

Research Article

FREE SCHOOL MEALS POLICY: LESSONS LEARNED FROM AROUND THE WORLD FOR INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the implementation of free school meals policies worldwide. Based on the campaign promises of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, this program is expected to address four main issues: stunting, improving nutrition, enhancing academic achievement, and alleviating extreme poverty. The research adopts a literature review approach, utilising Scopus-indexed sources alongside bibliometric and content analysis to examine global trends, impacts, and challenges associated with such programs. The findings reveal that free school meal programs make a significant contribution to students' nutritional status, cognitive development, and socioeconomic well-being. However, challenges related to financial sustainability, equitable distribution, and food waste management remain critical obstacles to practical implementation. Lessons from various countries suggest that successful programs require strong political commitment, efficient resource allocation, and multi-sectoral collaboration. In the Indonesian context, implementing a large-scale free school meal initiative demands careful planning and stakeholder engagement to ensure sustainability and effectiveness. This study concludes that while the program holds substantial potential to address pressing social challenges, further research is necessary to evaluate its feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and long-term impact in Indonesia. A comprehensive approach involving policymakers, educators, health experts, and local communities is recommended to support the successful implementation of this initiative, ensuring that it aligns with national development goals and international best practices

Keywords: free school meals; students; public welfare; poverty; literature review

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INTRODUCTION

The campaign promises of presidential and vice-presidential candidate pair Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka regarding free school meals for students at schools in the 2024 election are in the spotlight of Indonesian society. The initiative to provide nutritious food for schoolchildren throughout Indonesia aims to address four key issues simultaneously: stunting, improving nutrition, enhancing academic achievement, and alleviating extreme poverty (Tempo.co, 2024). In this way, the program primarily aims to enhance societal welfare by investing in schoolchildren.

Poverty and stunting are serious problems in Indonesia that require serious attention. Poverty is a significant factor in the inability to access adequate nutrition, thereby hampering physical growth and brain development (De & Chattopadhyay, 2019; Galler et al., 2021; Siddiqui et al., 2020; Vilar-Compte et al., 2021). Adequate nutritional intake is considered essential for the growth and development of children. Specifically, it was found that adequate nutrition and nutritional intake will also have a positive impact on the quality of education (Nyaradi et al., 2016; Spronk et al., 2014), with the consideration that children who receive a nutritious lunch are expected to have better concentration and absorption of knowledge at school (Anderson et al., 2018; Forester et al., 2023). So, with adequate nutritional intake, it is hoped that children's health and productivity will improve. Therefore, the free school meals program for school children is expected to have a positive impact on the welfare of society.

The free school meals program for school students is not a recent breakthrough. Many developed and developing countries have long implemented this policy. This program has been recognised as an effective strategy for improving children's welfare, increasing school participation, and overcoming nutritional problems (Bundy et al., 2009; Drake et al., 2017). Finland is considered the best and most sustainable model in the context of education, with its free school lunch program being an integral part of the education system for eight decades (Kairiene & Sprindziunas, 2016; Tikkanen &

Urho, 2009). This demonstrates Finland's long-term commitment to delivering high-quality education and promoting children's well-being.

The Asian giant, which also has a strong reputation in the field of education, Japan, has been adopting the free school lunch program for decades as an integral part of its education system. Apart from providing nutritious food, the free school meals program in Japanese schools also emphasises nutritional education and the development of social skills through the active participation of students in the process of serving and cleaning food (Izumi et al., 2020). This helps teach students about the importance of a balanced diet and maintaining hygiene when eating. Additionally, this program fosters an inclusive environment and promotes the development of students' social skills.

A densely populated country like India is also a good example in the context of free school lunch programs. The mid-day meal scheme in India is the most extensive free school meals program in the world (Chakrabarti et al., 2021; Kaur, 2021; Paltasingh & Bhue, 2022). This program aims to provide healthy food to children from underprivileged families, thereby helping overcome the problem of malnutrition and increasing school participation. The scheme has also been proven to have a positive impact on student school attendance and reduce dropout rates (Assan et al., 2020; Jayaraman & Simroth, 2015; Paltasingh & Bhue, 2022). In this way, this program not only helps overcome the problem of malnutrition but also increases students' learning motivation and concentration. In addition, by increasing student attendance at school, this program also has the potential to create a younger generation that is more educated, which in turn may help reduce poverty levels in the future.

Numerous studies on free school meals for school students have been conducted by researchers from around the world. However, research on this topic has not been explored in Indonesia, which is understandable considering that the country does not yet have a similar policy. This research aims to conduct an in-depth analysis through a bibliometric review and content analysis of the impact and effectiveness of the free school meals program for school children in overcoming several problems mentioned

at the beginning of the study. The author aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits, challenges, and opportunities associated with implementing a free school meals program for school children, drawing on lessons learned from cases in other countries that have implemented similar programs for an extended period. This will serve as the basis for policymakers to enhance the program's quality and ensure it has maximum impact in addressing the issues of stunting and poverty in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was conducted through a literature review of articles related to free school meals programs or policies for students in schools. The database source used is Scopus, one of the largest and most comprehensive databases in the field of science (Schotten et al., 2017). It is the appropriate choice because it provides access to a wide range of relevant scientific journals. Furthermore, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol was employed to enhance the transparency and replicability of the results for other researchers. The VOSviewer application is used to map Co-occurrence and Co-authorship.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Period 2013-2023	Unrelated topic
English	Duplication
Article	Non-article
Finals	In press

Source: Processed by the author (2024)

The implementation mechanism involves organised and structured steps, starting from selecting research questions, conducting a literature search, selecting studies, extracting data, and analysing data, to reporting results. This process ensures that all steps are carried out carefully and following established methodological

standards. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are outlined in Table 1. Then, the process of searching and filtering articles is carried out in four steps: searching articles from databases, filtering articles based on period, filtering articles based on document type and publication stage, and filtering articles based on language. For clearer stages, see Figure 1.

