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## THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TO ENHANCING HEALTH AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INDONESIA'S POLICY ON FREE NUTRITIOUS MEALS

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### Abstract

*This qualitative study examines the role of Christian education in supporting Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meals Policy (FNMP) to promote children's health and intellectual growth, focusing on primary education. Using a literature review approach, the research analyzes existing studies, government reports, and educational frameworks to explore how Christian education complements the policy's goals. The FNMP, designed to combat malnutrition and improve educational outcomes, provides free meals to students nationwide. Christian education, with its emphasis on moral, spiritual, and intellectual development, supports this policy by fostering values of stewardship, responsibility, and compassion, rooted in biblical principles such as loving one's neighbor (Mark 12:31) and caring for the vulnerable (Matthew 25:35-40). The study highlights the contribution of Christian primary schools in integrating nutrition education and encouraging healthy lifestyles, while also recognizing their achievements in academic competitions, including SD Kristen Tri Tunggal Semarang, SD Kristen Kalam Kudus Surakarta, SD Kristen Petra 12, SD Kristen Satya Wacana, SD Kristen Gloria, and SD Kristen Gloria 2. It identifies opportunities for collaboration between Christian institutions and government bodies to enhance the FNMP's impact, demonstrating that Christian education plays a vital role in supporting and strengthening the policy through a holistic approach grounded in theological and biblical values.*

**Keywords:** *Christian Education; Free Nutritious Meals; Health Promotion; Intellectual Growth; Policy Implementation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Nutrition is a fundamental cornerstone in ensuring children's physical and intellectual development. Proper nutrition during childhood enhances brain function,

improves concentration, and strengthens overall health, which are essential for learning and academic success. Research shows that malnutrition negatively impacts cognitive abilities, weakens immune

systems, and reduces school attendance, leading to a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities (Saputra et al., 2023: 255). Therefore, addressing nutritional deficiencies in children is a health concern and a significant educational and social priority.

In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government implemented the Free Nutritious Meals Policy (FNMP) as combat malnutrition and improve educational outcomes. This program focuses on providing balanced, nutrient-rich meals to school-aged children, particularly those in disadvantaged areas (Indonesia, 2025). By ensuring students receive adequate daily nutrition, the policy aims to enhance their ability to learn and participate in school activities, ultimately improving academic performance and reducing dropout rates (Jomaa et al., 2011: 95). Such initiatives are critical in laying the foundation for a healthier and more educated generation.

Christian education offers a holistic approach that complements the FNMP by integrating moral, spiritual, and intellectual development into the educational experience. Christian schools often emphasize the concept of stewardship, which includes taking care of one's body as a gift from God. This perspective aligns with the goals of the FNMP, as it teaches children the importance of proper nutrition,

discipline, and responsibility (Jatmikowati et al., 2023: 1288). Moreover, the supportive community within Christian schools often ensures that the well-being of each child is prioritized, fostering an environment conducive to both academic and personal growth.

Aligning Christian education with national policies like the FNMP offers a unique synergy that can enhance the program's impact on children's well-being and potential. Christian schools can serve as valuable partners in promoting the government's nutritional goals while fostering essential values such as gratitude, care, and responsibility in students. However, successful implementation faces challenges, particularly due to limited financial resources in many Christian schools. To address these challenges, Christian schools require financial support from churches, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and collaborations with international financial donors. This collaboration not only strengthens policy implementation but also contributes to the broader vision of developing well-rounded individuals who are equipped to support Indonesia's future development goals, including the nation's aspiration for a "Golden Generation" in 2045 (Puspa et al., 2023: 3311). By integrating these resources, Christian schools can play a

pivotal role in shaping a healthier and more prosperous society.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a literature review methodology to explore and analyze existing studies, reports, and policies related to Christian education and nutrition, with a specific focus on primary education. The rationale for the literature review is to establish a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between Christian education, nutrition, and child development, recognizing that well-rounded education includes not only intellectual and moral development but also physical well-being. The literature review draws from academic journals, government documents, and Christian educational frameworks that discuss education, nutrition, and child development. Sources are selected based on relevance, credibility, and recency, with a focus on peer-reviewed articles, official policy documents, and key texts in Christian education.

