

Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in Schools: A Systematic Literature Review of Success and Failure Factors

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ABSTRACT

Background: Child nutrition problems in Indonesia remain a critical issue affecting health, education, and human resource quality. The government introduced the Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) Program to reduce stunting, improve learning concentration, and support socio-economic welfare. Nevertheless, its implementation faces challenges that may limit the achievement of long-term objectives.

Content: This study applied a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using articles published between 2020 and 2025 retrieved from Google Scholar. Inclusion criteria covered Indonesian and English publications addressing the implementation, effectiveness, or policy analysis of the MBG Program. From 396 identified articles, nine met the selection criteria. The findings indicate that the MBG Program positively impacts nutritional status, stunting reduction, student concentration and motivation, and local economic empowerment. Success is supported by strong leadership, local government involvement, transparent governance, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and policy adaptation. In contrast, major constraints include limited funding, fiscal sustainability issues, uneven logistics, weak regulations, low community participation, and unstable socio-political conditions.

Conclusion: The MBG Program has strong potential as a long-term investment in achieving the Golden Generation 2045. Its success depends on stable financing, effective implementation, transparent governance, and sustained political commitment.

Keywords: Free nutritious meal program, health policy, systematic literature review



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Introduction

Nutrition problems among children, particularly in Indonesia, remain a crucial issue that significantly affects the quality of human resources and the nation's future. Data from the *Survei Status Gizi Indonesia* (SSGI, Indonesian Nutrition Status Survey) in 2022 released by the Ministry of Health showed that the national stunting prevalence was still 21.6%. Although this number had declined, it remained above the World Health Organization's (WHO) 20% threshold.¹ Nutrition problems not only affect children's physical growth but are also directly linked to cognitive function and academic achievement. A study found that 41% of Indonesian students experienced hunger during learning, which negatively impacted their concentration and learning motivation.² This condition is consistent with global evidence showing that childhood malnutrition has long-term impacts on brain development, educational attainment, and future economic productivity.³

In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government launched a strategic policy called the *Program Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG, Free Nutritious Meal Program) to address nutrition problems while simultaneously improving community welfare. This program, which is also part of the national political vision and mission, has the noble aim of creating the "Golden Generation 2045".⁴ In addition to providing direct benefits for nutritional fulfilment, the program is also expected to bring broader socio-economic impacts, such as reducing the economic burden on families and empowering local *Usaha Mikro, Kecil, dan Menengah* (UMKM, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises/MSMEs).⁵ Similar programs in various countries have also been proven not only to improve nutritional intake but also to strengthen local food security through the involvement of farmers and UMKM.⁶

Nevertheless, the implementation of a large-scale national public policy that involves substantial budgets and complex logistical chains is inevitably fraught with challenges. Several studies have identified key obstacles, including limited funding and fiscal sustainability, complicated logistics distribution, and weak transparent governance.⁷ These challenges are consistent with findings from international studies, which reveal that school feeding programs in various countries often face issues of sustainability, political dynamics, and unequal resource allocation, despite their proven effectiveness in improving children's nutrition and educational outcomes.^{8,9}

Therefore, it is essential to conduct an in-depth analysis of the literature addressing the implementation of MBG, both from the perspective of success and failure. Through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this study aims to identify and synthesize findings from previous research, categorize the factors contributing to success, and uncover the

determinants of failure. Similar approaches have been widely applied in policy research to generate more comprehensive evidence-based recommendations.¹⁰ The findings of this study are expected to provide stronger guidance for designing and implementing an effective, adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable free nutritious meal policy in Indonesia.

Methods

This study employed a SLR design. The article search was conducted using the electronic database Google Scholar, covering publications from 2020 to 2025. Keywords such as “free nutritious meal program,” “Makan Bergizi Gratis,” and “health policy,” as well as open-access filters, were applied to identify relevant publications in Indonesia.

The subject of this study is the Free Nutritious Meal Program policy, focusing on scholarly articles and research reports that explicitly discuss the implementation, effectiveness, or policy analysis of the program. Selected articles must identify or analyze factors of success and/or failure in the program’s implementation. Given the importance of up-to-date data, documents published within the last five years (2020–2025) were prioritized. Finally, all analyzed documents were written in either Indonesian or English and centered on case studies in Indonesia.