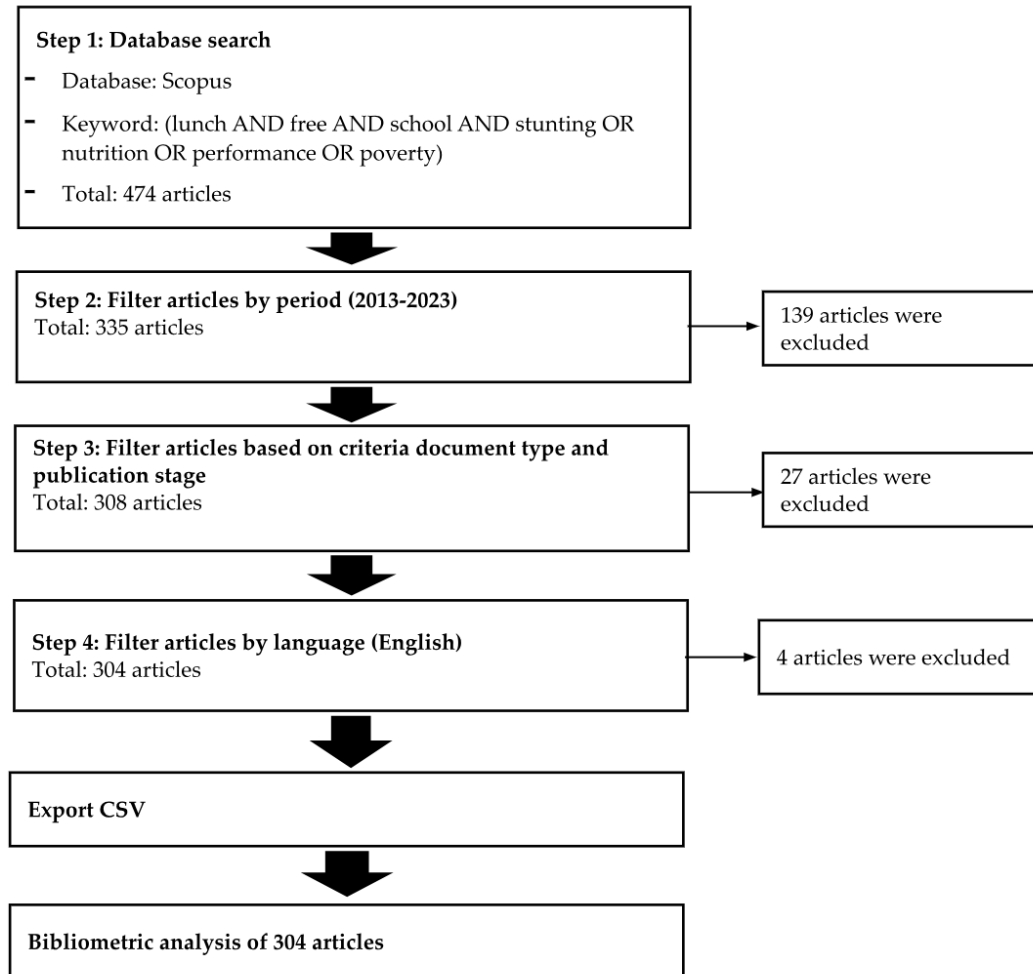


Figure 1. Bibliometric Search and Filtration

After screening the documents, the author identified a total of 304 articles that met the predetermined inclusion criteria. This article was then used in the analysis of this research. All articles are exported in CSV format for analysis in the bibliometric

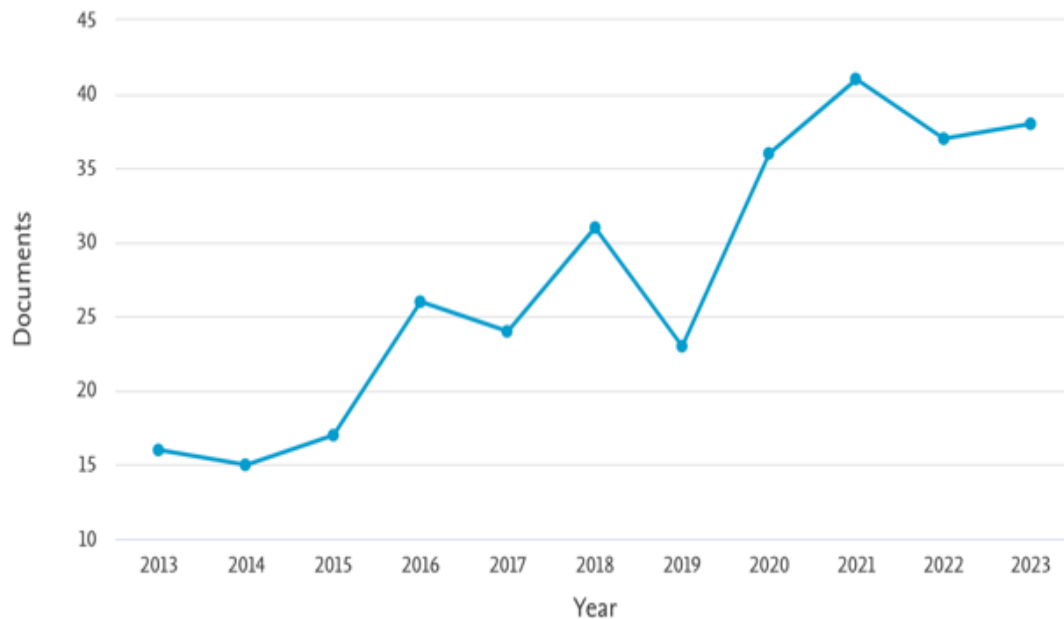
assistance application VOSviewer. For content analysis, all documents are downloaded in PDF format so they can be analysed. Thus, the analysis of the findings seeks to see:

