

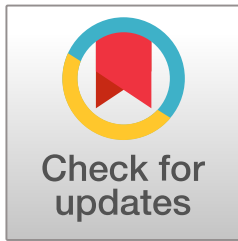
ARTICLE

School SPPG Coordination in Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG)

A Case Study in Bojonegoro, East Java

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Abstract: This study examines coordination between schools and the Nutrition Food Production Center (SPPG) in implementing Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Bojonegoro Regency, East Java, across schools with diverse operational capacities. This study uses integrated qualitative methods by highlighting governance processes—role allocation, communication flows, decision-making, and reporting—rather than impact indicators. Data were generated through purposive focus group discussions with school principals, teacher MBG coordinators, SPPG managers and operational staff, and school committee representatives or parents, and triangulated with relevant program documents. Transcripts were analyzed thematically using iterative coding. Findings show coordination is mainly operational and weakly institutionalized: schools act as passive recipients, while SPPG controls menu selection, production, and logistics, yielding asymmetric, largely one way information exchange. Communication and problem reporting rely on informal messaging and brief delivery-time interactions, with limited documentation, unclear pathways, and inconsistent feedback. These governance gaps contribute to recurring delivery delays, unannounced menu changes, inadequate accommodation for dietary restrictions, and increased administrative workload for schools. They also intensify parental concerns regarding food quality and safety and influence student acceptance, thereby undermining program legitimacy. The study concludes that implementation quality depends on strengthening local coordination capacity through regular coordination forums, standardized reporting and feedback protocols, clearer role and accountability structures, and ongoing technical support aligning centralized standards with context-sensitive adaptation. Institutionalizing coordination would enable the school SPPG network to transition from reactive delivery to continuous improvement, supporting transparent learning, effective risk management, and sustained community buy-in over time.

Keywords: MBG; SPPG; interorganizational coordination; school feeding governance; collaborative governance.

1. Introduction

School feeding programs are better understood not only as mechanisms for ensuring food availability, but also as governance arrangements through which nutritional and learning outcomes are delivered consistently. Evidence from Southeast Asia indicates that program success depends heavily on local governance quality and stakeholder coordination, not merely on commodity supply. Accordingly, school nutrition initiatives should be treated as a public service ecosystem linking schools, production and distribution managers, local governments, and communities, in which coordination functions as the institutional mechanism that aligns daily operations, service reliability, and accountability across actors (Pramesthi et al., 2025; Istiqomah et al., 2025; Studdert et al., 2004; Siy Van et al., 2022)

Indonesia offers a salient illustration: community-based school feeding programs launched in 1996 indicate that decentralised design, grounded in community actor engagement, the use of existing village administrative structures, and reliance on local food, can reinforce participation and sustain delivery even under severe economic shock, including the 1998 Asian financial crisis (Studdert et al., 2004). This insight bears directly on national initiatives such as MBG: while central standards are necessary, operational resilience in routine service provision often derives from local organisational capacity for collective action. In this sense, the contribution of community actors and local government is not merely administrative; it shapes how food is procured, monitored, distributed, and socially accepted at the school level, thereby influencing whether nutritional provision can be translated into stable student participation and meaningful learning conditions (Agustiani et al., 2025; Jaya et al., 2025).

Recent evidence confirms this pattern. The ProGAS evaluation reports improvements in behaviours and the learning environment (e.g., dietary diversity, meal frequency, handwashing, and nutrition knowledge), yet it also flags weak nutrition-education delivery and inadequate monitoring by local and national authorities, suggesting that program targets may be achieved only superficially when coordination and quality assurance remain fragile (Pramesthi et al., 2025). This mirrors findings from East Java's education policy implementation, where weak coordination and communication between schools and education agencies undermine responsiveness to school needs and hinder development targets (Muhartono, 2024). Similar patterns also appear in Indonesian public policy settings where formal policy intent is often weakened by limited coordination, informal dependence among actors, and fragmented implementation structures (Agustiani et al., 2025; Safitri et al., 2025). However, the MBG context differs from ProGAS in an important respect: MBG relies on a more formalized linkage between schools and dedicated food production units (SPPG), making inter-organizational coordination not only nutritional outcomes a central implementation issue in its own right.

