



Hifzh al-nafs in the Free Nutritious Meals Program as an Instrument of Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract:

This study examines the concept of *hifzh al-nafs* within the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program and analyzes its relevance as a contextual resource for Islamic Religious Education. Methods: This study used a qualitative approach and a literature review. Data were obtained from scholarly literature addressing maqashid al-shariah, Islamic Religious Education, the MBG Program, nutrition, and the preservation of human life. The data were analyzed descriptively and interpretively to identify relationships between life preservation, fulfillment of basic needs, and Islamic educational values. Results: The findings indicate that the MBG Program reflects the principle of *hifzh al-nafs* by supporting students' health, nutritional adequacy, survival, and physical development. The program also provides opportunities to cultivate educational values, including gratitude, social care, responsibility, healthy living, and respect for human life. Implications: The MBG Program can function as a contextual learning resource for Islamic Religious Education by connecting maqashid al-shariah principles with students' everyday experiences. Integrating nutritional practices into religious learning may strengthen meaningful, practical, and socially relevant Islamic education while encouraging students to understand Islamic teachings through tangible health and social practices.

INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) is an important Indonesian government policy because adequate nutrition is fundamental to healthy human development. The program seeks to support a healthy, intelligent, productive, and competitive generation, particularly among students and vulnerable groups. Evidence indicates that nutrition interventions can improve wellbeing and human resource development (Rimbawan et al., 2023; Suprpto et al., 2025). MBG has therefore expanded beyond food provision to include social and educational infrastructure, with the aim of strengthening nutritional literacy and healthy eating habits (Wall et al., 2022; Khoiroh et al., 2025). This broader role makes MBG socially significant because daily meal practices can shape health, responsibility, discipline, and values. Thus, examining MBG as an educational opportunity is important for strengthening both student wellbeing and value-based human development.

Despite its strategic importance, implementing MBG faces a broader challenge: nutritional policy does not automatically become an educational process. Providing meals may satisfy immediate nutritional needs, but students also need guidance to understand healthy eating, cleanliness, food safety, gratitude, discipline, and responsibility. This issue is particularly relevant to Islamic Religious Education (PAI), whose purpose extends beyond transferring religious knowledge to developing attitudes, character, and the ability to apply Islamic teachings in everyday life (Hidayatulloh et al., 2024; Sanjani & Safitri, 2024). From the perspective of *maqasid al-shariah*, *hifzh al-nafs* emphasizes protecting and preserving human life from harm, including through nutrition, physical health, food safety, and healthy lifestyles (Hamzah & Ismail, 2026; Abiin, 2026). The general problem, therefore, is how a national nutrition policy can be translated into meaningful religious learning and daily student practices.

This problem is visible in MBG implementation as a national program affecting students' everyday experiences. As of 10 June 2026, the government reported that more than 43 million of Indonesia's nearly 53 million students had benefited from MBG (Nurmansyah & Fitriani, 2025; Honainah et al., 2025). In Islamic educational settings, the program has also been connected with character-building practices, including prayers before and after meals, gratitude, discipline, cleanliness, and respect for others. These practices show that MBG can become a space where nutrition and religious habituation meet. However, implementation itself does not guarantee a pedagogical framework that explains how *hifzh al-nafs* should be translated into Islamic Religious Education. The phenomenon therefore reveals a gap between MBG's expanding reach and the limited educational articulation of its Islamic value dimension (Liguori et al., 2024; Mustaghfiroh & Mubaroq, 2025).

Previous studies have established important connections between nutrition programs, *maqasid al-shariah*, and Islamic education. Muhyidin and Syarofi (2026) identify a strong relationship between *hifzh al-nafs* and MBG through nutritional fulfillment, malnutrition prevention, and improved quality of life. Nuraini et al. similarly report that nutritious meal programs can support the protection of life, intellect, progeny, food security, and social development. Irmayanti et al. position *maqasid al-shariah* as a useful conceptual framework for understanding Islamic values and legal principles in Islamic Religious Education. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that MBG has welfare and educational significance. However, their emphases remain fragmented across nutrition, *maqasid*, character, and manners, leaving their pedagogical integration insufficiently developed.