- (i) What are the trends in the publication of free school meals for students in schools?
- (ii) How is Co-authorship between authors and the authors' country affiliation?
- (iii) What impact does the free school meals policy have on students at school?
- and (iv) What obstacles do several countries face in free school lunch policies?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Publication and citation trends

To thoroughly analyse research publication trends regarding free school meals for students worldwide, we will draw on data sourced from the Scopus database. This analysis will focus on the annual publication figures from 2013 to 2023, allowing us to identify significant patterns and shifts over the past decade.



world for the period 2013-2023

From Figure 2 above, we observe a notable upward trend in the number of research publications focused on free school meals for students, exhibiting some variability throughout the years. During the initial phase, from 2013 to 2015, the

volume of publications remained comparatively stable, reflecting a consistent interest in the topic. However, a pronounced shift occurred in 2016, marked by a significant annual increase that accelerated particularly between 2020 and 2021. This period stands out as a peak in research activity, suggesting a growing recognition of the importance of this issue. Despite experiencing slight dips in publication numbers in 2019 and 2022, these figures remain remarkably elevated when compared to earlier years, indicating sustained and escalating scholarly engagement with the subject of free school meals.

This increase in the number of publications may reflect increased interest and awareness of the importance of free school meals for the well-being of school students worldwide. Other factors that may contribute include increased attention to nutrition and education issues, as well as encouragement from government and non-government organisations to address stunting and poverty and improve academic performance through free school meals programs. In addition, this increase in the number of publications also shows that this topic is increasingly recognised as an essential and relevant research area at the global level. This can foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among researchers from various countries, enabling the development of more effective solutions to address global child welfare issues.

Table 2. Top 10 Journals with the most publications for the 2013-2023 period

Source Title	Quartile	Total Articles
Nutrients	Q1	22
Journal of School Health	Q1	19
Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics	Q1	14
Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior	Q2	9
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	Q1	7
Teachers College Record	Q2	7

Public Health Nutrition	Q1	6
Childhood Obesity	Q1	5
Developmental Psychology	Q1	5
Federal Register	Q4	5

Source: Processed by the author (2024)

According to Table 2 above, the Nutrients journal is the one that publishes the most research on free school meals for school students worldwide, with 22 articles. This journal is classified in quartile 1 (Q1), indicating that it has a high impact in the field. Furthermore, the Journal of School Health and the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics are also journals that publish a significant amount of research related to this topic, with 19 and 14 articles, respectively. These two journals are also classified in quartile 1 (Q1), indicating that they also have a good reputation in their fields.

Meanwhile, other journals also make significant contributions to the publication of research on free school meals for school students. Some of these journals fall into quartile 1 (Q1) or quartile 2 (Q2), indicating that they have also had a considerable impact in their respective fields. Only the Federal Register journal (quartile 4/Q4) has the lowest impact among all the journals mentioned above.

Table 3. Top 10 articles with the most citations

Title	Year	Source Title	Cited by
Uneven Playing Field? Assessing the Teacher Quality Gap Between Advantaged and Disadvantaged Students	2015	Educational Researcher	204
Family income, school attendance, and academic achievement in elementary school	2014	Developmental Psychology	158

New school meal regulations increase fruit consumption and do not increase total plate waste	2015	Childhood Obesity	156
School-based mindfulness instruction: An RCT	2016	Pediatrics	150
Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: A systematic review	2021	Nutrients	106
An Experiential Cooking and Nutrition Education Program Increases Cooking Self-Efficacy and Vegetable Consumption in Children in Grades 3–8	2016	Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior	96
Is Free and Reduced-Price Lunch a Valid Measure of Educational Disadvantage?	2018	Educational Researcher	94
The link between school environments and student academic performance	2017	Urban Forestry and Urban Greening	92
Effect of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act on the Nutritional Quality of Meals Selected by Students and School Lunch Participation Rates	2016	JAMA Pediatrics	90
The contribution of the USDA school breakfast and lunch program meals to student daily dietary intake	2017	Preventive Medicine Reports	83

Source: Processed by the author (2024)

From Table 3 above, the article with the title “Uneven Playing Field? Assessing the Teacher Quality Gap Between Advantaged and Disadvantaged Students”,

published in 2015 in the Educational Researcher journal, received the highest number of citations, namely 204 citations. This suggests that the article has had a significant impact on the academic literature regarding free school meals for school students. Furthermore, other articles published in the top 10 journals (Nutrients, Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour, Childhood Obesity, Developmental Psychology), listed in the previous table, were also included among the top 10 articles that received numerous citations from several researchers during the 2013 period. -2023. This indicates that these articles have had a substantial impact on the academic literature regarding free school meals for students worldwide.