A regional comparison further underscores the local government's enabling role. In the Philippines, a community-led central-kitchen model demonstrates that multisector action can be institutionalized via volunteer networks and community ownership; however, program resilience is stronger when local governments (LGUs) lead, because they provide continuity across administrative change, mobilize regulation and resources, and connect policy commitments with operational practice at school and community levels (Siy Van et al., 2022). Taken together, the evidence suggests an operational implication: community ownership and LGU support must be paired with clear coordination and monitoring so the program moves beyond food distribution to deliver sustained nutrition and learning gains. In other words,

subnational policy support matters insofar as it creates the conditions under which schools can communicate needs, production units can respond effectively, and implementation problems can be corrected before they affect students' daily food experience and learning routines (Kurnianingsih & Lamidi, 2025).

Conceptually, implementation at the education nutrition interface is seldom a linear centre to school process. While top-down policies establish vision, standards, and compliance mechanisms, outcomes are substantially shaped by how frontline actors school leaders, teachers, and health personnel interpret mandates and recalibrate priorities in practice (Dickson & Brindis, 2021). Misalignment between national directives and field realities commonly arises from divergent operational objectives, resource limitations, and institutional constraints; therefore, the literature frequently supports a hybrid model that couples clear central direction with structured bottom-up feedback to improve adaptability and effectiveness (Karaevli et al., 2024; Sia & Chern, 2023; Agustiani et al., 2025; Jaya et al., 2025). Within this perspective, local government and community actors matter not only as supporters of implementation, but as mediating institutions that translate policy into workable routines, mobilize oversight, and sustain trust between providers and beneficiaries. When these mediating functions are weak, the relationship between policy design and school-level practice becomes fragmented, increasing the risk that formally standardized programs will produce uneven service quality in everyday implementation.

Existing studies on school feeding in Indonesia, including those on ProGAS, focus predominantly on nutritional outcomes, behavioural change, and broad implementation achievements. Far less attention has been given to the governance micro-processes that link schools with food production and distribution units, particularly in early-stage MBG implementation settings where routines, authority boundaries, and communication channels are still being formed. As a result, an important gap remains in understanding how coordination actually operates between schools and SPPG, how reporting and feedback are structured, and how these processes shape implementation quality beyond formal program design.

This study addresses that gap by examining school SPPG coordination in MBG implementation in Bojonegoro Regency, East Java. Its contribution is not limited to describing operational challenges; rather, it identifies governance gaps in inter-organizational collaboration and positions MBG as a case of limited or pseudo-collaborative implementation, in which formal collaboration exists but substantive decision-making remains centralized. In doing so, the article contributes to the collaborative governance literature by clarifying how administrative centralization can persist within ostensibly collaborative arrangements and by providing an analytical basis for a more structured coordination framework in school feeding governance.

Within a street-level bureaucracy perspective, frontline discretion is not a mere "deviation" but a key mechanism explaining why policy outputs diverge from formal designs, as implementers bridge implementation gaps through procedural adjustments, work reorganization, and service prioritization (Gofen, 2014; Frangioni & Volturo, 2025). In school nutrition and health, evidence shows that guidelines alone are insufficient; sustained practice depends on ongoing support, capacity building, and stable implementation infrastructure (Buckler et al., 2025). For MBG, this means that implementation quality is shaped not only by national standards, but by how local actors interpret, communicate, and operationalize those standards in routine school SPPG interactions. Accordingly, effective delivery requires multilevel

governance coordination via clear structures, information flows, and accountability, while multisector nutrition policy outcomes remain contingent on political commitment, adequate funding, and explicit cross-sector coordination and accountability (Green & Koebele, 2025; Bach et al., 2020; Safitri et al., 2025; Irwansyah et al., 2025).

Resource constraints should be treated as integral to implementation design rather than as an external add-on. Evidence from Tanzania underscores the importance of stronger coordination, enhanced capacity among school-based stakeholders, and meaningful engagement of relevant actors (including adolescents), while evidence from Nova Scotia links adequate facilities and staff capacity to healthier food availability and stronger policy compliance (Sando et al., 2025; McIsaac et al., 2019). Accordingly, school meal quality hinges on both “hardware” (facilities, logistics) and “software” (competencies, role clarity, communication). This distinction is particularly relevant to MBG because weaknesses in communication, role definition, and reporting may undermine service reliability even when food production capacity formally exists. This argument is consistent with findings from Indonesian governance studies showing that implementation outcomes are often constrained not only by material limitations but also by uneven institutional capability and fragmented service integration (Irwansyah et al., 2025; Kurnianingsih & Lamidi, 2025).