Data analysis follows a thematic approach, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature. This includes examining how Christian education principles align with and support the goals of Indonesia's FNMP, while also highlighting challenges such as logistical

constraints, cultural diversity, and social disparities faced by Christian schools in implementing nutritional programs. The thematic analysis not only illustrates the synergy between moral and intellectual development fostered in Christian schools and the government's nutritional policy but also critically assesses the practical challenges and potential strategies for effective collaboration. This structured approach ensures a balanced analysis grounded in well-defined criteria and a broad thematic focus.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Christian Education's Contribution to Health Awareness**

Christian education plays a significant role in shaping students' awareness of health and well-being by integrating Christian values into their daily learning experiences. Central to Christian teaching is the principle of stewardship, which encourages individuals to take responsibility for the care of their bodies as sacred and valuable creations of God. This concept of stewardship is not limited to the spiritual realm but extends to the physical body as well, highlighting the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. In Christian schools, this value is taught as part of the broader curriculum, emphasizing that taking care of one's health is an expression

of gratitude for God's gift of life and a way to honor Him (Kasingku & Woy, 2024: 771). By instilling this mindset in children, Christian education fosters a sense of personal responsibility and discipline that is essential for promoting long-term health.

The biblical foundation for providing nutritious meals to students is deeply rooted in the Christian understanding that the human body is the temple of God, a sacred vessel that must be maintained in both purity and health. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul writes, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." This passage underscores the profound responsibility believers have to care for their bodies, not merely as an act of self-preservation but as an act of worship and devotion to God. Providing nutritious meals to students reflects this principle by ensuring that their bodies—created by God and inhabited by His Spirit—are well-nourished and cared for. Good nutrition supports physical health, cognitive development, and emotional well-being, enabling students to grow, learn, and thrive. By promoting healthy eating habits, we are helping young individuals honor God with their bodies, recognizing that proper care of the body is a spiritual responsibility entrusted to all believers.

Furthermore, the biblical call to love and serve others, especially those in need, is vividly articulated in Mark 12:31 and Matthew 25:35-40. In Mark 12:31, Jesus commands us to "love your neighbor as yourself," a directive that calls for active compassion and care for others' well-being. Providing nutritious meals to students, particularly those from underserved communities, is a tangible expression of this love, ensuring that children are not deprived of essential nourishment. In Matthew 25:35-40, Jesus highlights the importance of acts of kindness, stating, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." This teaching reinforces the idea that serving those in need is equivalent to serving Christ Himself. Offering balanced meals to students not only addresses their physical hunger but also fulfills a higher spiritual calling, demonstrating God's love through practical actions. It embodies the Christian commitment to justice, mercy, and compassion, ensuring that every child receives the care and nourishment they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives while also honoring God through the stewardship of their bodies.

Christian education's holistic approach to health extends beyond just physical well-being to include emotional,

mental, and spiritual health. By teaching children that they are created in God's image and are thus worthy of respect and care, Christian schools provide a framework that encourages students to take care of their whole selves. This integrated view of health emphasizes balance, teaching students that neglecting any aspect of their health—whether physical, mental, or spiritual—can disrupt their overall well-being (Kasingku & Woy, 2024: 769). For example, many Christian schools incorporate discussions about self-care, mindfulness, and emotional regulation as part of their curriculum, encouraging students to manage stress and anxiety in healthy ways, which ultimately contributes to their overall health and learning capacity.

A key component of Christian education's contribution to health awareness is its emphasis on care for others. Students in Christian schools are often taught the biblical principle of loving one's neighbor, which includes caring for the well-being of others, particularly the vulnerable. This extends to promoting health and wellness in the community by encouraging students to look out for the health of their peers, family members, and even the broader society. Christian education thus fosters an understanding of health not just as an individual concern but as a collective responsibility, reinforcing

the importance of sharing knowledge about healthy living with others (Margayaningsih, 2018: 77). This perspective creates a ripple effect, where the focus on individual health also leads to a broader commitment to the well-being of the community as a whole.