The increase in citations indicates that these articles are considered relevant and essential by researchers in the field. They may present valuable findings, innovative research methods, or other vital contributions to our understanding of the impact of free school meals on the well-being of school students. As such, these articles not only provided valuable insights to initial readers but also continued to impact subsequent research and policy development in this area. This confirms the importance of these journals as reliable sources of knowledge in our understanding of the topic of free school lunches and their implications.

Co-authorship

Co-authorship analysis provides essential insights into the collaborative dynamics among researchers in the field of free school lunch research from 2013 to 2023. This method allows for the identification of specific research communities and subfields, shedding light on the collaborative networks that exist within this area of study. Furthermore, it enables the measurement of the strength and nature of collaboration between authors, providing a comprehensive overview of how researchers work together to advance knowledge and understanding.

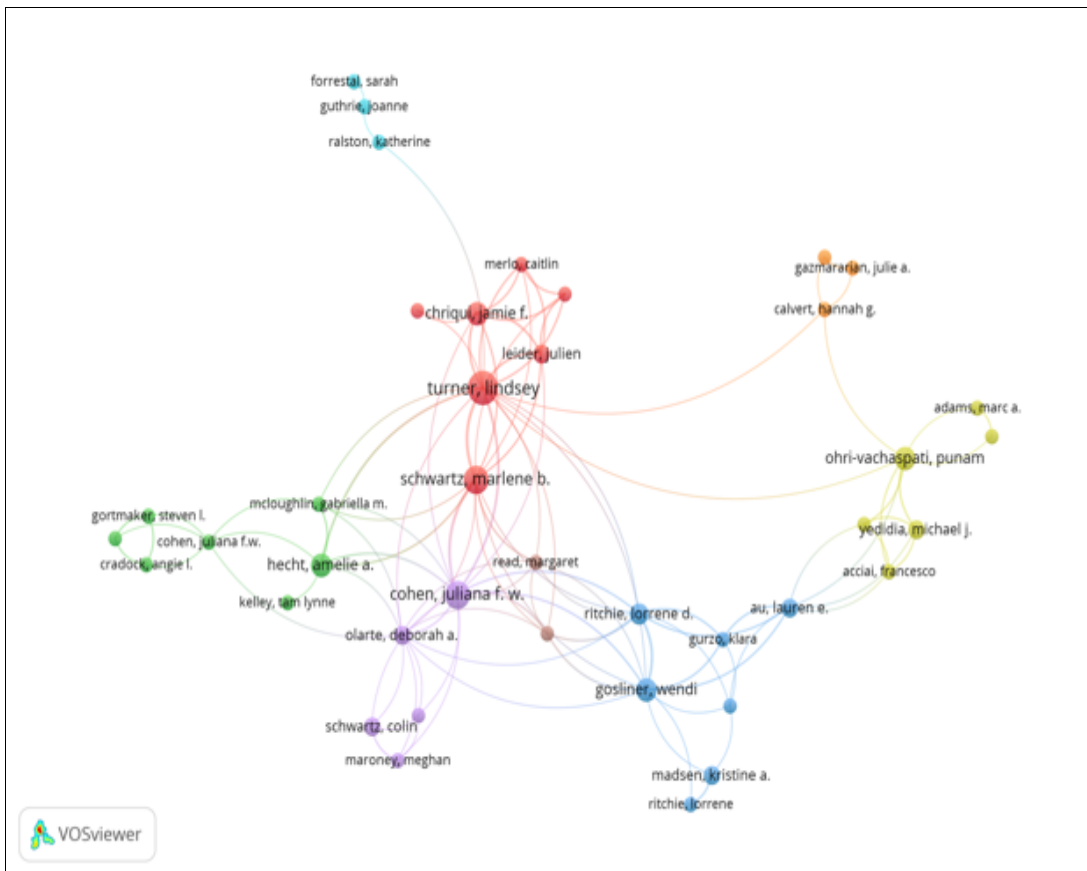


Figure 3. Co-authorship Author Analysis Unit

A total of 1,132 authors are involved in research on free lunches for school students during the 2013-2023 period, indicating significant interest from the academic community in this topic. Even though many authors are involved, based on Figure 3 above, only 40 articles can be analysed in the context of Co-authorship (i.e., authors involved in writing at least two articles). This data shows that only a few authors are involved in at least 2 articles. In contrast, others may be more inclined to work alone. These articles were ultimately divided into eight different clusters, with the largest cluster comprising 7 articles, while the smallest cluster consisted of only 2 articles. Furthermore, a total of 109 connections or relationships between authors were identified in the Co-authorship analysis. This indicates a high level of collaboration among researchers in this field. And the total strength or intensity of all connections

between authors is 169. All this information can help direct further research, identify potential new collaborations, and broaden the scope of research in the chosen field.