In education public services, interorganizational coordination entails aligning roles, workflows, and information exchange across schools, education offices, providers, and communities to ensure integrated and consistent services for students and parents. Evidence links cross organizational collaboration to improved managerial and program outcomes (Selden et al., 2006). It shows that stronger project management enabled by IT integration, procurement and supply-chain coordination, process innovation, and operational communication supports better organizational performance in education (Matalka et al., 2025; Hartati et al., 2025). In public-sector partnerships, moreover, the partnership-building process itself shapes role allocation and coordination mechanisms that render shared goals operational (Stene, 2019). This is reinforced by recent Indonesian studies showing that collaboration often falters when service integration is weak, authority is fragmented, and coordination remains more procedural than substantive (Kurnianingsih & Lamidi, 2025; Harnani et al., 2025). This distinction is important for the present study, because MBG formally involves multiple actors, yet the extent to which these actors actually share decision-making, problem-solving, and accountability remains an open empirical question.

Coordination is especially critical when education is conceptualized as a service supply chain: because services traverse organizational boundaries, quality and timeliness depend on the performance of each link and the orchestration strategy adopted (van Veenstra et al., 2009). A public logistics lens similarly foregrounds the coordination of information and resource flows to generate public value (Bubel, 2017). Yet weak coordination often produces fragmented responsibility and service duplication (Paulsson et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 2004). Accordingly, recommendations emphasize (1) explicit coordination governance, such as decisions on centralization versus peer-to-peer arrangements and context-appropriate system integration, and (2) stronger cross-institutional learning to avoid procedural rigidity (Moshtari & Seepma, 2025). Consistent with this, governance-network quality is associated with greater logistics efficiency and responsiveness in public services (Gavrilă et al., 2025). Recent Indonesian evidence similarly shows that weak coordination is frequently accompanied by overlapping institutional functions,

limited dedicated authority, and a lack of integrated service arrangements, all of which hinder implementation effectiveness (Harnani et al., 2025) (Kurnianingsih & Lamidi, 2025) (Irwansyah et al., 2025). Read in this way, school feeding is not merely a matter of food delivery but of service chain orchestration, where disruption in communication, reporting, or local adjustment can directly affect timeliness, trust, and acceptance at the school level.

School feeding programs ultimately hinge on stakeholder trust, including schools, meal-service managers, parents, and school committees, alongside robust quality assurance and food safety. Evidence from Western Australia indicates that healthy canteen policies retain strong parent school support, are perceived to improve food choices, and create opportunities for healthy eating education (Pettigrew et al., 2012). U.S. reforms to school meal standards similarly show mixed implementation effects: perceived nutritional gains (e.g., higher fruit and vegetable intake) coexist with operational problems such as food waste and procurement constraints (Asada et al., 2017). Student participation, moreover, is strongly shaped by parental perceptions: positive views tend to increase participation and negative views reduce it, while in food-insecure households, participation is further complicated by the tension between economic need and stigma-related barriers to social acceptance (Martinelli et al., 2020; Zuercher et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, schools also function as strategic actors in nutrition education and food security, and program success depends strongly on the involvement of schools, teachers, students, and parents (Istiqomah et al., 2025). This suggests that weak coordination cannot be treated as an internal administrative issue alone, because failures in communication, consistency, and responsiveness may alter parental trust, shape student acceptance of meals, and ultimately affect the legitimacy of program implementation.

