

Social Reproduction in the Implementation of the Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG) in Makassar Early Childhood Education (PAUD)

Ayu Indira Sangaji¹, Syamsu A Kamaruddin², Arlin Adam³

Program Studi Pendidikan sosiologi, Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Megarezky¹

Program Studi Pascasarjana Sosiologi, Universitas Negeri Makassar²

Program Studi Magister Kesehatan, Universitas Mega Buana Palopo³

Email : indirachannel7@gmail.com¹

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze how the implementation of the Free Nutritious Food (MBG) program in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institutions in urban areas of Makassar reflects the process of social reproduction. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus, capital, and field, this article examines how practices and policies within the MBG program contribute to the perpetuation of social structures and class differences in society. The study adopts a conceptual-analytical approach, employing qualitative methods based on literature review and sociocultural analysis of the Makassar community context. The findings indicate that the MBG program functions not only as a child health policy but also as a symbolic arena that reinforces disparities in social, cultural, and economic capital among different social groups. Family habitus, perceptions of nutrition, and the ways educational institutions interpret policy collectively shape patterns of social reproduction within the urban context of Makassar. This article highlights the importance of a sociological approach in formulating child nutrition policies to foster more equitable social transformation..

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Corresponding Author:

Ayu Indira Sangaji

Universitas Megarezky

indirachannel7@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood nutrition is a strategic issue in human resource development in Indonesia. Quality nutrition during early life forms the foundation for a child's physical, cognitive, and social development. The Indonesian government has made this issue a national priority through various policies, such as the Free *Nutritious Food Program (MBG)* in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institutions. This program aims to reduce stunting rates, improve children's nutritional status, and ensure access to nutritious food for all levels of society.

However, behind this seemingly neutral orientation towards health and well-being, there is a social dimension that requires serious attention. In this view, the *sociology of education* public policy implemented in the context of education is never truly value-free. It is always influenced by power relations, the distribution of social capital, and existing social structures. Thus, policies such as the free nutritious food program not only serve as instruments for improving nutrition but can also be a means of social reproduction—that is, the process of preserving social structures and power relations between groups within society.

This context becomes interesting when viewed from the perspective of urban social dynamics, such as in Makassar. As a metropolitan city in Eastern Indonesia, Makassar has a complex social structure, where urban modernity meets the still-strong Bugis-Makassar cultural traditions. On the one hand, there is a middle- to upper-class class with extensive access to education, nutritional

information, and modern healthcare. On the other hand, many families with limited economic means still maintain traditional consumption patterns and minimal access to quality nutritional sources. This inequality is reflected not only in economic indicators but also in *habitus*—namely, a system of dispositions, ways of thinking, and lifestyles that are formed from social experiences.

Within Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the free nutritious meal program in PAUD can be seen as a social *arena*(field) where various actors—government, teachers, parents, and children—interact and compete to define the meaning of “nutrition” and “health.” This arena is not neutral, but rather fraught with power relations and the distribution of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic).

The government, as the policy authority, brings symbolic capital in the form of legitimacy and technical knowledge regarding child nutrition standards. Early childhood education teachers possess cultural capital derived from their formal education and professional authority in early childhood pedagogy. Meanwhile, parents—particularly those from the lower-middle class—often find themselves in subordinate positions, where they become policy recipients without much room to redefine nutritional values based on their own experiences and culture.

This situation demonstrates how seemingly “neutral” policies can function as mechanisms of social reproduction. In practice, nutritious food programs often reinforce the values and habits of the dominant class. For example, knowledge about “healthy food” is often associated with the consumption of foods identified with the middle class, such as imported milk, expensive fruit, or certain processed foods, which, in the context of local Makassar culture, may not necessarily align with the consumption patterns of lower-middle-class people.

Pierre Bourdieu (1990) explains that *habitus* is a dispositional system that shapes how individuals think, act, and evaluate things based on their social experiences. In the context of families in Makassar, the *habitus* regarding food and nutrition is strongly influenced by cultural and economic factors. Upper-middle-class families generally possess the cultural capital that enables them to understand nutrition scientifically, recognizing the ideal levels of protein, fiber, or fat for children. In contrast, families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to rely on a pragmatic *habitus*: the important thing is that the child is full and healthy according to traditional standards, not based on modern nutrition tables.

This is where the tension arises between traditional *habitus* and *modern habits*. When nutritious food programs are introduced, the modern values brought by the policies are often perceived as symbolically “higher.” However, in some cases, traditional local eating practices—such as consuming seafood, free-range vegetables, and local plant-based protein sources—actually have excellent nutritional value. However, because they are considered “not modern,” these practices are slowly being replaced by new consumption habits shaped by formal programs.

Besides *habitus*, Bourdieu also highlights the importance of capital in determining the social position of individuals or groups. Economic capital (income and financial resources), cultural capital (education and knowledge), social capital (social networks and relationships), and symbolic capital (status and social recognition) play a role in determining who holds power in the social arena. In the context of early childhood education (PAUD) in Makassar, this difference in capital is evident in how educational institutions implement nutritious food programs. Private PAUDs managed by large foundations with the support of middle-class parents are able to provide nutritious food sustainably, while public or small PAUDs in densely populated areas rely on government assistance and community donations.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a conceptual-analytical qualitative approach based on a literature review. Data were obtained from previous research, policy reports, and scientific studies from 2020–2025 relevant to the topics of child nutrition, early childhood education, and Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. The analysis was conducted through a critical interpretation of the

literature and the sociocultural context of Makassar society. This approach was chosen to explore the symbolic meanings and hidden social structures behind the implementation of the free nutritious meal program in early childhood education settings.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social practices in early childhood education (PAUD) in Makassar can be seen as the result of the interaction between habitus, capital, and arena. Family habitus determines how parents interpret the importance of nutritious food. Middle-class families typically possess higher cultural capital, such as nutritional knowledge and a healthy lifestyle, while lower-income families are more focused on meeting basic needs. The nutritious food program then becomes an arena where these two groups meet and interact, but at an unequal level. PAUD, possessing symbolic capital as an educational institution, acts as a policy mediator and reinforces social legitimacy, asserting that "modern" nutritional knowledge is considered more valuable.