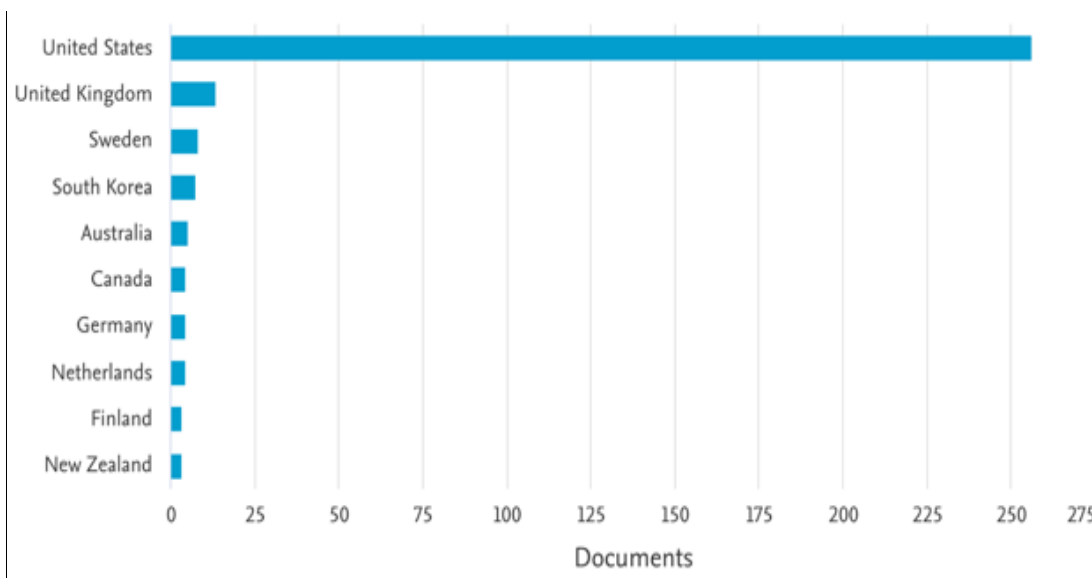


Figure 4. Author's Country

Figure 4 above provides a detailed overview of the contributions made by various countries to the research on free school meals for students, spanning the decade from 2013 to 2023. The United States stands out as the leading contributor, boasting an impressive total of 256 published articles on this topic. This dominance is not surprising, given the country's extensive and well-established education and research infrastructure, along with a vibrant academic community that exhibits a keen interest in exploring issues related to free school meals.

In second place is the United Kingdom (UK), which, despite being only one rank behind the United States, has published a markedly lower total of 13 articles. This disparity highlights the substantial gap in publication between the two countries, yet it still underscores the UK's relevance and commitment to advancing research in this field. Following the UK, Sweden and South Korea have shown commendable engagement in this research area, with each contributing between 7 and 8 publications. These countries illustrate a growing recognition of the importance of nutrition in

educational settings, emphasising the global interest in the impact of free school meals on student well-being.

Additionally, a range of other nations, including Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, and New Zealand, have each contributed to the scholarly discourse with their articles, totalling between 3 and 5 pieces. Furthermore, several other countries, while contributing on a smaller scale, have collectively published one to two articles each. Overall, these statistics clearly illustrate the United States' leadership in research concerning free school lunches, while also acknowledging valuable, albeit smaller, contributions from a diverse array of other countries. The data collectively reflect a growing global awareness of the critical role that free school meals play in supporting student health and academic success.

Co-Occurrence

The exploration of research surrounding free school meals for students can be extensively elucidated through Co-occurrence analysis. This method examines the relationships between keywords, topics, or concepts that frequently appear together within scholarly articles. This analytical approach enables researchers to gain valuable insights into emerging trends, key areas of focus, and the interconnectivity of various dimensions related to the subject. By conducting a Co-occurrence analysis for the period spanning 2013 to 2023, one can uncover significant developments and shifts in research dynamics, highlighting how discussions around free school meals have evolved and diversified over the years.