Articles that did not meet these criteria were excluded from the review. Specifically, we excluded articles that were too general and did not explicitly identify factors of success or failure, as well as theses, dissertations, working papers, and news articles that had not undergone peer review.

To clarify the research focus and map the relationship between the population, intervention, comparison, and outcomes examined in this literature review, the **PICO framework (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome)** was applied (**Table 1**). This framework helps formulate a clear and systematic research question and facilitates the synthesis of findings from various studies related to the implementation of the MBG program in Indonesian schools.

Results

The article selection process was carried out using the Mendeley Desktop application. As depicted in **Figure 1**, the initial search through the Google Scholar database yielded 396 articles. After the removal of duplicates, 131 unique articles remained. Subsequent screening based on titles, abstracts, and keywords identified 33 relevant articles, of which 14 were excluded for not meeting the initial criteria. The next stage involved full-text eligibility assessment of 19 articles, and after excluding ten articles consisting of theses and secondary reviews, a total of nine final articles met the inclusion criteria and were included in the

systematic analysis of this study. Thus, the total number of articles serving as the primary sources in this SLR is nine (n = 9) scholarly articles relevant to the implementation of the MBG Program in Indonesian schools.

Table 1. PICO framework.

P (Population)	School-age children in Indonesia who are beneficiaries of the Free Nutritious Meal (<i>Makan Bergizi Gratis</i> , MBG) Program.
I (Intervention)	Implementation of the MBG Program in schools, including meal provision, local government involvement, and support for local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
C (Comparison)	Schools or regions that have not implemented the MBG Program, or similar school meal programs in other countries used as reference.
O (Outcome)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved nutritional status and reduced stunting rates 2. Increased student concentration and learning motivation 3. Empowerment of local economies through MSME participation 4. Identification of success and failure factors in policy implementation.

Summary of the nine selected articles which were used as the primary sources for the present SLR is presented on **Table 2**. Across the reviewed studies, the MBG Program is generally viewed as a promising and socially strategic policy that supports improvements in children’s nutrition, learning concentration, and school attendance, while also reducing household economic burdens and generating local economic benefits through MSME participation. However, the findings also show that program outcomes remain partial and uneven across regions, with effectiveness highly dependent on governance capacity, coordination between sectors, availability of school infrastructure, and sustainability of program funding. Overall, the evidence suggests that the MBG Program has strong conceptual and social value, but requires strengthened implementation systems, clearer regulatory support, and more rigorous monitoring to ensure equitable and sustained impact at the national level.

Discussion

The MBG Program represents an important effort to improve public health and quality of life, particularly for school-aged children. Numerous studies have shown that this program not only provides short-term nutritional benefits but also generates positive impacts on education, the economy, and social well-being. However, achieving its success is not without

challenges, as the program faces obstacles ranging from funding and implementation to complex social and political conditions.

