

Measuring Parents' Trust in the Halal Status of the Free Nutritious Meal Program at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine parents' trust in the halal status of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) Salatiga. A qualitative approach with a descriptive research design was employed. The participants consisted of parents whose children were enrolled in the MBG program at MIN Salatiga. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that parents' trust is shaped by four key factors: religious values, the service quality of the Nutritional Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG), transparency in food management, and halal certification. Parents expect the meals provided not only to meet students' nutritional requirements but also to comply with the Islamic principles of *halal* and *thayyib*. Furthermore, transparent information regarding food ingredient sourcing, processing procedures, and halal certification strengthens parents' confidence in the program. The study concludes that the effectiveness and public acceptance of the MBG program in Islamic primary schools depend not only on its ability to improve students' nutritional well-being but also on maintaining halal compliance, ensuring high-quality food services, and implementing transparent food governance. These findings highlight the importance of integrating halal assurance into school feeding programs to foster public trust and support the sustainability of government nutrition initiatives.

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INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is one of the government's initiatives to improve the health quality and nutritional fulfillment of school-age children (Azzahra et al., 2025). This program serves as a form of attention to students' nutritional needs in order to support their growth, development, and learning concentration within elementary education environments (Maulidya & Fitriani, 2025). The presence of the MBG program is not only viewed as a solution for nutritional fulfillment, but also as a strategic effort to support the creation of a healthy, intelligent, and productive generation (Wicaksono et al., 2025). In the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), this program carries broader significance because it is not only related to health aspects, but also closely connected to the religious values that form the foundation of madrasah education (Manalu et al., 2025).

As an Islamic-based educational institution, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah has a moral responsibility to ensure that the food consumed by students is not only nutritious, but also halal and *thayyib* (Nurdi & Ahmad, 2025). In Islam, the concept of halal is not merely related to food ingredients, but also encompasses the processes of preparation, storage, distribution,

and serving (Susilo & Maulani, 2025). Therefore, the halal status of food becomes an important concern for parents in supporting the implementation of the MBG program in madrasahs. Parents tend to have high expectations regarding the assurance of the halal status of the meals provided to their children while they are at school (Jamal & Adinda, 2026).

In Indonesia, halal product assurance has been regulated through Law Number 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Assurance, which emphasizes that products distributed and consumed by the public must have guaranteed halal status. This regulation demonstrates that halal aspects are not only a religious necessity for Muslim communities, but also a part of consumer protection. In the context of the MBG program, the implementation of halal standards is essential for building a sense of security and public trust, particularly among parents of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students (Al Mustaqim, 2023).

Parents' trust is an important factor in the successful implementation of the MBG program (Herdiana, 2025). The level of trust is influenced by various factors, such as the transparency of food providers, the availability of halal certification, school supervision, hygiene in food processing, and communication between the school and parents (Purwaningsih & Lawal, 2026). When parents feel confident about the quality and halal status of the food provided, support for the program will increase. On the other hand, a lack of information regarding the sources and food processing methods may lead to doubts and concerns among parents.

Field phenomena indicate that there are still members of the community who question the halal standards of food provided in school meal assistance programs. Many parents consider halal labels or halal certification as the main indicators in determining their level of trust in the food consumed by their children. In addition, the diversity of food providers involved in the MBG program presents its own challenges in ensuring the consistent implementation of halal standards in every school or madrasah (Fajrin et al., 2026).

Research on the MBG program has so far focused more on aspects of nutritional fulfillment, children's health, and the effectiveness of the program in supporting the learning process. Meanwhile, studies that specifically discuss parents' trust in the halal aspects of food within the MBG program, especially in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah environment, are still relatively limited. In fact, halal aspects are closely related to the religious culture of Indonesian society, the majority of whom are Muslim.

Based on these conditions, this research is important to conduct in order to understand parents' trust in the halal status of the Free Nutritious Meal Program at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This study is expected to provide an overview of parents' perspectives, expectations, and level of confidence regarding the halal assurance of the meals provided by the school. Furthermore, the findings of this research are expected to serve as evaluation material and recommendations for schools and program organizers in improving the quality of MBG services so that they are not only healthy and nutritious, but also in accordance with halal principles.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to gain an in-depth understanding of parents' trust in the halal status of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri Salatiga. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of parents regarding the meals provided through the MBG program, particularly concerning halal assurance and the role of the Nutritional Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) as the food provider.

The research subjects consisted of several parents of students at MIN Salatiga whose children participated in the MBG program. Informants were selected using a purposive

sampling technique by considering parents who understood the implementation of the program and were willing to provide information relevant to the focus of the study (Mulyana et al., 2024). Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, allowing the researcher to explore more deeply the level of parents' trust in the halal status of the food, the transparency of program management, and the importance of halal certification in the implementation of the MBG program. In addition to interviews, the study was also supported by documentation in the form of data and information related to the implementation of the program in the madrasah (Hasan et al., 2022).