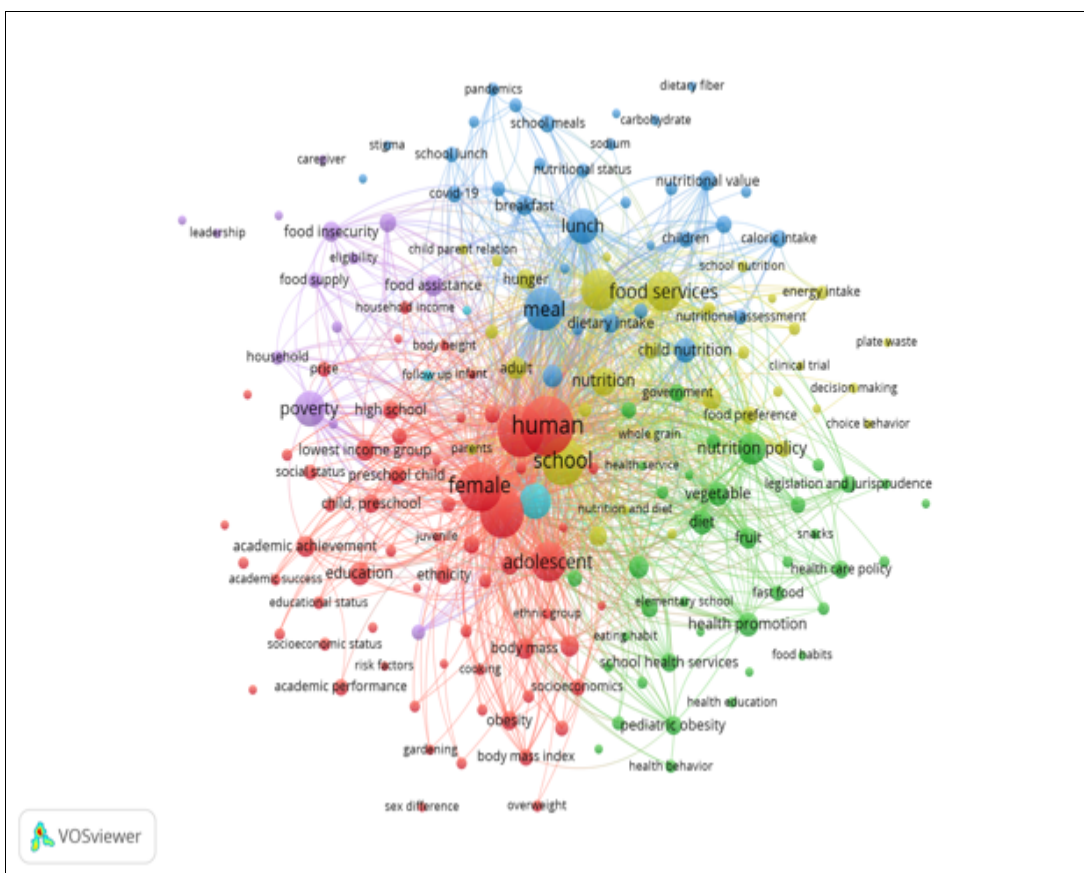


Figure 5. Co-occurrence Network Visualisation

Figure 5 illustrates that VOSviewer produces six main clusters. Each cluster represents a group of keywords that are closely related to one another based on their frequency of occurrence and the relationships between them. The size of each node or node indicates the frequency with which a particular keyword appears. The larger the node, the more often the keyword appears in the text, and vice versa. Then, the line connecting the nodes shows the frequency with which the two keywords appear together. The thicker the line, the more often the keywords appear together in the text. Furthermore, nodes that have the same colour are in the same cluster. This helps in identifying groups of keywords that are closely related. The closer the two nodes are, the more often the keywords appear together in the text. Conversely, the greater the

[illegible]

grouping clusters using network visualisation, another

The change in colour from dark to light signifies a shift in focus that has long been acknowledged, to one that is now gaining attention in research.