Implementation barriers are often socio-organizational, including weak communication to parents and students about policies or menu changes, limited resources and volunteers, role conflicts over responsibility for child feeding, and misalignment with students' food preferences (MacLellan et al., 2010). Accordingly, trust building should be treated as sustained public communication that is transparent, consistent, and responsive, with food safety as its core foundation. HACCP-based compliance can reduce food-safety problems, but effective implementation requires ongoing training and competency updating (Barrett & Riggins, 2011). Moreover, multi-stakeholder evaluations combining surveys of schools, canteen managers or parents, and menu audits help diagnose program issues using cross-actor evidence rather than unilateral assumptions (Lawlis et al., 2017). This point is strengthened by Indonesian studies showing that one-way communication, passive service management, and low responsiveness weaken public satisfaction and inhibit accountability, whereas interactive digital communication systems can improve transparency, documentation, and trust (Subekti & Wicaksono, 2025; Purwanto et al., 2025). In the MBG context, these insights are important because weak communication cannot be separated from implementation legitimacy: when menu changes, food-safety concerns, or service disruptions are not communicated clearly, parents and schools are left to manage uncertainty, which may reduce trust and weaken student acceptance of the program.

In cross-sector public policy, collaborative governance is increasingly framed as a corrective to the limits of traditional bureaucracy by treating implementation as collective work that depends on deliberate partnership design, leadership that aligns a shared vision, and incentives, including funding, that translate collaboration into executable operational decisions (Hadorn, 2024) (Berends et al., 2016). Incorporating non-state actors such as civil society organizations matters because

they can contribute access, social legitimacy, and contextual field knowledge that governments may lack (Lee, 2012). In this model, coordination mechanisms are the core infrastructure of collaboration, structuring role division, communication flows, implementation rules, and interdependency management so that joint action does not collapse into jurisdictional conflict. Recent Indonesian evidence also suggests that collaborative arrangements often fail when stakeholder power, legitimacy, and urgency are distributed unevenly, creating disconnects between policy formulation and operational practice (Wahono et al., 2025). This perspective is particularly relevant for MBG because the program formally involves multiple actors, yet the presence of multiple institutions does not automatically indicate substantive collaboration. A key analytical question, therefore, is whether school SPPG relations represent genuine shared governance or a more limited arrangement in which schools participate operationally while strategic control remains centralized

These implications are evident in school nutrition programming. In Nepal, school health and nutrition initiatives face weak coordination, resource constraints, and insufficient training, indicating that sustainability depends on cross-sector leadership, advocacy, and mobilized support (Shrestha et al., 2019). Systematic reviews further suggest that Health Promoting Schools approaches generally improve students' dietary and health outcomes, but effects are stronger when interventions are supported by adequate professional training and sustained over sufficient duration (Wang & Stewart, 2013;Thakur et al., 2023). From a trust and local accountability perspective, parent satisfaction and program effectiveness are shaped by robust information flows such as routine briefings and transparent reporting among schools, parents, and local government (Sobczyk et al., 2024). Similarly, implementation support for school food authorities is associated with higher nutritional quality in lunches, implying that standards must be operationalized through technical assistance and practical tools rather than guidelines alone (Poole et al., 2025).

Consistent with this, CATCH Eat Smart findings show that inter-school communication and support for program components increase implementer satisfaction, which subsequently supports more consistent implementation (McCullum-Gomez et al., 2006). These broader lessons align with recent Indonesian studies showing that nutrition-related public policies and school-based food initiatives depend not only on formal adoption but also on cross-sector coordination, actor involvement, and responsive implementation mechanisms (Safitri et al., 2025; Istiqomah et al., 2025). Taken together, this literature suggests that the effectiveness of school feeding programs depends not only on compliance with standards, but also on whether coordination mechanisms enable schools, providers, parents, and local authorities to exchange information, solve problems, and adapt implementation in ways that protect service quality and trust.

Building on this evidence, MBG implementation, particularly the operational linkage between schools and production and distribution units such as SPPG, can be read through three mutually reinforcing pillars: (1) clear coordination (shared rules, authority boundaries, and role allocation), (2) structured communication and reporting (routine, documented, and traceable information flows), and (3) continuous capacity strengthening (training, technical support, and minimum resource provision). These pillars must operate together so the program not only "delivers food," but also safeguards quality, builds trust, and sustains consistent nutrition and learning benefits (Shrestha et al., 2019)(Sobczyk et al., 2024) (Wang & Stewart, 2013)(Agustiani et al., 2025)(Irwansyah et al., 2025)(Purwanto et al., 2025)(Istiqomah et al., 2025). This framework also provides the analytical basis for

the present study: rather than treating coordination problems as isolated technical failures, the article examines them as governance gaps that reveal whether MBG implementation operates as substantive collaboration or as a more centralized administrative arrangement with limited reciprocal coordination.