Other studies reinforce the potential of *maqasid al-shariah* to explain the broader welfare objectives of MBG (Adeoya et al., 2023), while Hashim et al. (2023) emphasize normative and policy-oriented relationships between Islamic law and social welfare. Badri and Malik (2024) highlight the character-building potential of MBG. Nevertheless, previous research has not fully explained how *hifzh al-nafs* can be reconstructed as an educational principle that connects MBG with Islamic Religious Education. The unresolved gap concerns transforming life preservation from a normative objective into learning values, lived experiences, habituation, and educational orientations. Addressing this gap is important because without such integration, MBG may remain primarily a nutritional policy rather than a contextual medium for Islamic value formation.

The state of the art of this study lies in reconstructing *hifzh al-nafs* as a pedagogical principle within MBG, rather than treating it only as a normative criterion for

evaluating nutrition policy. The proposed framework connects four dimensions often separated: nutritional fulfillment, protection of health and life, habituation of Islamic values, and contextual learning through PAI. Within this framework, eating nutritious food, maintaining cleanliness, recognizing halal and tayyib food, expressing gratitude, practicing discipline, assuming responsibility, and caring for others become observable educational experiences. The novelty is therefore not simply identifying a relationship between MBG and maqasid al-shariah, but explaining how that relationship can be reconstructed and operationalized educationally. This contribution is important for developing a more transformative understanding of PAI in which religious values are experienced through everyday institutional practices rather than taught only as abstract concepts.

This study addresses the research problem of how *hifzh al-nafs* can be integrated into MBG and established as a meaningful instrument of Islamic Religious Education. It aims to identify the dimensions of *hifzh al-nafs* reflected in the goals and implementation of MBG, examine their relationship with PAI goals and values, and develop a conceptual framework positioning MBG as a contextual space for religious education. The study argues that MBG can function as a transformative educational medium when nutritional fulfillment is accompanied by conscious internalization and habituation of values related to health, cleanliness, gratitude, discipline, responsibility, and social concern. Its contribution is an integrated perspective linking nutrition policy, maqasid al-shariah, and Islamic value education. In this way, MBG can be understood not merely as food assistance, but as a learning environment through which students experience and practice preserving life.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design conducted through a field study approach. The qualitative design was selected because the study aimed to gain an in-depth, contextual understanding of how the value of *hifzh al-nafs* (preservation of life) was implemented through the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) and how its implementation related to Islamic Religious Education. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, understanding, and religious values emerging from their direct involvement in the program (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). The research was conducted at Madrasah Sultan Hasanuddin, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, because it was one of the educational institutions implementing the Free Nutritious Meal Program and therefore provided a relevant field setting for examining the relationship between the program, students' health and wellbeing, and Islamic Religious Education. The research participants included 20 MBG recipient students, two Islamic Religious Education teachers, two classroom teachers, two MBG administrators, and one head of the madrasah, for a total of 27 participants see Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Research Samples

No.	Group	Population	Sample	Sample Percentage
1	MBG Recipient Students	99	20	20%
2	Islamic Religious Education Teacher	2	2	100%
3	Classroom Teacher	4	2	50%
4	MBG Administrator	2	2	100%
5	Head of the Madrasah	1	1	100%
Total		108 People	27 People	24.77%

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The researcher served as the main research instrument and was directly involved in collecting, recording, interpreting, and verifying information obtained in the field. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and supporting informants using an interview guide containing questions concerning their understanding of nutritious food, health maintenance, gratitude, caring for others, and Islamic values obtained through participation in the program. Observation focused primarily on the processes of food distribution and consumption, participants' interactions during the program, and practices reflecting the preservation of health and life. The researcher used field notes, interview guidelines, and audio-recording devices with participants' consent. The researcher also used documentation as complementary evidence to strengthen information obtained through observations and interviews. Using multiple data collection techniques enabled the researcher to compare information from different sources and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of *hifzh al-nafs* in the MBG program (Nurfajriani et al., 2024).