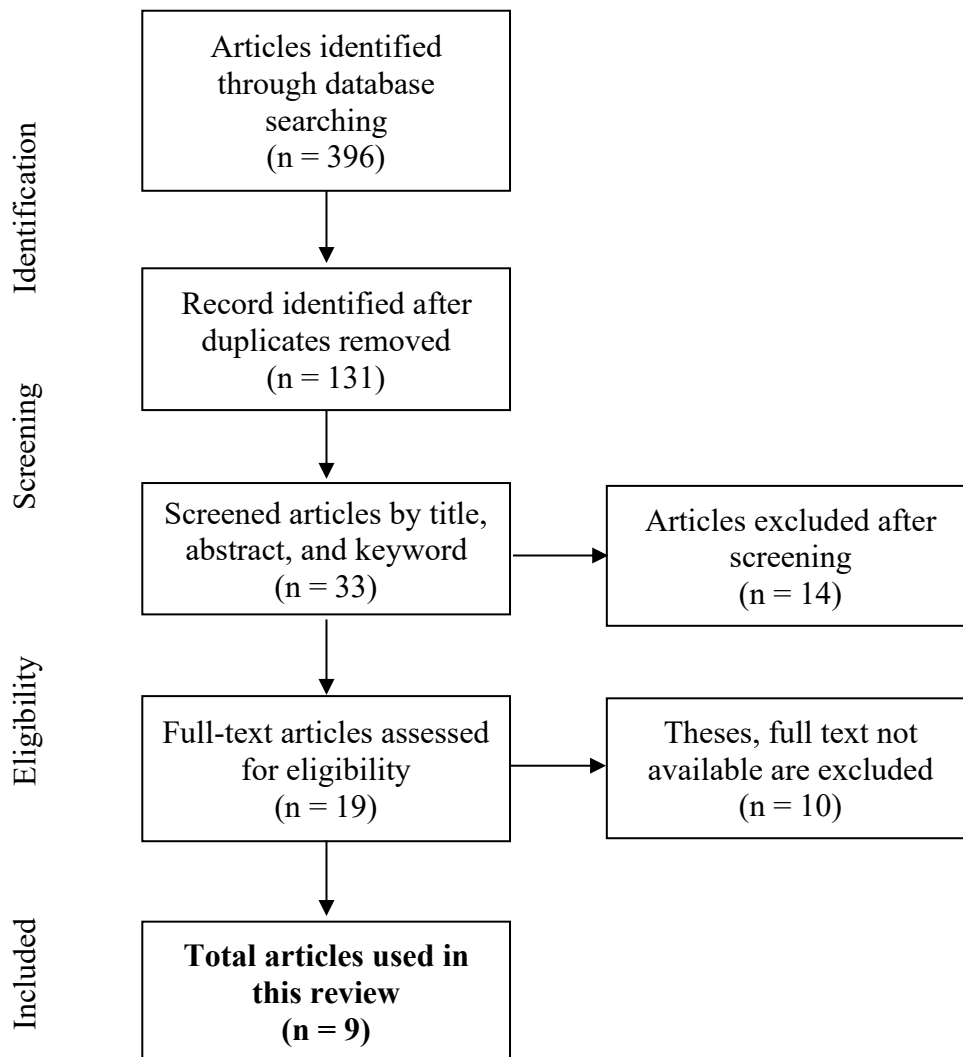


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram search and data extraction.

Waluyo views the MBG program as a form of state intervention in the redistribution of resources to build human capital and strengthen national food security.⁷ However, the success of this role is highly dependent on the government's ability to ensure fiscal sustainability and regulatory consistency. Therefore, MBG is not merely a social program, but also a long-term economic policy instrument that requires careful and well-planned budgeting.

Table 2. Summary source.

Authors (Year) / Title	Objective	Design and Method	Results		Conclusion Program
			Intervention Characteristics	Evaluation and Significant Results	
Waluyo (2025) / Kebijakan Makanan Bergizi Gratis: Tinjauan Ekonomi Politik Dalam Kesejahteraan Dan Ketahanan Pangan	To analyze the MBG policy from a political economy perspective and its contribution to social welfare and national food security.	The study design is literature review with political economy approach	The program is a government strategy to improve the quality of human resources through adequate nutrition, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children and low-income communities. From a political economy perspective, it reflects the role of the state in resource redistribution, market intervention,	The program has the potential to enhance long-term productivity. However, its success depends heavily on the ability to address budgetary challenges and fiscal sustainability, which remain the main risks.	Conceptually successful, but real-world implementation requires stronger governance and regulatory consistency.

			and social welfare improvement.		
Qomarrullah <i>et al.</i> (2025) / The Long-Term Impact of the Free Nutritious Meal Program on Health and Educational Sustainability	To assess the long-term effects of MBG on students' health and educational continuity.	The study design is qualitative case study, used in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Approximately 30 participants (principals, teachers, health workers, students, and parents).	This program is a strategic policy to improve school children's health and support educational sustainability. Its goals include reducing nutritional inequality, improving concentration, and lowering dropout rates.	This qualitative study shows that the MBG program has the potential to reduce stunting and malnutrition among children.	Program was highly successful, demonstrating positive and sustainable impacts on student nutrition, attendance, and academic outcomes
Herdiana (2025) / Implementasi Kebijakan Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG): Faktor-	To identify key enablers and barriers in the implementation of MBG and propose future policy recommendations.	Study design is descriptive qualitative study. Employed secondary data analysis from official reports,	This policy is a government initiative aimed at identifying driving and inhibiting factors in its implementation.	Driving factors include strong leadership, local government support, and good community	Partially successful, supported politically but hindered by administrative, technical, and