In addition to these values, Christian schools play a critical role in educating students about the importance of nutrition. By integrating lessons on nutrition into the curriculum, Christian educators help students understand the direct relationship between what they eat and their physical, mental, and academic performance. Lessons often include practical information about food groups, the role of vitamins and minerals, and the effects of poor nutrition on the body. These lessons go beyond the classroom by encouraging students to make healthier food choices at school, at home, and in their communities (Rahmad et al., 2023: 8). In many cases, Christian schools partner with parents and local organizations to reinforce these teachings, making nutrition a shared community value.

Moreover, many Christian schools provide students with opportunities to practice healthy eating habits through school meal programs. By serving balanced, nutritious meals and snacks, Christian schools model good nutritional practices for their students. This hands-on approach helps students internalize the

principles of healthy eating, making it easier for them to apply what they learn in real-life situations (Herlianty, Sumidawati & Bakue, 2024: 43). These experiences not only teach students about nutrition but also empower them to take control of their health.

Education on balanced nutrition plays a crucial role in shaping a healthy lifestyle from an early age, as demonstrated in the study by Permatasari et al. (2022) at SD Kristen Imanuel Semarang. The nutrition education program successfully enhanced students' understanding of the importance of consuming balanced, nutritious meals, as evidenced by the significant increase in the average pre-test score from 65.0 to 88.0 in the post-test. This improvement indicates that the provided education effectively increased students' knowledge. Beyond theoretical understanding, the program's success is also reflected in behavioral changes, with 27.78% of students actively adopting balanced nutrition principles in their daily lives, such as paying attention to healthy food intake, maintaining hygiene, and practicing regular eating habits. This study highlights that effective nutrition education in school settings can serve as a vital foundation for fostering long-term healthy eating habits and improving children's overall quality of life.

Christian schools also emphasize the link between good nutrition and mental

well-being. Students are taught how certain foods can influence their mood, concentration, and energy levels. For example, educators explain how nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can boost brain function, improve memory, and stabilize mood. Conversely, foods high in sugar or unhealthy fats can contribute to mood swings, fatigue, and difficulty focusing. By connecting the dots between what students eat and how they feel, Christian education fosters a more comprehensive understanding of health that includes both physical and mental well-being (Telaumbanua et al., 2024: 159). This holistic approach empowers students to make mindful choices that promote their overall well-being and cultivate healthier lifestyles.

The emphasis on health in Christian education is also seen in its approach to physical activity. Many Christian schools offer sports and fitness programs as part of their curriculum, reinforcing the importance of staying active. These programs are designed not only to improve physical fitness but also to build teamwork, discipline, and resilience—values that are central to Christian teaching. By participating in sports and physical activities, students learn firsthand the benefits of an active lifestyle, such as

improved cardiovascular health, enhanced energy levels, and better mental clarity.

Another key aspect of Christian education's contribution to health awareness is its commitment to providing students with a safe and supportive environment. Christian schools often create spaces where students feel valued and cared for, which is essential for promoting mental health and emotional well-being. This supportive environment encourages open dialogue about health issues, allowing students to feel comfortable discussing challenges related to nutrition, body image, and mental health. By addressing these issues in a compassionate and understanding way, Christian schools help to destigmatize health-related struggles, fostering a culture of care and empathy (Esterina Londo, 2023: 253). Ultimately, this approach empowers students to prioritize their mental and emotional well-being, equipping them to navigate life's challenges with confidence and resilience.

Christian education's contribution to health awareness extends beyond the walls of the classroom. By teaching students about the importance of nutrition, physical activity, mental well-being, and the value of stewardship, Christian schools equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead healthy, fulfilling lives. Moreover, the values instilled in Christian

education—such as care, responsibility, and community—create a strong foundation for students to become advocates for health in their communities. This holistic approach to health awareness not only benefits individual students but also contributes to the overall health of society (Zakiah, 2024: 409). Ultimately, Christian education fosters a culture of wellness that empowers students to make positive, informed choices for themselves and others.