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case-study design to understand the coordination dynamics between schools and the Nutrition Food Production Center (SPPG) in implementing the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) at the local level. A qualitative approach was chosen because it can capture complex social processes, institutional interactions, and the perceptions of implementing actors that cannot be identified through quantitative indicators alone. By focusing on a single study site, the study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how coordination is formed, enacted, experienced, and negotiated in everyday implementation practice. The study was guided by a collaborative-governance and interorganizational-coordination perspective, through which role allocation, communication flows, reporting pathways, and problem-solving practices were treated as key process dimensions shaping implementation quality. Accordingly, although this study does not measure nutritional or educational outcomes directly, it examines governance processes that are theoretically relevant to program effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability.

The research design is an embedded case study focusing on MBG implementation in Bojonegoro Regency, East Java. This site was selected because it represents an early implementation context for MBG and involves multiple schools served by school-feeding delivery arrangements within a single administrative area, providing an informative setting to observe interorganizational coordination within a real policy environment. Bojonegoro was considered strategically relevant because early-stage implementation made coordination structures, reporting routines, and authority boundaries still visibly emergent, allowing the study to capture how collaboration was being formed rather than examining only mature or stabilized arrangements. In addition, the case brought together diverse actors from schools, parents, local government, and other local stakeholders within one district setting, making it particularly suitable for analyzing how centralized program design was translated into local practice. The study emphasizes process-oriented analysis rather than impact evaluation. Accordingly, the focus is on governance processes, communication flows, decision-making arrangements, and reporting mechanisms among key actors, rather than on outcome measurement such as nutritional improvement or educational attainment.

Research informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in program implementation and coordination. Informants included school principals, teachers or school representatives serving as MBG coordinators, SPPG managers or operational staff and representatives of school committees or parents. These groups were chosen to capture diverse perspectives on coordination, communication, and service, both from the provider side and from beneficiaries. Schools were positioned as frontline institutions interacting daily with students and parents, whereas SPPG was the central actor in food production and distribution. Involving school committees and parents was necessary to assess how coordination outcomes shape perceptions, trust, and community acceptance of the program. Informant diversity also enabled data triangulation and revealed differences in experience across organizational roles. In operational terms, the discussion involved representatives from multiple school units and community stakeholders in Bojonegoro, including

school leaders, school committee or parent representatives, and local institutional actors engaged in MBG evaluation and oversight. The diversity of participants was intended to ensure that the study captured not only formal provider perspectives but also viewpoints from actors affected by communication failures, distribution problems, and accountability gaps. A table of informant characteristics should therefore be included in the revised manuscript to summarize participant categories, institutional affiliations, and roles in program implementation.

Primary data were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), as this technique is effective for eliciting shared experience, collective meaning, and interaction dynamics among stakeholders involved in the same policy process. FGDs provide space for participants to discuss coordination practices openly, reflect on emerging challenges, and respond to one another's experiences, generating rich and nuanced data. FGDs were conducted in mixed groups involving school representatives, SPPG personnel, and school committee members or parents to encourage cross-actor dialogue. The main FGD session used in this study was conducted in Bojonegoro on 22 October 2025 and brought together multi-stakeholder participants in a shared evaluative setting. The session involved 14 participants representing the Food Security and Agriculture Office, Bappeda Bojonegoro, three school principals, three parent or school-committee representatives, PD Muhammadiyah Bojonegoro, ISTEK ICSADA, Metro TV, AJI, Kodim 0813 Bojonegoro, and the Environmental Office. In substantive terms, the FGD therefore represented three schools together with a wider set of local institutional and community stakeholders engaged in evaluation, oversight, and public communication concerning MBG implementation.