faktor Pendorong dan Penghambat		policy documents, and academic sources. No direct participants.		acceptance. Inhibiting factors include incomplete regulations, rigid distribution chains, and suboptimal supervision and community involvement.	coordination challenges.
Nissa <i>et al.</i> (2025) / Kebijakan Makanan Bergizi Gratis: Analisis Ekonomi Politik dan Dampaknya terhadap Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Studi Kasus: SMP Negeri 4 Tanjungpinang	The research aimed to analyze the MBG policy from a political economy perspective and assess its impact on community welfare	The study employed a qualitative approach using a literature-based case study method. Utilized secondary data sources including government reports, statistical data (BPS), academic publications, and	The program is a government initiative to address nutritional problems among vulnerable groups such as school children, toddlers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers.	This journal analyzes the program's impact on community welfare and recommends collaboration between government, the private sector, and civil society, as well as adaptive policies to ensure	The program is deemed socially and substantively successful, effectively improving student welfare and community participation. Nonetheless, it faces fiscal and sustainability challenges. Overall,

current news. Additionally, limited field observations were conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Tanjungpinang, involving 1,166 student beneficiaries of the MBG program. No direct interviews were conducted; empirical data were obtained through official reports and institutional documentation.

sustainability and effectiveness.

implementation at SMP Negeri 4 Tanjungpinang was successful with recommendations for governance improvement and long-term funding stability.

Rahmah <i>et al.</i> (2025) / Analisis Efektivitas Program Makan Bergizi	To evaluate how effective the Free Nutritious Food (MBG) Program is at the	The study design is literature review. This study use synthesis analysis of	The program was introduced by the Indonesian government in 2025	The program shows positive impacts on children's nutritional status,	Partially successful — positive effects but requires stronger monitoring,
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Gratis di Sekolah Dasar Indonesia Tahun 2025	primary-school level in Indonesia.	previous studies, program reports, and government data related to program implementation.	to address nutritional issues among children, reduce stunting, and improve the quality of primary education.	stunting reduction, and increased student concentration and attendance. It also reduces household economic burdens and empowers local entrepreneurs. However, challenges include uneven distribution, lack of facilities, and varying levels of nutritional awareness.	infrastructure, and food-quality standards.
Aji (2025) / Makan Bergizi Gratis di Era Prabowo-Gibran: Solusi	To examine policy readiness, budgeting, and political-implementation	This study is a literature review and public-policy reflection.	The program is a flagship vision and mission of President and Vice President Prabowo-Gibran,	The study raises concerns about the sustainability of the program due to the large budget	Does not measure direct outcomes; focuses on policy analysis and

untuk Rakyat atau Beban Baru?	challenges of the program		aimed at improving the quality and health of human resources to build the “Golden Generation 2045.”	requirements (800 billion IDR per day).	implementation readiness.
Basit and Ramdani (2025) / Analisis Implementasi Program Makan Bergizi Gratis Terhadap Perkembangan Ekonomi	To analyze program implementation and its micro–macro economic effects on households and the food sector.	The study design is descriptive qualitative study based on literature review and economic policy analysis. Used secondary-data analysis (BPS, national reports, economic studies, education data).	The program is a government initiative to address malnutrition, improve human resource quality, and reduce the economic burden on poor households.	The program not only improves children’s nutritional status but also generates a multiplier effect on agriculture, MSMEs, and household purchasing power.	Economically effective, though based on modeled and secondary data, requiring field validation.
Merlinda and Yusuf (2025) / Analisis Program Makan Gratis Prabowo Subianto	To analyze how the Free Nutritious Meal Program contributes to improving students’ learning motivation	The study used a qualitative design. Data were collected through non-participant school	The program is a strategic initiative aimed at improving student nutrition and learning motivation,	This discourse analysis study provides insights into the program’s	Conceptually successful strategic for learning motivation, but findings are analytical rather than