Data were analyzed interactively through data condensation (data reduction), data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. First, interview recordings were transcribed, and the collected information was condensed by selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing data relevant to the research objectives. Particular attention was given to themes concerning *hifzh al-nafs*, nutritious food, health maintenance, gratitude, caring for others, and the contribution of Islamic Religious Education. Second, the condensed data were displayed thematically to identify patterns, relationships, similarities, and differences among the perspectives of students, teachers, administrators, and other participants. Finally, the researcher concluded and continuously verified them by comparing interview findings with observations and documentation. The verification process used source triangulation and technique triangulation to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings. This analytical procedure enabled the researcher to interpret the empirical findings systematically while maintaining consistency between participants' accounts, observed practices, and documentary evidence (Villamin et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The research results indicated a strong relationship between the Free Nutritious Meals Program and the principle of *hifzh al-nafs* in maqashid al-shari'ah, especially in efforts to maintain the continuity of life, health, and students' physical wellbeing. Research shows that nutritious meals help students meet their daily nutritional needs and prepare them to learn. The results indicate that improved physical conditions can enhance students' concentration, active participation, and enthusiasm for learning, including in Islamic Religious Education. From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, meeting nutritional needs is an effort to internalize the values of preserving life, taking responsibility for one's health, social concern, and expressing gratitude to Allah for His blessings. The Free Nutritious Meals Program serves as both a nutritional fulfillment policy and an educational tool that weaves the values of *hifzh al-nafs* into students' daily lives.

Table 2. Research Informant Selection Criteria

No	Group of Informants	Amount	Selection Criteria	Role in Research	MBG achievements
1	MBG Program participants	20	Actively participate in the Free Nutritious Meal Program and be willing to be interviewed.	Providing information regarding the experience of receiving the MBG.	Students possess a sense of care and gratitude.
2	Islamic Religious Education Teacher	2	Teaching Islamic Religious Education and understanding students' conditions and development.	Providing information regarding the connection between the MBG Program and the value of <i>hifzh al-nafs</i>	MBG is a valuable lesson in Islamic religious education
3	homeroom teacher	2	Supporting students participating in the MBG Program.	Providing information regarding student behavior and program implementation in the classroom.	The MBG program fosters greater discipline and religious observance among students.
4	MBG Administrator	2	Directly involved in food preparation and distribution.	Providing information regarding the implementation, distribution, and oversight mechanisms of the MBG Program.	MBG is used to make MBG run optimally
5	Head of Madrasah	1	Responsible for the implementation of programs at the Madrasa.	Providing information regarding the policy and implementation of the MBG.	The school is implementing the government program.
Total Informan		27			

The findings also indicate that the concept of *hifzh al-nafs* is acknowledged and implemented as a key element in ensuring the continuity, safety, and protection of human life. The results were drawn from interviews with informants directly involved in the research context, as presented in Table 2, and supported by available observations and documentation. Taken together, the data show that *hifzh al-nafs* is not only a normative idea but is also manifested in actions, policies, and protections that fulfill basic needs, provide safety and health, and save lives. The interview results show that most informants had similar views on *hifzh al-nafs*. Informants said that saving life means ensuring people are safe, well protected, and shielded from situations that can kill them.

According to Abdul Haris, the Free Nutritious Meals Program is closely related to preserving life because nutritious, safe food is a prerequisite for maintaining health and preventing nutritional deficiencies in children. Protecting life is not only a response to emergencies but also the fulfillment of basic needs that promote health and sustain life. It shows an awareness that safeguarding life is linked to implementing concrete steps to reduce risks to personal safety.