### **Alignment of Christian Education Principles with National Policy Goals**

Christian education and national policy goals in Indonesia share a common focus on promoting human dignity, equity, and the development of well-rounded individuals. At the heart of Christian education lies the belief in the intrinsic value of every individual, which aligns with the national policy's focus on ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have access to education and resources that promote their well-being. The principle of human dignity in Christian education emphasizes that every child is created in God's image and therefore deserves to be treated with respect, care, and fairness. This foundational belief resonates with the Indonesian government's efforts to address social inequities by providing free nutritious meals to children in schools,

ensuring that those from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to the same opportunities as their peers (Maharani et al., 2024: 7). By focusing on human dignity, both Christian education and national policies seek to lift individuals out of poverty and give them the tools to thrive in society.

Moreover, equity is another central theme shared by Christian education and Indonesia's national policy goals. Christian schools often aim to provide quality education regardless of a student's economic background, aligning with the national government's objective of reducing educational disparities across regions. The FNMP directly supports this goal by ensuring that all students, regardless of socio-economic status, receive access to healthy meals. The policy helps level the playing field for students from disadvantaged families, giving them the physical and mental nourishment they need to succeed in their studies (Harpina, 2023: 784-785). Christian schools, particularly those serving low-income communities, work to ensure that every student has an equal chance to succeed, which further aligns with the national objectives of equity in education and social welfare.

Promoting human dignity and equity, Christian education also emphasizes the development of well-rounded individuals who are not only academically successful

but also morally and socially responsible. Christian schools teach students to be compassionate, to care for others, and to contribute to society in meaningful ways. This holistic approach to education aligns closely with the Indonesian government's goal of producing citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also socially responsible and capable of contributing to the nation's development (Sukasni & Efendy, 2017: 192). By integrating academic learning with moral and spiritual formation, Christian education plays a crucial role in fostering responsible, well-rounded individuals who understand the importance of health, nutrition, and community care, all of which are central components of the national policy on free nutritious meals.

The shared commitment to well-rounded development between Christian education and national policy can also be seen in the emphasis on promoting students' physical health. Through the integration of nutrition into the curriculum and the provision of nutritious meals, Christian schools help students understand the importance of taking care of their bodies as part of their overall well-being. This approach directly supports the national policy's objective of reducing malnutrition and improving the physical health of children, which is necessary for them to perform well academically. When students are physically healthy, they are better able

to focus on their studies, participate in school activities, and contribute positively to their communities (Syaharani et al., 2024: 2881). By aligning these goals, Christian education and national policy work hand in hand to ensure that children's health and education are given equal priority.

Collaboration between Christian institutions and government bodies is essential to maximizing the impact of the FNMP. Christian schools have a unique advantage in fostering trust and engagement with local communities, particularly in rural areas, where they often have strong ties to families and local leaders. This relationship can be leveraged to ensure that the policy reaches those who need it most. In many cases, Christian institutions collaborate with local government bodies to improve the implementation and effectiveness of the FNMP by providing feedback on how meals are distributed and suggesting improvements to the program. For example, Christian schools may work with local health officials to ensure that the meals provided meet the specific nutritional needs of students in their area. This collaboration helps bridge the gap between government policy and local implementation, ensuring that the policy reaches its intended beneficiaries.

Christian institutions can offer valuable insights into how the FNMP can be integrated into broader educational initiatives. Christian schools often emphasize character education, community service, and holistic health, which can complement the government's goals of improving educational outcomes and public health. Through their community-centered approach, Christian schools can foster a sense of shared responsibility among students, parents, and teachers, making the policy's goals more accessible and achievable. By working together, Christian schools and government bodies can create a supportive network that addresses both the immediate needs of students and the long-term objectives of national development.