Terhadap Strategi Peningkatan Motivasi Belajar Siswa di Sekolah Tinjauan dari Perspektif Sosiologi Pendidikan	through nutrition improvement and socio-educational support.	observation, documentation of social-media and news content, and secondary literature review; data collection lasted half a month.	based on data showing that 41% of students in Indonesia experience hunger during learning.	impact on student learning motivation.	quantitative field-impact evaluation.
Kiftiyah <i>et al.</i> (2025) / Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) dalam Perspektif Keadilan Sosial dan Dinamika Sosial – Politik	To examine whether the MBG program is well-targeted from a social-justice perspective and to analyze its socio-political implementation dynamics.	The study is library research using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). Data sources include reputable journals, mass media, and supporting literature; data were identified, evaluated, and qualitatively described.	This flagship program of the Prabowo Subianto–Gibran administration aims to improve community welfare, particularly among students.	The study recommends prioritizing schools in <i>daerah 3T</i> (disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost regions). Program sustainability depends on budget, policy stability, and government commitment.	No direct success/failure outcome measured; the program is strategic and socially-just in intent, but success depends on governance and equitable targeting.

The study conducted by Waluyo views the success of the MBG Program as a strategic long-term investment from a political economy perspective.⁷ The program not only provides immediate nutritional benefits, but also builds healthier and more productive human resources, which in turn can improve the quality of the workforce and contribute positively to the national economy. However, financial challenges cast a shadow over the program's success. Issues of funding and fiscal sustainability remain the primary obstacles, as without a stable budget allocation and a clear financing mechanism, the program risks becoming a financial burden and failing to achieve its long-term objectives.

This statement is consistent with another study conducted by Aji,⁴ which evaluated the success of the program in terms of its noble objective of creating the "Golden Generation 2045" through improving the quality of human resources. Nevertheless, the issue of substantial funding emerges as a major concern, with sustainability risks that could potentially impose a new burden on the *Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara* (APBN, State Budget) if the sources of financing are not clearly defined. Both perspectives underscore the critical importance of funding as a key factor for ensuring the program's sustainability, while simultaneously highlighting it as the primary challenge.

Another study conducted by Qomarrullah *et al.* emphasized the success of the program in generating long-term impacts beyond physical health.¹¹ The program has the capacity to address nutritional inequalities, which are the root cause of educational challenges, by providing nutritious meals that directly improve students' concentration and reduce dropout rates. This finding aligns with Merlinda's work, which highlighted the program's success in social and educational contexts. The primary positive outcome—increased student learning motivation—was attributed to the fulfillment of nutritional needs, which reduces hunger during learning.² Together, these studies reaffirm the program's positive impact on both students' health and education, particularly in enhancing concentration and learning motivation.

According to Basit and Ramdani, stress the program's success in generating significant multiplier effects by empowering local farmers and small enterprises, supported by transparent governance and optimized supply chains. Failures, however, may arise from a lack of transparency and ineffective supply chain management, leading to financial leakages.¹³

The findings of these two studies are consistent with the research conducted by Nissa *et al.*, which emphasized that the success of the program lies in its ability to remain adaptive and sustainable, particularly in aligning policies with diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts. Program failure may occur if rigid and uniform approaches are applied without taking local conditions into account, thereby preventing the achievement of equitable community

welfare outcomes.¹⁴ Collectively, these studies underline the importance of leadership, collaboration, transparency, and policy adaptation to local contexts as critical determinants of successful implementation.

According to the study by Kiftiyah *et al.*, the success of the program depends on prioritizing implementation in 3T regions as an effective way to reduce social inequality. However, the sustainability of the program largely relies on socio-political dynamics, with a significant risk of failure if political commitment weakens or if policy changes lead to its termination, which would negatively impact vulnerable communities.¹⁵ This perspective highlights social justice and political dynamics as critical factors for sustainability, complementing the more economic and technical implementation perspectives discussed in other studies.