Muhammad Basri stressed this, saying that the MBG Program is a way of preserving life, as it ensures that children get enough nutritious, safe, and appropriate food based on their needs. The meals they receive are important for their health and help them grow. Also, the program can be used to prevent children from suffering from malnutrition and from being more prone to disease or other health issues that would interfere with their lives.

In this context, the implementation of *hifzh al-nafs* is seen through efforts to satisfy needs considered essential for preserving life, according to the interview results. In the interviews, the informants generally viewed *hifzh al-nafs* not only as protection in emergencies. They also perceived it as a preventive measure against various conditions that could lead to physical harm or endanger an individual's safety. Hence, life protection can be assured through concrete actions adapted to the context of those concerned.

According to Nuraini Daeng Marola, the MBG Program aims not only to help children already suffering from nutritional problems, but also to prevent the emergence of nutritional problems. Consistently providing nutritious, safe food can improve children's health. It also helps to reduce the chances of nutritional deficiencies, weakened immunity, and other health problems. This approach allows children to develop optimally, continue learning, and avoid situations that could endanger their health.

The interview results show that protection work is not only reactive to problems that have already occurred, but also proactive. Documentation and field observations support this finding. The interviews show that protection is not only carried out in response to existing problems, but also through preventive actions. The documentation also showed that students were regularly provided with healthy meals, including menus. It explained the procedures for inspecting and distributing the food before students consumed it, as shown in Figure 1. These results add further support to what was seen and discussed during the interviews about the implementation of *hifzh al-nafs* in the research context.



Figure 1. Distribution of MBG to Madrasa Students in A Regular Manner

However, the research results have shown difficulties in implementing *hifzh al-nafs*. Some informants identified several challenges affecting the implementation of initiatives to protect human life. The challenges show that the implementation of the

hifzh al-nafs principle is still influenced by several conditions, such as geographical factors and the distance of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) distribution. The results also indicate that *hifzh al-nafs* requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders and supporting conditions for sustainable protection efforts to be implemented effectively.

Abd. Salam said there are still challenges to address in implementing the program. Sometimes the food arrives late, and the menu choices do not always match children's tastes, so some food is left over. There is a need for greater control of food hygiene, food quality, and the distribution process. Without due consideration of these aspects, the program cannot optimally achieve the goals of maintaining children's health and meeting their nutritional needs.

The research data also show that *hifzh al-nafs* is achieved through various protective measures, preventive actions, meeting basic needs, and efforts to ensure individual safety. The results also show the various elements that facilitate the implementation of *hifzh al-nafs*. One supporting factor is the involvement of many parties in implementing the MBG Program, especially the school, food service providers, and students. A regular meal distribution schedule, a nutritious menu, food hygiene measures, and supervision during distribution are also important factors that contribute greatly to the program's effective implementation.

Another reason for the delivery of the MBG Program is the effective collaboration of schools, parents, and food service providers. The best way to control and coordinate the program's implementation is through effective communication. Facilities and hygiene standards are also important to ensure food is served to students safely and properly. Teacher oversight and program staff are also critical to successful implementation of the MBG Program. This oversight helps ensure meals are delivered on time, in adequate quantities, and received by students. We also conduct regular assessments to identify and address any shortcomings in program delivery.

Table 3. Indicators of *Hifzh al-nafs* and Their Integration into Islamic Religious Education

No	Indicator of <i>Hifzh al-nafs</i>	Islamic Religious Education as an Instrument	Number of informants (n=4)	Percentage
1	Maintain health	Instilling the value of maintaining health as a trust.	4	100%
2	Your nutritional needs	Cultivating healthy and good lifestyle habits	3	75%
3	Prevention of health problems	Education is a personal responsibility.	3	75%
4	Protection and survival	Instilling the value of caring for others	3	75%
5	Supporting students' physical well-being	Strengthening the spirit of learning and the pursuit of knowledge.	2	50%
6	Maintain food hygiene and safety	Instilling the habit of cleanliness in Islam	2	50%
7	Program monitoring and sustainability	Education in responsibility and cooperation	2	50%

Table 3 shows that the implementation of *hifzh al-nafs* in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program is most dominant in the health maintenance indicator, at 100%. At the same time, nutritional satisfaction, health problems prevention, and life protection are 75%, and students' physical condition, food safety, and program monitoring are 50%.