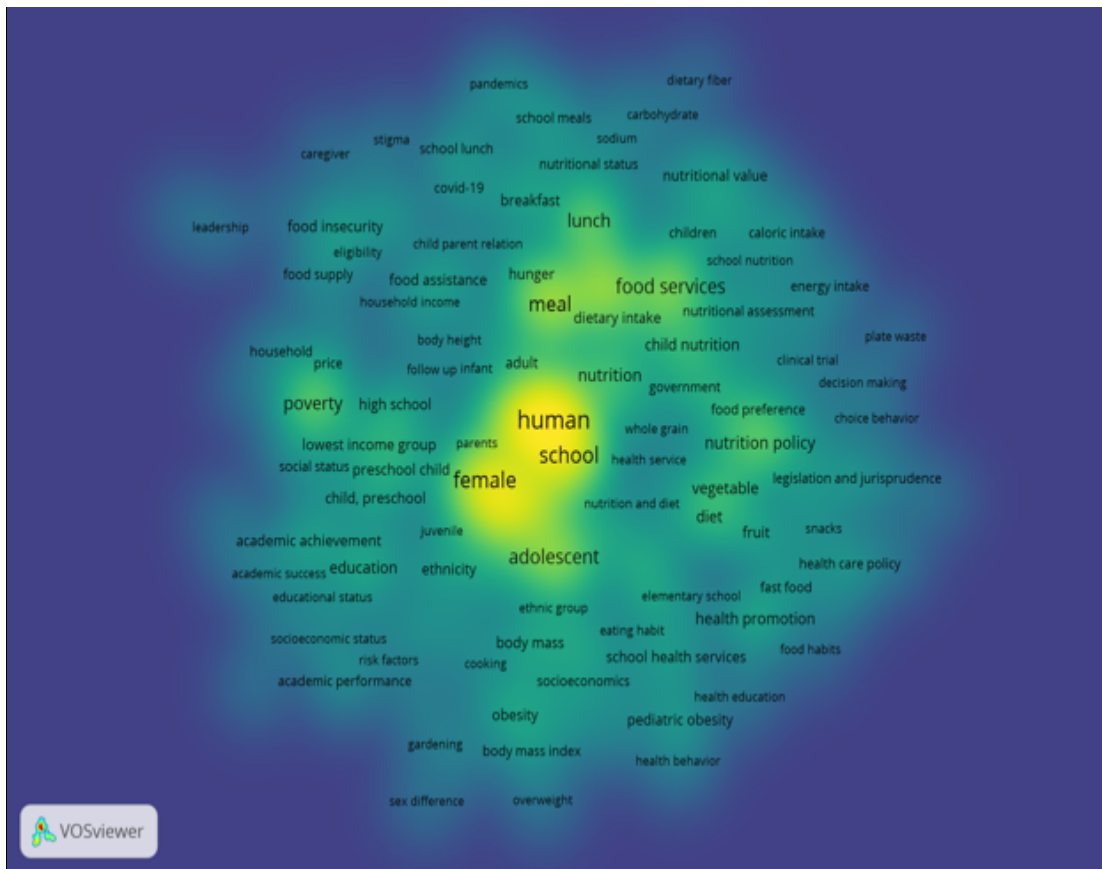


Figure 7. Density Co-occurrence Visualisation

Apart from viewing the history of research publications, density visualisation can also be used in Vosviewer. The results of data processing, as shown in Figure 7, indicate a difference in density between items and other items. The level of saturation is indicated by yellow, where the intensity of the yellow colour corresponds to the frequency of the topic's discussion in previous research. Conversely, the fainter the level of saturation, the more research themes remain to be explored. From the picture, the keywords "human" and "school" are the most frequently used in research. Keywords that are rarely researched include leadership, gardening, dietary fibre, plate

waste, and others. From themes that are rarely explored in research, there is an opportunity for studies related to these themes to be conducted.

Global Insights for Indonesia

Free school meals may seem straightforward, but behind this program lies a broad and diverse set of benefits. With the many benefits it offers, free school lunch programs are a valuable investment in the well-being of children and the future of society. Reflecting on the experiences of several countries that have previously implemented this program, it is possible to address the four main problems that need to be resolved—stunting, improving nutrition, increasing academic achievement, and alleviating extreme poverty—if the program is well-planned and managed. Therefore, Indonesia must be able to utilise best practices from other countries in designing and implementing policies.

According to the number of scientific publications, the United States is far ahead of other countries. It must be acknowledged that the United States is a developed country with advantages in nearly all fields, including its school lunch programs. The United States has a program called the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which is one of the oldest and largest government-sponsored school lunch programs (Gaddis & Coplen, 2018). NSLP is not entirely free for all students; however, the program provides free or reduced-price meals to eligible students based on their family income level (Domina et al., 2018; AE Schwartz & Rothbart, 2020; Tan et al., 2020). Considering the large budget and infrastructure required to manage the free school meals program, the NSLP can serve as a reference for the Indonesian government in designing and implementing a similar program.

The NSLP has demonstrated flexibility in determining beneficiary eligibility criteria (Kim & Joo, 2020), allowing more students in need to benefit from the program successfully. Not only does NSLP provide lunch, but it also prioritises the nutritional aspects of food by emphasising the consumption of fruits, vegetables, and healthy proteins (Joyce et al., 2018; Poole et al., 2020; Stern et al., 2023; Thorndike et al.,

2022). The educational components integrated into NSLP have helped raise awareness of the importance of healthy eating and active lifestyles among students (Meng et al., 2018). In addition, the NSLP is regularly evaluated and updated to ensure compliance with applicable nutritional requirements and guidelines (Byker et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2016; Tabak & Moreland-Russell, 2015). By adopting the principles and best practices of the NSLP, Indonesia can enhance its free school meals program to achieve better health and educational outcomes for future generations.

Studies on free school meals for school students rarely discuss stunting, particularly because most research is conducted in Western countries, where stunting is not a significant issue. Instead, their focus is more on treating obesity in students (Adams et al., 2020; Cantarero et al., 2016; Gajo et al., 2019; Hawkins et al., 2018). However, if the Indonesian government attempts to address the stunting problem through a free school meals program, the only country that can serve as a reference is India. Given that the country has similar demographic characteristics to Indonesia, experiences and findings from India may be more relevant and can be better adapted to the Indonesian context.

Many studies look at the impact of the free school meals program on the nutritional needs of students at school (AE Schwartz & Rothbart, 2020; Stern et al., 2023; Thorndike et al., 2022; Vilar-Compte et al., 2021). This large body of research reflects the great interest in understanding the effects of these programs on children's health and development. These studies often involve nutritional evaluations to measure students' nutritional intake before and after the program is implemented. The results can provide valuable insight into whether the program was successful in increasing nutritional intake, as well as its impact on students' health and academic performance. With a better understanding of how free school meals programs impact student nutrition, governments can make more informed and effective policy decisions to improve the well-being of children in schools.

Speaking more specifically about improving student academic performance. Free school meals can affect students' academic performance both directly and

indirectly (Cohen, Hecht, McLoughlin, et al., 2021). Directly, adequate nutritional intake from school food can increase students' energy, concentration, and cognitive abilities (Roberts et al., 2022). Adequate nutrition plays a crucial role in brain development and cognitive function, which in turn can significantly impact learning ability and academic performance. Indirectly, free school meal programs can also affect academic performance through factors such as student attendance and overall health (Heim et al., 2022; Shaw et al., 2015). When students get adequate meals at school, they tend to be healthier and have fewer absences due to nutrition-related health problems. Apart from that, the existence of this program can also help alleviate psychological pressure for students from low-income families, allowing them to focus better on their education without worrying about food. Thus, free school meals have the potential to provide necessary support for students' academic performance, both through directly increasing nutritional intake and through their impact on students' health, attendance, and other factors.