The discussion covered the current condition of MBG implementation, stakeholder roles and responsibilities, communication processes, food provision and distribution constraints, menu and food safety issues, and strategies for program sustainability based on local human and material resources. Discussions were guided by a semi-structured protocol covering coordination patterns, communication channels, reporting mechanisms, distribution processes, menu adjustments, and the perceived effects of coordination on program smoothness. While the protocol provided direction, the discussions remained flexible so participants could elaborate on issues they considered important. In addition to primary data, the study used secondary data in the form of program-related documents such as meeting minutes, implementation guidelines, internal reports, and relevant policy documents. These secondary data clarified formal arrangements and allowed comparison with actual practices described by participants, strengthening analytical depth.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis through a systematic and iterative process to identify patterns and core themes related to coordination in MBG implementation. All FGD sessions were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to preserve data accuracy. The analysis began with repeated readings of the transcripts to gain an overall sense of the data. Initial coding then identified meaningful text segments, particularly those related to coordination, communication, reporting, distribution, and perceived impacts. Coding was conducted both deductively, based on the research objectives and implementation framework, and inductively, based on field findings. Codes were then clustered into broader themes reflecting coordination patterns and challenges, such as informal communication practices, dominance of certain actors in decision-making, or hesitation in reporting problems. Throughout the analysis, findings across participant groups and data sources were continuously compared to identify similarities,

differences, and variations in perspective. Emergent themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and clear boundaries between themes. Data saturation was considered to have been reached when no substantially new coordination issues, actor positions, or explanatory patterns emerged from repeated review of the discussion material and supporting documents. In this study, recurrent themes such as one-way communication, weak reporting pathways, delivery delays, limited accommodation of special dietary needs, and uncertainty over accountability appeared consistently across participant groups, indicating sufficient thematic saturation for process-oriented analysis.

To maintain research reliability and rigor, several strategies were applied. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation by combining FGDs with document analysis and involving diverse stakeholder groups so that findings did not depend on a single perspective. Dependability was supported by transparently documenting the research process, from data collection procedures to analytic steps and key decisions during coding and theme development. Confirmability was supported by ensuring that interpretations always departed from participants' statements and empirical evidence rather than researchers' assumptions, and where possible by discussing initial interpretations with the research team to minimize individual bias. Ethically, participation in FGDs was voluntary and preceded by informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected by removing identifying information from transcripts and research outputs. Given the sensitivity of discussing coordination problems in a public program, FGDs were conducted with special attention to creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere so participants could speak honestly and openly. To further strengthen methodological transparency, the revised manuscript should also report the number of discussion sessions, the number of participants in each session, and the institutional distribution of participants in a separate methodological table. This addition would make the study design more auditable and respond more directly to expectations regarding qualitative rigor in case study research.

3. Results and Discussion

This section reports the core empirical themes from the case study and interprets their governance implications. For each theme, the results are stated succinctly (what was observed), followed by discussion (why it matters for implementation quality, accountability, and adaptation in the school SPPG service network).

3.1. Coordination Patterns and Role Allocation

Coordination between schools and SPPG was largely operational rather than institutionalized. Schools were positioned mainly as recipients responsible for receiving meals and managing on-site distribution, while SPPG dominated menu selection, production planning, and logistics decisions. Information exchange was predominantly one-way from SPPG to schools, and interactions typically occurred shortly before or during delivery, with no routine coordination forum for joint planning or review. This pattern was reflected in participants' accounts that program implementation remained strongly top-down and weakly coordinated at the local level. As one participant from Bappeda stated, "the MBG program is a top-down program initiated by the central government," while also noting that "the lack of reporting from SPPG to Bappeda" limited local oversight. Similarly, school actors emphasized that they mainly received and managed the consequences of implementation decisions rather than participating in planning them.

These results indicate an asymmetric coordination structure in which control over critical resources (production and delivery) concentrates decision authority in SPPG. While such centralization can streamline day-to-day delivery, it also narrows feedback and weakens co-production, making implementation less sensitive to school schedules, student needs, and emerging risks. Reliance on informal personal relationships may accelerate problem solving in specific instances. However, it also produces uneven performance across schools because coordination quality becomes contingent on individual initiative rather than shared procedures, highlighting the need for clearer role allocation and institutionalized coordination arrangements (Hadorn, 2024; Berends et al., 2016). Analytically, this suggests that MBG implementation in the study site was collaborative only in a limited operational sense: multiple actors were involved, but authority over substantive decisions remained concentrated. In this respect, the case more closely resembles a form of pseudo-collaboration or administratively centralized collaboration than a fully reciprocal collaborative governance arrangement.