In the context of collaboration, the alignment between Christian education principles and national policy goals becomes even more evident. Christian education encourages students to live out their faith through acts of service and care for others, which corresponds with the government's goal of fostering civic-minded individuals who contribute positively to society. As such, Christian schools provide an ideal platform for teaching students the values of teamwork, cooperation, and community engagement in the context of national policy initiatives like the FNMP. Through such collaborations,

Christian schools help students internalize the importance of supporting national goals and contributing to their fulfillment, ensuring that they grow into citizens who are both academically capable and morally responsible (Simamora, 2021: 21). This synergy between Christian education and national policy not only benefits individual students but also plays a crucial role in shaping the future of the nation.

Christian institutions can advocate for the expansion and improvement of the FNMP by sharing their successes and challenges with government officials. Given their community connections and commitment to holistic education, Christian schools are well-positioned to inform policy discussions about the effectiveness of the program and provide recommendations for its improvement. For instance, Christian schools may advocate for greater funding to support nutrition education or additional resources to ensure that students from marginalized communities can fully benefit from the policy (Losando, 2023: 92-93). This ongoing dialogue between Christian institutions and government bodies is crucial to the continuous improvement and success of the policy, ultimately benefiting both students and society as a whole.

The alignment between Christian education principles and national policy goals creates a powerful synergy that can

lead to improved health, education, and overall well-being for students. By focusing on human dignity, equity, and the development of well-rounded individuals, both Christian schools and government bodies work toward a shared vision of a healthier, more prosperous society. Through collaboration and mutual support, these institutions can maximize the impact of the FNMP, ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to succeed academically and live healthy, fulfilling lives. The partnership between Christian institutions and the government serves as a model for how faith-based education can contribute to national development initiatives and help build a brighter future for the nation.

### **Implementation**

The implementation of the FNMP within schools faces several challenges that must be addressed to maximize its effectiveness. One major challenge is logistical. Many schools, especially in rural or underserved areas, struggle with the infrastructure required to distribute meals efficiently. Schools may lack the necessary facilities for meal storage, preparation, or even adequate transportation to bring meals to students. The transportation of food to remote areas can be delayed, leading to meals being distributed too late to be useful. This lack of infrastructure can hinder the

smooth rollout of the policy and impact its effectiveness in providing nutritious meals to students. To mitigate this, there is a need for increased investment in school facilities and supply chains, ensuring that food is delivered fresh and on time.

Cultural challenges also play a role in the difficulties faced by schools in implementing the FNMP. Indonesia is a culturally diverse country, and dietary preferences vary widely across regions and communities. Schools must consider these differences when planning meals to ensure that the food provided is acceptable to all students. In particular, certain regions or religious communities may have specific dietary restrictions or preferences, such as halal food requirements in Muslim-majority areas. Christian schools, in particular, may encounter challenges in reconciling the national policy with local customs. The meals provided by the government may not always align with the tastes or cultural norms of the student body, leading to reluctance in accepting the food. The challenge lies in designing a meal program that can cater to a broad range of cultural and religious requirements while still fulfilling nutritional standards.

In addition to logistical and cultural challenges, financial barriers present another significant obstacle to implementing the policy effectively.

Although the government covers the cost of meals, schools are often required to bear the costs of meal preparation, transportation, and staffing. For Christian schools, especially those serving low-income or rural communities, these additional costs can be difficult to manage. Many schools may struggle to find the financial resources to cover these expenses, relying on external donations or fundraising efforts to keep the program running. This financial strain can prevent some schools from fully realizing the potential benefits of the FNMP, limiting the quality or reach of the program. Addressing this issue requires long-term financial support from both the government and local communities to ensure that Christian schools can offer high-quality meals that meet students' nutritional needs policy (Losando, 2023: 92-93). Without adequate financial backing, the program may fall short of its intended goals, leaving some students without access to the resources they need to thrive.

Despite these challenges, there are several opportunities to expand the role of faith-based education in national development initiatives, particularly through the implementation of the FNMP. One significant opportunity lies in the ability of Christian schools to leverage their strong community ties. Christian institutions often have deep relationships

with local families and leaders, which can be an asset in promoting the policy and ensuring its effectiveness. Christian schools can play an active role in encouraging local communities to embrace the policy and support its goals of improving children's nutrition and education outcomes. By promoting awareness of the FNMP and educating parents on its importance, Christian schools can help create a strong support network for the policy, ensuring that children receive the full benefits of the program.

