinners: lessening push for guardians, empowering social bolster and association, and giving an opportunity to create more beneficial eating propensities; and two obstructions to cooperation: need of social comprehensiveness and need of wide information around summer dinners [27]. In the UK Exposure to universal free lunches reduced obesity prevalence and BMI among children aged 4–5 and 10–11 years, but older children's weight was less responsive than younger children. We found preliminary evidence that the effects may be cumulative, as the largest impacts occurred for those exposed to universal free school meals throughout primary school [28].

CONCLUSION

The Free Nutritious Meals (FBM) Program is an important initiative aimed at improving the health and well-being of students in elementary schools. The program not only provides access to free nutritious food, but also contributes significantly to increasing student attendance at school. From the evaluation conducted, it is clear that the FBM has succeeded in reducing hunger among students, increasing their energy and concentration in learning, and encouraging better social participation. By involving parents and communities, the program also strengthens awareness of the importance of nutrition for children. Overall, the FBM has a wide-ranging positive impact, not only in terms of physical health but also in

supporting students' learning and social development. Therefore, the sustainability and improvement of this program is essential for the future of a healthier and more educated generation.

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