3.2. Communication and Reporting Mechanisms

Communication and problem reporting were primarily conducted through informal messaging and brief verbal exchanges during the delivery process. Schools reported the absence of clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for reporting delays, food quality concerns, or menu changes, as well as uncertainty regarding the appropriate reporting channels. When complaints were communicated, follow-up and feedback were often inconsistent, and issues were rarely documented in a manner that allowed the tracking of recurrence or resolution. This weakness was explicitly raised during the FGD. A representative from Bappeda stated that “there has been insufficient reporting from the SPPG to Bappeda,” which had become a recurring concern. The same representative also noted that “schools are reluctant to report problems that occur because they fear potential sanctions resulting from regulations issued by the central government.” In the follow-up discussion, participants further explained that when delays or menu changes occurred, “schools usually communicate their concerns directly to the SPPG team,” indicating that reporting practices relied on ad hoc communication rather than on a standardized and traceable mechanism.

The predominance of informal communication suggests a governance gap: rapid contact is possible, but accountability and organizational learning remain limited. Unclear reporting lines can create a “low-reporting equilibrium” in which schools tolerate minor disruptions to avoid being perceived as uncooperative, thereby allowing small problems to accumulate into recurrent operational risks. Without documented feedback loops, reporting loses credibility as a mechanism of change, reducing incentives for early escalation, systematic correction, and preventive action. For this reason, the study does not classify communication as weak merely on impressionistic grounds, but on identifiable process indicators: the absence of routine reporting procedures, uncertainty regarding who should receive complaints, hesitation to report, and limited documentary traceability of follow-up. These features indicate not simply administrative imperfection, but a governance structure in which feedback is weakly institutionalized.

3.3. Distribution Performance and Menu Adjustments

Distribution delays were among the most frequently reported operational problems, requiring schools to adjust daily routines and, at times, disrupt teaching activities.

Menu changes also occurred and were not consistently communicated in advance, leaving schools to manage student and parent reactions with limited information. In addition, menu standardization constrained the accommodation of students with dietary restrictions (e.g., allergies or specific health conditions), and schools often relied on ad hoc workarounds such as advising affected students not to consume certain items.

These problems were repeatedly highlighted in the FGD. A school principal reported that “the implementation of the MBG program at his school had only been running for two weeks,” but had already encountered “a case of mild food poisoning involving five students” linked to uncertainty over students’ allergies. Another school participant stressed that “MBG distribution is still experiencing obstacles, both in terms of timing and implementation in the field,” while a parent representative noted “the inefficiency of the food distribution schedule” and complaints about “rice that had already gone cold” and “fruit that had started to spoil.” Participants in the follow-up discussion also acknowledged that menu changes could occur “for example, when ingredient stocks run out, such as eggs,” confirming that field-level adjustments were often reactive rather than planned.

These findings highlight a practical tension between centralized standardization and local adaptation. Standard menus and centralized production can protect equity and nutritional compliance at scale, but weak anticipatory coordination makes the system brittle: supply or logistics disruptions cascade into school-time disruption and communication burdens. Limited accommodation for dietary restrictions signals a gap in risk management and inclusivity, because responsibility is effectively shifted back to schools and families when there is no structured mechanism to register needs and operationalize adjustments. The relationship between weak coordination and these disruptions is therefore not incidental. When schools receive late information, cannot anticipate menu substitutions, and lack a formal mechanism for registering student-specific dietary needs, logistical disturbances become instructional disruptions and food-safety concerns. In theoretical terms, this illustrates how insufficient coordination capacity transforms what appears to be a technical delivery problem into a broader implementation and legitimacy problem.