The success of the MBG program is not determined by a single aspect, but rather is the result of various interrelated factors that influence both its implementation and impact. The authors argue that the effectiveness of the program depends largely on the synergy between stable funding, effective execution, and policy alignment with local social and political conditions. Financial stability serves as the primary foundation to ensure the program can run sustainably without being hindered by budgetary constraints. Furthermore, strong leadership, support from local governments, and collaboration among stakeholders are essential to successful implementation. Community involvement and the adaptation of policies to local characteristics are also essential to ensure that the program delivers maximum and equitable benefits. However, without transparency, good governance, and consistent political commitment, the program risks failure, which would hinder the achievement of its long-term objectives in health, education, and social welfare. Therefore, the success of the MBG program should be viewed as the outcome of integrated factors working in synergy and the sustained commitment of all relevant parties.

Driving factors for successful implementation

The successful implementation of the MBG Program is strongly influenced by governance factors. Herdiana identifies strong leadership, support from local governments, and cross-sectoral coordination as key determinants of program success. Regions with well-defined institutional structures and adaptive implementation mechanisms tend to demonstrate more optimal implementation outcomes.¹²

In addition, policy adaptation to local conditions is a crucial aspect. Nissa *et al.* emphasizes that implementation approaches which take into account geographical, social, and economic differences can enhance both the effectiveness and acceptability of the program

within communities.¹⁴ Kiftiyah *et al.* also recommends prioritizing 3T regions as a social justice strategy to ensure that the most vulnerable groups receive maximum benefits from the MBG Program.¹⁵

Inhibiting factors and risks of program failure

Despite its considerable potential, the MBG Program continues to face various structural challenges. One of the main issues is funding sustainability. Several studies highlight the substantial budgetary requirements and the risk of dependence on political dynamics in budget allocation, which may threaten the long-term sustainability of the program.^{4,7} Without stable and transparent financing mechanisms, MBG risks becoming a fiscal burden that is difficult to sustain.

Operational challenges also represent significant barriers. Rahmah *et al.* and Herdiana point out uneven food distribution, limited school infrastructure, and weak monitoring and evaluation systems as major constraints.^{5,12} Furthermore, limited community involvement in program planning and oversight may reduce accountability and increase the risk of inefficiency.

From a socio-political perspective, Kiftiyah *et al.* emphasizes that the stability of political commitment is a fundamental prerequisite for the sustainability of the MBG Program. Changes in leadership or policy direction may lead to implementation uncertainty and directly affect vulnerable groups who are the primary targets of the program.¹⁵

Strengths and limitations of the study

This study's primary strength lies in its use of a SLR approach, which enables the integration of findings from multiple disciplines and provides a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the MBG Program. The focus on recent literature (2020–2025), along with the application of the PICO framework, enhances the precision and relevance of the analysis.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. The number of articles included in the review is relatively limited ($n = 9$), and most of the studies employ qualitative approaches or rely on secondary data, with a lack of large-scale quantitative evaluations assessing nutritional and educational impacts. Variations in study designs and outcome indicators also constrain the generalizability of the findings.

Overall, the results of this review indicate that the MBG Program has a strong conceptual and empirical foundation as an instrument for improving health, education, and social welfare. However, its success is highly dependent on the synergy between effective governance, fiscal sustainability, and consistent political commitment to ensure equitable and

sustainable impacts.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review concludes that the MBG Program is a strategically important public policy with strong conceptual and empirical evidence for improving children's nutrition, educational participation, and broader social welfare in Indonesia, while also generating local economic benefits through MSME involvement. However, its impacts remain uneven across regions and are highly dependent on governance quality, leadership, intergovernmental coordination, cross-sector collaboration, adaptive policy design, and alignment with local socio-economic and geographical contexts, including prioritization of 3T regions to ensure equity. The program's sustainability is challenged by fiscal constraints, political dependence, uneven logistics and infrastructure, weak monitoring and evaluation, and limited community participation. Therefore, the MBG Program should be viewed as a long-term investment in human capital rather than a short-term social assistance scheme, requiring strengthened governance, fiscal sustainability, adaptive implementation, and rigorous impact evaluations to achieve equitable and sustainable national health, education, and social welfare outcomes.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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Author's Contribution

Design and conceptual framework: SPN. Literature search: SPN, SFFL, RN, NM, RFS. Drafting manuscript: SPN. Data analysis and synthesis: SPN, RN, RFS. Writing—review and editing: SPN, SFFL, RN, NM, RFS. All authors had read and validated the manuscript.

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