These results show the MBG program as a way to meet nutritional needs, but also as a program with a strong educational component. In this context, Islamic Religious Education serves as a tool to provide value-based significance to implementing the MBG program. Islamic Religious Education teaches learners that health is a sacred trust (*amanah*), nutritious food is a blessing to be grateful for, cleanliness is an integral part of Islamic teachings, and caring for others is a form of social responsibility. Therefore, the MBG program is a contextual medium for instilling the values of *hifzh al-nafs* in students' daily lives.

Discussion

The study shows that the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program is highly relevant to the principle of *hifzh al-nafs* within the framework of *maqashid al-shari'ah*. (Tumiran et al., 2025). This relationship can be viewed in terms of meeting nutritional needs, maintaining health, preventing health problems, protecting students' physical condition, and striving to preserve human life. The above findings support the notion that *hifzh al-nafs* is not only about protecting human beings from direct threats but also about meeting basic needs that allow them to stay healthy and alive. An important aspect of *hifzh al-nafs* is sufficient, halal, and nutritious food. Its absence increases the risk of disease and threatens human survival (Mohd Aris et al., 2010). The research backs up the idea that providing students with healthy food is a tangible way to save lives. (Anam et al., 2024).

The findings align with prior research linking healthy meal programs to students' learning conditions. Studies have linked the provision of nutritious food through the MBG Program to increased concentration and students' willingness to engage in learning activities. (Alam and Nurfatmi, 2025). This study extends these findings by showing that the benefits of nutritional satisfaction can also be viewed from the perspective of Islamic values, in addition to health and educational perspectives. Physically fit students are more ready, more enthusiastic, and more likely to participate actively in learning activities such as Islamic Religious Education. The MBG Program is best understood as a multi-dimensional policy. It meets biological needs, supports educational processes, and offers a practical context for realizing the values of *maqashid al-shari'ah*. (Masnan et al., 2025).

This research also aligns with Muhyidin and Syarofi's findings (2026), which examined the relevance of the MBG Program to the principle of *hifzh al-nafs*. Considering MBG's objective to meet nutritional needs and prevent health problems, the study concluded that MBG is important for preserving life. This study contributes to the literature not only by analyzing the normative relationship between the program and *hifzh al-nafs*. Interviews, observations, and documentary evidence show how those directly involved in the program perceive and implement the principle. Therefore, this study not only builds on the conceptual level of previous studies but also empirically explores the implementation of *hifzh al-nafs* as a practice in schools.

The percentage distribution of the indicators found in this research also indicates the position of *hifzh al-nafs* in the implementation of MBG. The best indicator was health maintenance, at a whopping 100%. Nutritional fulfillment, prevention of health problems, and protection of life were achieved in 75 percent of cases. Simultaneously, 50% weightage was provided to the physical condition of the students, 50% to food safety, and 50% to supervision of the program. The health-oriented part of the program seems to have been realized strongly, while several supporting dimensions at this level

have not yet been realized. This finding matters because *hifzh al-nafs* is more than simply feeding people. Food safety, quality, timely distribution, and effective oversight are integral to the mission of preserving life in the best way possible.

Another important finding of the study is that it refutes the assumption that the existence of a nutritional program guarantees the achievement of *hifzh al-nafs*.