3.4. Implementation Implications: Workload, Trust, and Sustainability

Weak coordination produced cumulative effects at the school and community levels. Schools faced increased administrative workload to manage delivery issues, respond to student complaints, and communicate with parents. Parents’ concerns about food quality and safety intensified when menus changed without notice or when information from schools was limited, and students’ acceptance of meals was influenced by perceived quality and service consistency. Recurring issues were often handled reactively, with limited evidence of systematic learning across actors. This pattern was visible in statements from parents, committees, and schools. One participant emphasized “there is concern among some parents about the safety of MBG food.” At the same time, another noted the importance of “two-way communication mechanisms.” so that schools and communities would have space to provide input openly. A school representative similarly requested that distribution problems be “follow up immediately,” showing that recurrent disruptions had created additional coordination burdens for school actors who were not formally empowered to resolve them.

Taken together, the results suggest that implementation quality in MBG depends not only on meeting formal standards but also on institutionalizing coordination as a routine governance function. Operational disruptions become politically salient when they shape perceptions of safety, reliability, and fairness; therefore, coordination failures can undermine legitimacy even in the absence of overt non-compliance. Strengthening implementation sustainability requires: (1) clearer role and accountability arrangements that legitimize school input beyond reception tasks; (2) standardized reporting and feedback protocols that enable traceability, learning, and timely correction; and (3) routine coordination forums and continuous technical support to align centralized standards with context-sensitive adaptation, consistent with evidence that routine informational meetings and transparent reporting are pivotal for sustaining trust and local accountability (Sobczyk et al., 2024). More broadly, the findings refine collaborative-governance discussions by showing that formal multi-actor involvement is insufficient when reciprocal communication, shared problem-solving, and accountable feedback are weak. In the present case, MBG implementation operated through a centralized administrative logic that relied on schools for reception and damage control, but not for meaningful co-governance. In this configuration, the school SPPG network can shift from reactive delivery toward continuous improvement and risk-informed management only if coordination is institutionalized as a shared, documented, and reviewable governance process rather than an informal operational adjustment.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzed the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) at the local level by focusing on coordination between schools and the Nutrition Food Production Center (SPPG) in Bojonegoro Regency. The findings show that the quality of coordination among key actors strongly influences MBG's implementation effectiveness. Coordination between schools and SPPG remains dominated by informal, operational, and largely one-way patterns, with decision-making authority more centralized in the food production and distribution unit. Rather than functioning as a fully collaborative arrangement, the school SPPG relationship in this case reflects a limited form of collaboration in which multiple actors are formally involved, but substantive coordination, feedback, and decision-making remain unevenly distributed.

The study also showed that weak communication and unclear reporting mechanisms contribute to recurring operational problems, such as delayed food distribution, menu changes without adequate prior notice, and limited accommodation of students' special dietary needs. These coordination failures not only disrupt school routines but also generate parents' concerns about food quality and safety. This ultimately affects stakeholder trust and students' acceptance of the program. In addition, the absence of a structured feedback mechanism limits opportunities for policy learning and continuous improvement at the local level. These conclusions are based not merely on general impressions but on process indicators identified across the data, including the absence of routine coordination forums, unclear reporting pathways, limited documentation of follow-up, and schools' restricted role in substantive decision-making. In this sense, weak coordination operates as the mechanism through which logistical disturbances are translated into administrative burden, reduced trust, and uneven program acceptance.

Academically, this study extends scholarship on the implementation of school-based nutrition programs by underscoring the importance of coordination as a

crucial governance dimension. More specifically, it contributes to the collaborative governance literature by showing that the formal presence of multiple actors does not necessarily produce substantive collaboration; under conditions of centralized control and weak reciprocal feedback, implementation may instead take the form of pseudo-collaboration or administrative centralization disguised as collaboration. Implementation challenges should not be understood as separate technical problems, but as governance issues that require strengthened collaborative coordination and institutionalized mechanisms among local actors. For policymakers, these findings suggest that improving coordination capacity at the local level needs to be integrated from the program design stage so that MBG's effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability can be better assured. Operationally, this study points to the need for a three-layer coordination mechanism consisting of: (1) strategic coordination through clear role allocation and regular inter-actor forums; (2) operational coordination through standardized communication, delivery adjustment, and dietary-accommodation procedures; and (3) feedback-accountability coordination through documented reporting, response tracking, and routine review. Future research can develop these findings through comparisons of coordination dynamics across regions, longitudinal examination of how coordination reforms affect trust and implementation stability over time, or mixed-method analysis linking governance quality with service and nutritional outcomes.

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