Data analysis was carried out using qualitative analysis techniques, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The researcher selected relevant data, presented it descriptively, and then drew conclusions based on the research findings (Waruwu, 2024). To ensure data validity, the study employed source triangulation by comparing interview results from several parents, thereby obtaining more valid and objective data regarding parents' trust in the halal status of the MBG Program at MIN Salatiga.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is one of the government's efforts to improve the nutritional quality of students while also supporting a more optimal learning process (Jamal & Adinda, 2026). This program is designed to help fulfill the nutritional needs of school-age children so that they can grow and develop in a healthy and active manner, as well as maintain better concentration in the educational environment (Saavedra & Prentice, 2023). The implementation of the MBG program also serves as a strategic step in supporting the creation of a healthy and high-quality generation through the equitable provision of nutritious meals for students (Fajrin et al., 2026). In the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, this program has a broader meaning because it is not only related to health and educational aspects, but also connected to the religious values that characterize Islamic-based education (Purwaningsih & Lawal, 2026).

In its implementation, the MBG program involves not only the school, but is also supported by the Nutritional Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) as the provider and distributor of meals to schools (Prasetyo et al., 2026). The SPPG has an important responsibility in ensuring that the meals distributed to students meet nutritional standards, hygiene requirements, food safety regulations, and halal provisions in accordance with applicable regulations (Wicaksono et al., 2025). Starting from the selection of food ingredients, processing, packaging, and distribution to schools, all stages must be carried out in a controlled manner to maintain food quality. Therefore, the role of the SPPG is not merely as a meal provider, but also as an essential component in maintaining the continuity and success of the MBG program within the madrasah environment (Manalu et al., 2025).

The presence of the SPPG is a crucial factor in determining the quality, safety, and halal status of the meals received by students (Masruroh et al., 2025). For Muslim communities, especially parents of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students, the halal aspect of food holds a very important position because it is closely related to religious teachings and the formation of children's character from an early age (Susilo & Maulani, 2025). Therefore, parents' level of trust in the MBG program is directed not only toward the madrasah, but also toward the food management system implemented by the SPPG. Parents tend to pay attention to the transparency of food management, hygiene standards, sources of raw materials, and the existence of halal assurance in every menu provided to their children. The better the supervision and transparency carried out by both the school and the SPPG, the higher the level of parents' trust in the implementation of the MBG program at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

The Halal Status of Food as the Foundation of Parents' Trust

The interview findings indicate that the halal status of food is the primary factor shaping parents' trust in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri Salatiga. Parents consistently emphasized that meals provided through the program should fulfill not only nutritional requirements but also the Islamic principles of *halal* and *thayyib*. Since madrasahs are Islamic educational institutions, parents expect them to uphold religious values in every aspect of school life, including the provision of daily meals.

One parent explained:

"Because this is a madrasah, parents naturally expect the food provided to be truly halal. We trust that the school certainly pays attention to that." (Interview with a fourth-grade student's parent)

This statement illustrates that parents perceive the madrasah as more than an educational institution. It is also regarded as a trusted religious institution responsible for ensuring that food served to students complies with Islamic dietary principles. Consequently, parents' confidence in the MBG program is strongly influenced by their belief that the school consistently maintains halal standards.

The findings further reveal that parents' trust extends beyond the school itself to include the Nutritional Fulfillment Service Unit (*Satuan Pelayanan Pemenuhan Gizi—SPPG*), which is responsible for preparing and distributing meals. Parents recognized that halal assurance depends not only on the ingredients used but also on the integrity of the entire food management process.

As one participant stated:

"Now the meals come from a special MBG kitchen, so we also want to know whether the provider truly maintains the halal status of the ingredients and cooking process." (Interview with a fifth-grade student's parent)

This finding suggests that parents increasingly evaluate the credibility of the food provider rather than focusing solely on the meals received by their children. They expressed concerns regarding ingredient sourcing, food preparation procedures, kitchen sanitation, and distribution practices. In their view, halal compliance encompasses the entire supply chain rather than merely the absence of prohibited ingredients.

Another parent highlighted the relationship between halal assurance and psychological security:

"If the food is clearly halal and clean, parents feel more at ease letting their children eat at school every day." (Interview with a third-grade student's parent)

This response demonstrates that halal assurance contributes not only to religious compliance but also to parents' sense of safety and peace of mind. Transparent information regarding food preparation and certification reduces uncertainty and strengthens public confidence in the MBG program.