In the context of Makassar City's society, which has a patron-client social structure and high solidarity values, the practice of distributing nutritious food also has symbolic meaning. The government's provision of nutritious food to preschool children can be understood not only as a form of state concern but also as a symbolic act that reinforces the dominant position of the provider. As Bourdieu explains, symbolic capital operates through unconscious social recognition, where recipients perceive the relationship as normal and legitimate. Thus, child nutrition policies in Makassar's preschools have the potential to reproduce a social hierarchy between the recipient group and the policy provider.

Furthermore, teachers and educators in early childhood education (PAUD) are crucial actors in this social reproduction process. As holders of cultural capital (educational knowledge and authority), they translate policies into everyday practices, including how to choose food, how to convey health values, and how to interact with children and parents. Through these practices, certain values considered "ideal" are internalized, which in turn shape the new habitus of children and families. However, this habitus often follows the patterns of the dominant social class, which are more symbolically valued, thus reinforcing cultural inequality in society.

Bourdieu's theory helps explain how seemingly neutral programs like nutritious food can contribute to the perpetuation of social inequality. In early childhood education, the distribution of economic capital (nutrition assistance), cultural capital (health knowledge), and social capital (networks between families and institutions) is never equal. Children from families with greater cultural capital are more likely to adapt to the program's values, while children from families with less capital tend to simply be recipients without significant transformation.

The Makassar context demonstrates the fusion of Bugis-Makassar collectivist culture with a competitive urban social system. When public policies, such as nutritious food programs, are incorporated into this system, they operate within two logics simultaneously: welfare and symbolic. The welfare logic emphasizes the equitable distribution of nutrition, while the symbolic logic emphasizes who has the authority and knowledge to determine nutritional standards. This is a concrete manifestation of social reproduction through early childhood education.

4. CONCLUSION

The nutritious food program at Makassar's PAUD community reflects a complex interaction between public policy, social practices in educational institutions, and local cultural structures. This program is not simply the distribution of nutritious food to children, but rather a social arena (*field*) in which various forms of capital—economic, social, cultural, and symbolic—operate simultaneously. Through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory, it can be understood that these interactions are not socially neutral. Every element of policy, from the type of food provided, the

method of distribution to communication patterns with parents, carries a symbolic dimension that can reinforce existing social hierarchies.

The nutritious food program at Makassar's Early Childhood Education Center (PAUD) serves as an instrument of social reproduction. Children and families not only receive nutritional benefits but also internalize the social and cultural values inherent in the dominant class. For example, foods considered "ideally nutritious" tend to conform to modern standards that are more accessible to middle- and upper-class families. This indirectly creates differences in nutritional experiences from an early age, which subsequently shape different habits across social groups.

This habitus encompasses eating behaviors, health literacy, and attitudes toward education. Children raised in middle-class environments tend to adapt more easily to the modern nutritional values and healthy lifestyles advocated by the program, while children from low-income families tend to adjust their eating behaviors only minimally, without significant changes in cultural knowledge or preferences. This process demonstrates how social inequality is symbolically reproduced through seemingly universal programs.

This program also demonstrates the interaction of capital in a more concrete form. Early childhood education teachers, for example, act as mediators, possessing both cultural capital—pedagogical knowledge and competence—and symbolic capital—legitimacy and social recognition as professionals. They determine how policies are implemented in the field, including menu planning, monitoring food consumption, and teaching about the importance of nutrition. Parents, as recipients of policies, bring varying levels of social and cultural capital. The relationship between teachers and parents forms a network of unequal interactions, where parents from higher social classes have greater influence in determining practices in early childhood education, while parents from lower classes tend to follow established rules.

Furthermore, the government's symbolic capital is evident in the form of policy legitimacy. The distribution of nutritious food not only provides nutrition but also affirms the government's position as a key stakeholder in children's health and education. The community's acceptance of the program is seen as a recognition of this authority and legitimacy. In other words, this policy operates not only through formal rules but also through symbolic mechanisms that make power relations appear "natural" or appropriate for all parties.

By broadening the analytical lens through Bourdieu's theory, it becomes clear that the nutritious food program in Makassar's early childhood education (PAUD) operates on two levels: technical and symbolic. Technically, it improves children's nutritional status; symbolically, it reproduces existing social hierarchies. Therefore, the social transformation envisioned through public policy requires an approach that recognizes the complexity of social, cultural, and symbolic capital, as well as Makassar's local cultural context. A nutritious food policy designed in a participatory, culturally sensitive, and inclusive manner can reduce the risk of reproducing social inequality, strengthen the community's social and cultural capital, and provide a more equitable foundation for children's development in Makassar. This transformation is not simply about improving nutrition, but also an investment in social equality and the formation of a generation aware of the values of culture, health, and education from an early age.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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