The free school meals program also has a significant impact from a socio-economic perspective. Free school meals have a positive impact on the welfare of disadvantaged students (Cullen & Chen, 2017; Gordanier et al., 2020; Guio, 2023). By providing free food at schools, this program can alleviate the financial burden on low-income families, enabling them to meet their basic needs and invest in other necessities (Bakhshinyan et al., 2019; Marcus & Yewell, 2022; Wang & Cheng, 2022). Apart from that, lunch can also be a moment to facilitate social inclusion among students, especially togetherness between students from different economic backgrounds. Eating together at school is a valuable opportunity for children to learn important values about friendship, togetherness and sharing (Janhonen et al., 2016; Whiting et al., 2022). This can certainly strengthen social ties between students and promote a culture of cooperation and care within the school environment. Overall, the free school lunch program is an investment in well-being; it is an effective strategy for strengthening the foundations of health while reducing social inequality, a crucial aspect of children's development.

The free school meals program, although offering significant benefits, also faces several challenges that must be addressed to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness in providing benefits to students and the broader community. One of the main challenges is program financing. The free school meals program requires substantial funding to provide food to all students who need it (Baek et al., 2019; Gaddis, 2020; Guio, 2023). Funding also cannot depend on just one source (Chang et al., 2016; Gaddis & Coplen, 2018). Therefore, stable and sustainable sources of financing must be identified and appropriately allocated to ensure the continuity of this program. Additionally, food distribution to schools requires a robust logistics infrastructure. Issues such as transportation, storage, and distribution of food must be appropriately addressed to ensure that food can be delivered safely and efficiently to each school (Granillo-Macías, 2021; Maiellaro et al., 2020). Furthermore, free school meals programs also produce food waste that needs to be managed properly (Burg et al., 2021; Calvert et al., 2021; Cohen et al., 2021; Niaki et al., 2017). Therefore, effective waste management measures must be implemented to mitigate environmental impacts and promote sustainable practices.

Next, it is crucial to ensure that the free school meals menu is not only healthy and nutritious but also interesting and varied. A varied food menu is associated with the variety of beneficial nutrients that students can obtain to support improvements in their nutrition and health (Beitane et al., 2021; Fagerberg et al., 2019; Joyce et al., 2018). Not only that, but menu variations also contribute to reducing food waste (Chote et al., 2022; MB Schwartz et al., 2015), as students are less likely to feel bored with their food choices. Thus, collaboration is necessary between nutritionists and local food producers to help design menus that meet students' nutritional needs. Furthermore, another challenge is ensuring adequate awareness and participation from all relevant parties, especially students and schools. This program will only be successful if the parties involved actively participate and consciously support it (Hock et al., 2022; Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). To overcome these challenges, innovative solutions and cross-sector collaboration are needed. Collaboration between the government, schools,

community organisations, and the private sector can help identify effective and sustainable solutions to ensure the success of free school meals programs.

Finally, free school lunch programs have a significant and far-reaching impact because they extend beyond simply providing meals to students. The impact can be felt in various aspects, including academic performance, health, and social behaviour. By providing healthy and nutritious food at schools every day, this program helps address the issues of malnutrition and undernutrition among children. Healthy food intake not only supports optimal physical growth and development but also improves endurance and overall well-being. Additionally, students no longer worry about their next meal, allowing them to focus more on their studies. These conditions help improve students' concentration, attendance, and participation in the learning process, which, in turn, enhances their learning outcomes. In addition, with an integrated and comprehensive approach, several challenges that may arise can be overcome, enabling the achievement of the broader program goals of enhancing the welfare of children and society.

CONCLUSION

The initiative to seamlessly integrate education and nutrition within Indonesia's free school meals program heralds a transformative solution to the four pressing challenges confronting school children. This ambitious proposal, put forth by the newly elected leaders Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, emphasises a multifaceted approach to improving the lives of students. The key findings of the study reveal that the free school meals initiative holds significant promise in reducing stunting, a critical issue affecting children's growth, enhancing overall student nutrition, boosting academic performance, and alleviating extreme poverty among families. These encouraging outcomes align with a wealth of prior research conducted globally, which has consistently highlighted the profound impact of free school meal programs on students' well-being, underscoring their vital role in fostering a healthier and more educated future generation.

This research has several noteworthy limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, it is primarily based on a literature review and an analysis of secondary data sourced from the Scopus database. This reliance on existing literature may limit the breadth of topics covered and potentially overlook significant studies that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Additionally, the research encounters challenges in fully capturing the local context and the intricate cultural factors that could impact the implementation and effectiveness of the free school meals program in Indonesia. This limitation is particularly pronounced due to the lack of extensive research conducted by Indonesian scholars, as this policy is relatively new and still developing. Consequently, the insights drawn may not reflect the nuanced realities of the program's operation within various Indonesian communities.

To enhance the understanding of the free school meals program in Indonesia, it is highly recommended that a more comprehensive field study be undertaken. Such research should examine the various impacts and the numerous factors that contribute to the program's effectiveness. In addition, expanding the study's scope to incorporate the perspectives of all stakeholders—including students, parents, teachers, and community members—would provide valuable insights. By capturing these diverse viewpoints, the research aims to paint a clearer picture of the program's successes and challenges. Ultimately, it is hoped that this extended inquiry will yield rich, actionable insights that can guide the effective and sustainable implementation of the free school meals program across Indonesia, ensuring that it meets the needs of the communities it serves.

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