These findings support previous studies showing that halal is a comprehensive concept encompassing ingredient selection, processing methods, equipment hygiene, storage, and distribution practices rather than food ingredients alone (Masruroh et al., 2025). In the context of school feeding programs, halal assurance functions as an institutional trust mechanism because parents rely on schools and food providers to safeguard both the religious and physical well-being of their children.

From the perspective of Institutional Trust Theory, parents' trust emerges when institutions demonstrate competence, integrity, and value congruence. The madrasah and the SPPG are therefore expected not only to provide nutritionally balanced meals but also to ensure transparent halal governance throughout the food supply process. Consistent

implementation of halal standards reinforces institutional credibility, whereas insufficient transparency may generate uncertainty and reduce public confidence.

Overall, the findings indicate that the success of the MBG program in Islamic primary schools depends not only on nutritional quality but also on effective halal governance. Transparent food management, reliable service delivery, and comprehensive halal assurance collectively strengthen parents' trust and enhance public acceptance of the program.

This is in line with the Islamic principles of halal and thayyib, which emphasize that food must not only be lawful in substance, but also good, clean, healthy, and safe for consumption (Al Mustaqim, 2023). The concept of thayyib indicates that food quality should provide health benefits and be free from anything that may harm the body (Syarifah et al., 2024). In the MBG program, the implementation of halal and thayyib principles is highly important because the meals are consumed regularly by students within the school environment. Therefore, the better the implementation of hygiene, safety, and halal standards in the food provision process, the higher the level of parents' trust in the implementation of the MBG program at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

The Role of SPPG in Building Parents' Trust

The interview findings reveal that the quality of services provided by the Nutritional Fulfillment Service Unit (*Satuan Pelayanan Pemenuhan Gizi/SPPG*) is a key determinant of parents' trust in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program. Parents generally perceived that the credibility of the program depends not only on the nutritional value of the meals but also on the competence of the institution responsible for food preparation and distribution. Government and school supervision of the SPPG was viewed as an important mechanism for ensuring that meals meet standards of nutrition, hygiene, and halal compliance.

One parent explained:

"If the SPPG is truly supervised by the government and the school, then we certainly feel more at ease because it means there is quality control." (Interview with a third-grade student's parent)

This finding suggests that parents associate institutional supervision with service reliability. The involvement of schools and government agencies increases confidence that food preparation follows established quality standards and minimizes the possibility of negligence in food management. Consequently, effective oversight enhances the perceived credibility of both the SPPG and the MBG program.

Despite this positive perception, the interviews also identified concerns regarding the transparency of information provided by the SPPG. Several parents reported that they had limited knowledge about food preparation procedures, kitchen sanitation, and operational standards.

One respondent stated:

"We still do not know much about what the SPPG kitchen is like. Sometimes parents only receive the final result." (Interview with a sixth-grade student's parent)

This response indicates that transparency remains a critical prerequisite for strengthening public trust. Parents expect access to information not only about the nutritional composition of school meals but also about ingredient sourcing, food processing practices, hygiene protocols, and distribution procedures. The absence of such information may generate uncertainty, even when the program operates effectively.

Another important finding concerns the consistency of food quality. Parents emphasized that their trust is reinforced by their children's daily experiences with the meals

provided. Clean, safe, nutritious, and appealing food was consistently identified as an indicator of high-quality service.

As one parent noted:

“If the food is clean, children enjoy it, and there are no health problems, parents will definitely trust the program even more.” (Interview with a second-grade student’s parent)

This finding demonstrates that parents evaluate the effectiveness of the MBG program through observable outcomes. Positive eating experiences and the absence of food-related health issues strengthen confidence in both the SPPG and the school as responsible institutions. Conversely, declining food quality or negative experiences could undermine public trust despite the program's broader policy objectives.

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that the SPPG plays a strategic role in ensuring the successful implementation of the MBG program through effective food procurement, preparation, packaging, and distribution (Fajrin et al., 2026; Masrurroh et al., 2025). Furthermore, service quality has been identified as a significant predictor of public trust in government-supported nutrition programs (Prasetyo et al., 2026). From the perspective of Institutional Trust Theory, trust develops when institutions demonstrate competence, integrity, and accountability. In the context of the MBG program, parents interpret effective supervision, transparent communication, and consistent service quality as indicators of institutional competence. These factors reduce uncertainty and reinforce confidence that the SPPG is capable of fulfilling its responsibility to provide meals that are nutritious, hygienic, and compliant with halal standards.

Overall, the findings indicate that the success of the SPPG should not be assessed solely by its capacity to distribute meals on a large scale. Equally important are its ability to maintain consistent service quality, implement transparent food governance, and ensure accountability throughout the food management process. Strengthening these aspects is essential for sustaining parents' trust and enhancing long-term public acceptance of the MBG program in Islamic primary schools.