Furthermore, Christian schools have the opportunity to integrate health and nutrition education into their curricula, creating a broader impact beyond just providing meals. By educating students about the importance of nutrition and healthy lifestyles, Christian schools can foster long-term changes in students' eating habits and overall health. This can contribute not only to improving students' physical well-being but also to enhancing their academic performance, as good nutrition has been linked to improved concentration and cognitive function. By embedding nutrition education into their values-based approach to education, Christian education's significant contribution in shaping a healthier and more educated future generation (Damanik & Yuli, 2024: 98). Ultimately, this holistic approach equips students to make informed

choices that positively affect their lives and the well-being of their communities.

Another opportunity for Christian schools is to use their position within local communities to advocate for further government investment in the FNMP. Schools can serve as intermediaries between the government and local communities, helping to ensure that the policy reaches the students who need it most. Christian schools have a long history of social advocacy, and they can use this experience to work with government bodies to ensure that the policy is inclusive, accessible, and effectively implemented in all regions. Through partnerships with local governments and non-governmental organizations, Christian schools can help expand the reach of the FNMP, ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have access to nutritious meals.

In addition, Christian schools can contribute to national development by fostering a generation of responsible, civic-minded individuals. The integration of moral and spiritual values into the education system provides an opportunity to develop students who understand the importance of community well-being and are motivated to contribute to national progress. As students are taught to value stewardship, care for others, and act responsibly within their communities, they

can become agents of change, working to improve not only their own lives but also the lives of those around them. By instilling these values, Christian schools can support the broader goals of national development and the advancement of Indonesia's socio-economic status (Ismanto et al., 2017: 8). Ultimately, this approach ensures that students grow into individuals who not only succeed academically but also contribute meaningfully to the nation's future prosperity.

Christian schools have the potential to collaborate with other faith-based organizations, international aid agencies, and local government bodies to further enhance the policy's impact. In addition to these partnerships, collaboration can include policy advocacy, curriculum design, and funding partnerships, which are essential for successful outcomes. Effective collaboration requires clear communication, shared goals, and mutual respect among stakeholders. By pooling resources, expertise, and networks, these partnerships can help overcome the financial and logistical barriers that schools face. For example, collaborations can lead to the development of more sustainable meal programs, provide additional educational resources, and expand the reach of nutrition education. Such partnerships allow Christian schools to strengthen their

role in national development initiatives while also ensuring that the FNMP delivers the intended benefits to all children, particularly those in underprivileged or remote areas.

While there are significant challenges in the implementation of the FNMP within schools, particularly in terms of logistics, cultural factors, and financial constraints, there are also substantial opportunities for faith-based schools to expand their role in national development. Christian schools, with their community ties, values-based approach to education, and commitment to social justice, are well-positioned to play a central role in advocating for and supporting the policy. Through strategic partnerships, curriculum integration, and active community engagement, Christian schools can help ensure the success of the FNMP and contribute to the broader goals of national development, creating a healthier and more prosperous future for all students in Indonesia.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION**

The integration of Christian education with Indonesia's FNMP significantly contributes to the health and intellectual development of students. Christian education complements the policy by providing moral and spiritual support, enhancing the policy's goals of improving nutrition and

academic performance. The Christian values of stewardship, care, and responsibility are particularly effective in fostering a deeper understanding of health and nutrition among students. These values not only help students make informed decisions about their well-being but also encourage them to appreciate the importance of a balanced diet for both physical health and intellectual growth.

The findings highlight the potential for strengthening partnerships between Christian schools and government agencies to improve the implementation and impact of the FNMP. By leveraging Christian education's holistic approach, which integrates moral, spiritual, and intellectual development, schools can help achieve broader educational and developmental goals. Christian schools, with their strong community presence and values-driven education, can make a significant contribution to ensuring the success of the policy, fostering a healthier, well-rounded generation that is better prepared to face future challenges. Through collaboration and a shared commitment to national development, Christian education can help maximize the benefits of the FNMP for students Indonesia.

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