The gap between policy goals and reality is shown in delayed food delivery, menu options that do not always fit student tastes, uneaten food, and the need for better monitoring of hygiene and food quality. Recent research on MBG from a maqashid al-shari'ah perspective also emphasizes the need to improve distribution, governance, transparency, and sustainability to ensure that the program's benefits reach the intended beneficiaries. The results indicate the need to consider the implementation of *Hifzh al-nafs* substantially and not administratively. A program is considered to conform to *hifzh al-nafs* if its implementation shows that it provides tangible protection and benefits for students.

This research contributes theoretically to the field of Islamic Religious Education by providing empirical evidence that *hifzh al-nafs* can be used as a contextual approach to education. Nutritious food relates to Islamic teachings, such as the obligation to maintain health, the importance of cleanliness, the prohibition of doing things that harm the body, the obligation to be grateful to Allah for His blessings, and the cultivation of concern for others. Therefore, the MBG Program is not only a policy of food provision but also a way for students to learn to internalize Islamic values through daily experience. This finding contributes to the discourse of *hifzh al-nafs* by extending beyond the legal and life-protection dimension to education and public policy. Recent theoretical literature also indicates that the concept of *hifzh al-nafs* has been expanded to include not only the protection of life but also broader aspects of human health and wellbeing.

The practical implications of this study emphasize improving food quality control, food safety, timeliness of distribution, menu suitability, and coordination among schools, food providers, parents, and government institutions while implementing MBG. The program evaluation should not be based on the number of meals distributed. It should include health indicators, student acceptance of meals, food safety, physical condition, and educational benefits. This research shows theoretically that the concept of maqashid al-shari'ah is a useful framework for empirical analysis of social policies. The *hifzh al-nafs* framework allows policymakers to shift the assessment of MBG from distributional performance to actual protection, benefit, and wellbeing.

There are a few limitations to this study that should be considered when you interpret the findings. The data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, mainly within the confines of a limited research setting. (Muhyidin and Syarofi, 2026).

The study did not employ any objective measurements such as anthropometric indicators, hemoglobin levels, energy and protein intake, or other clinical assessments. Moreover, the research does not include a comparison group, so it is not possible to know whether improvements in students' health and academic performance are due to the introduction of MBG. These limitations may affect the reliability of interpretations of the program's impact and the ability to generalize the findings to schools or regions with different social, geographical, and student characteristics.

Further research should broaden the geographical scope to include schools within different social and environmental contexts. Longitudinal studies are needed to

understand the long-term effects of MBG on nutritional status, health, concentration, attendance and learning outcomes. (Duan et al., 2024). Future research could develop a tool or index of *hifzh al-nafs* that combines measures of nutritional fulfillment, health, food safety, protection of life, and internalization of Islamic values. This approach may lead to a more comprehensive assessment of the MBG Program and advocate the role of maqashid al-shari'ah in educational policy and child welfare research. (Zaimsyah, 2026).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program provides more than nutritional fulfillment; it offers a contextual way to realize *hifzh al-nafs* through Islamic Religious Education by connecting health, cleanliness, responsibility, social concern, justice, and gratitude with students' daily experiences. The key lesson is that preserving life in the perspective of maqashid al-shari'ah can be meaningfully implemented through concrete educational practices that protect students' physical wellbeing while simultaneously fostering awareness of the body as a trust from Allah SWT. Scientifically, this study contributes by extending the discussion of *hifzh al-nafs* beyond its normative and legal dimensions into an empirical educational and policy context, demonstrating how a nutritional program can serve as a medium for internalizing Islamic values in everyday school life. However, the study is limited by its qualitative design, restricted research setting, and reliance on interviews, observations, and documentation without objective nutritional or health measurements or comparative data. Future research should therefore examine the implementation of MBG across different educational levels and social, cultural, economic, and institutional contexts, while employing longitudinal, comparative, or mixed-method approaches to assess its effects on nutritional status, healthy behavior, religious understanding, social character, learning conditions, and students' awareness of *hifzh al-nafs*.

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