Halal Certification and Transparency in MBG Management

The interview findings indicate that halal certification is a critical factor influencing parents' trust in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program. Parents perceived halal certification as more than a legal requirement; it represents an official assurance that meals provided to students comply with Islamic dietary principles and national halal regulations. For parents of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students, halal certification enhances confidence that food ingredients, preparation methods, and distribution processes have undergone appropriate verification and supervision.

One parent explained:

“If there is halal certification from an official institution, parents will certainly feel more confident about the MBG meals.” (Interview with a fifth-grade student's parent)

This finding suggests that halal certification functions as a symbol of institutional credibility. Parents perceive certified food providers as more accountable and trustworthy because certification reflects compliance with established halal standards. Within the context of Islamic primary schools, such assurance carries additional significance, as madrasahs are expected to uphold religious values in every aspect of student welfare, including food provision.

Beyond halal certification, transparency emerged as another essential determinant of parents' trust. Participants consistently expressed the need for clear information regarding ingredient sourcing, food preparation procedures, kitchen hygiene, and the halal certification status of the SPPG. Parents believed that access to such information would reduce uncertainty and strengthen their confidence in the MBG program.

One participant stated:

“In my opinion, it would be better if the school explained that the catering service or kitchen already has halal certification so that parents do not keep wondering about it.”
(Interview with a fourth-grade student's parent)

This response demonstrates that transparency extends beyond providing meals to ensuring effective communication between schools, the SPPG, and parents. Rather than evaluating only the final product, parents also wish to understand the processes behind food management. Open communication therefore serves as an important mechanism for increasing accountability and public acceptance of the program.

Interestingly, the interviews also revealed that institutional trust in the madrasah remains an important factor shaping parents' acceptance of the MBG program. Several participants indicated that they trusted the school to select qualified food providers and ensure that meals were prepared in accordance with Islamic values.

One parent commented:

“I trust that the school will certainly choose the best food provider for the children.”
(Interview with a first-grade student's parent)

This finding indicates that parents' confidence is not based solely on halal certification but is also influenced by the reputation and credibility of the madrasah. Schools are viewed as institutions responsible not only for students' academic development but also for safeguarding their moral, religious, and physical well-being. Consequently, parents believe that the madrasah has both the competence and the ethical responsibility to oversee the implementation of the MBG program.

These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that halal certification enhances consumer confidence by providing formal assurance of compliance with Islamic dietary standards (Bukhari, 2023; Maghfirotn et al., 2022; Mustika, 2025). In addition, transparency has been identified as a key element of effective public service governance because it reduces information asymmetry and strengthens institutional legitimacy (Fajrin et al., 2026). Within the MBG program, transparency regarding food procurement, preparation, and distribution enables parents to verify that halal standards are consistently implemented throughout the food supply chain.

From the perspective of Institutional Trust Theory, trust develops when institutions demonstrate competence, integrity, and openness. In this study, halal certification represents institutional integrity by providing formal evidence of compliance with religious standards, while transparent communication reflects organizational accountability. Likewise, parents' confidence in the madrasah illustrates the importance of institutional reputation in reducing uncertainty surrounding government-supported nutrition programs. These dimensions collectively strengthen parents' trust in both the school and the SPPG as responsible actors in the implementation of the MBG program.

Overall, the findings suggest that public acceptance of the MBG program depends not only on the nutritional quality of school meals but also on the integration of halal assurance, transparent governance, and institutional credibility. Strengthening collaboration between the madrasah, the SPPG, and halal certification authorities is therefore essential for sustaining parents' trust and ensuring the long-term success of the MBG program in Islamic primary schools.

CONCLUSION.

This study concludes that parents' trust in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri Salatiga is primarily shaped by the integration of halal assurance, service quality, transparency, and institutional credibility. Among these factors, the halal status of food serves as the foundation of parents' trust, reflecting their expectation

that school meals should comply not only with nutritional standards but also with the Islamic principles of *halal* and *thayyib*. Furthermore, the quality of services provided by the Nutritional Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG), supported by effective supervision, transparent communication regarding food management, and halal certification, reinforces parents' confidence in the program. Institutional trust in the madrasah also plays a significant role, as parents perceive the school as responsible for safeguarding students' religious, moral, and physical well-being. Therefore, the long-term success and public acceptance of the MBG program in Islamic primary schools depend not only on providing nutritionally balanced meals but also on strengthening halal governance, ensuring transparent food management, maintaining high-quality services, and fostering collaboration among schools, the SPPG, and halal certification authorities.

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