

FRAGMENTATION OF AUTHORITY OF THE FREE NUTRITIONAL MEAL PROGRAM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program is a strategic government policy designed to improve the nutritional status of the community, enhance the quality of human resources, and support efforts to accelerate the reduction of stunting in Indonesia. Despite the high expectations for the program, its implementation still faces various governance issues, particularly those related to the division of authority between government institutions. The involvement of many actors in the planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring processes has not been fully accompanied by an effective coordination mechanism, potentially leading to overlapping tasks, differing policy interpretations, and inconsistencies in implementation across regions. Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the forms of fragmentation of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program and explain its implications for the effectiveness of governance from a public administration perspective. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with stakeholders, observations of program implementation, and reviews of various policy documents, regulations, and institutional reports related to the MBG implementation. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis using source and method triangulation to strengthen the validity of the research results. The research findings indicate that fragmentation of authority not only impacts the effectiveness of inter-institutional coordination but also results in slow decision-making, administrative inefficiencies, and variations in program implementation at the regional level. Furthermore, the study found that strengthening collaborative governance, clarifying role allocations, harmonizing regulations, and utilizing integrated information systems can improve coordination and enhance the effectiveness of program implementation. Therefore, strengthening institutional synergy and realigning the distribution of authority are crucial prerequisites for realizing a more effective, accountable, and sustainable Free Nutritional Meal Program within the framework of public administration in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Fragmentation of Authority; Free Nutritional Meal Program; Public Administration*

INTRODUCTION

National development is fundamentally aimed not only at driving economic growth but also at improving the welfare and quality of life of the community through the provision of effective public services that are responsive to citizen needs and uphold the principle of justice. Within this framework, public administration plays a crucial role, serving as a bridge between policy formulation and implementation at the operational level. The success of public policy is not solely determined by sound planning; it also depends on the government's ability to organize institutions, strengthen cross-sector coordination, and ensure that each actor carries out its role and authority appropriately (Wibowo et al., 2026). The increasing complexity of public issues requires the government to implement more collaborative governance involving various institutions with different functions and responsibilities. This collaborative approach is increasingly relevant because many strategic national policies are cross-sectoral and require the integration of resources, information exchange, and interconnected decision-making mechanisms. However, bureaucratic structures involving multiple organizations often give rise to problems such as overlapping authority, weak coordination, and differing interpretations of applicable regulations. This situation can reduce the effectiveness of policy implementation and hinder the achievement of established development goals (Azzahra et al., 2025). Therefore, from a public administration perspective, policy is not only understood as a legal or regulatory product, but also as a governance process that requires synergy between institutions so that services to the public can be provided effectively, efficiently, transparently and accountably.

The quality of human resources is a fundamental factor determining the success of development and a country's global competitiveness. This improvement is not only determined by access to quality education but is also significantly influenced by the health conditions and the fulfillment of nutritional needs from early life. Various studies have shown that adequate nutritional intake plays a crucial role in supporting brain development, increasing learning capacity, enhancing productivity, and maintaining sustainable individual health. Conversely, various nutritional issues, such as stunting, anemia, chronic energy deficiency, and other forms of malnutrition, remain a problem in several regions of Indonesia (Ardhana *et al.*, 2026). These issues not only impact the community's quality of life but also have the potential to hinder the development of competitive and productive human resources, thus impacting the long-term success of national development. Based on these conditions, the government continues to develop various policies oriented towards improving the nutritional status of the community as an integral part of the national development agenda. Over time, nutritional fulfillment policies are no longer viewed solely as interventions in the health sector but have become a form of development investment that provides broad benefits for improving the quality of education, economic growth, and community welfare. Therefore, the successful implementation of policies in the field of nutrition requires a governance system that is able to strengthen cross-sectoral coordination, integrate the roles of various institutions, and ensure that policy implementation takes place effectively, evenly, consistently, and sustainably throughout Indonesia (Afriansah, 2026).

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is one of the government's priority policies designed as a long-term investment in developing the quality of Indonesia's human resources. This policy is aimed at improving the nutritional status of the community, especially among groups with high levels of vulnerability, such as students, toddlers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. Beyond simply providing nutritious food, this program is part of a development strategy that integrates objectives in health, education, and social welfare in a sustainable manner. By meeting adequate nutritional needs, the government seeks to accelerate the reduction of stunting rates, reduce various forms of malnutrition, and strengthen the learning capacity, health, and productivity of the younger generation as a foundation for future national development (Zubaedah & Sirait, 2025). This approach demonstrates that human resource development is placed as a top priority in supporting the realization of a more advanced, productive, and competitive Indonesia. However, the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program is highly complex because it involves various government institutions with different authorities and responsibilities. All stages of implementation, from planning, budget allocation, food provision, distribution, quality control, to program evaluation, require synergy between ministries, local governments, educational institutions, food suppliers, and various other stakeholders. Therefore, the success of the Free Nutritious Meals Program implementation is not only determined by the adequacy of funding and the quality of policy design, but also greatly influenced by the effectiveness of governance in integrating inter-institutional roles, clarifying the boundaries of each institution's authority, and establishing a coordination mechanism capable of ensuring optimal and sustainable program implementation throughout Indonesia.

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program is a public policy involving various government institutions with overlapping authorities and responsibilities at every stage of its implementation, from policy formulation and budget planning to food provision and distribution to target recipients, through to program control, monitoring, and evaluation. The cross-sectoral nature of the program means its success is inextricably linked to effective coordination among ministries, state institutions, local governments, educational institutions, food providers, and various other stakeholders. However, the involvement of multiple actors with differing institutional characteristics often creates problems in program implementation (Fahrian & Putra, 2026). Differences in institutional mandates, division of tasks, administrative procedures, and policy priorities have the potential to lead to overlapping authority, weak inter-agency communication, and disharmony in policy implementation at the implementation level. This situation not only reduces the efficiency of the administrative process but can also slow decision-making and lead to variations in the quality of program implementation across regions. Public administration studies demonstrate that the success of policy implementation is strongly influenced by the government's ability to build integrated institutional governance, not solely by the quality of its policy formulation. Therefore, the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program requires a governance system that is able to strengthen cross-sector synergy, define the limits of authority of each institution, and develop adaptive collaboration mechanisms so that policy objectives can be realized more effectively, efficiently, accountably, and sustainably (Setiawan, 2026).

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program faces challenges not only related to budget availability and the readiness of supporting facilities, but also closely related to institutional arrangements involving various government agencies and the division of authority among them. From a public administration perspective,

this condition reflects a fragmentation of authority, namely a situation where the functions of planning, decision-making, implementation, and oversight are distributed among a number of institutions without the support of an integrated coordination system. This institutional pattern has the potential to create unclear boundaries of responsibility for each institution, differences in policy interpretation, and weak harmonization during the program implementation stage (Wulansari *et al.*, 2026). However, the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program requires strong synergy between the central government, regional governments, relevant ministries and institutions, educational institutions, food suppliers, and community participation as part of the policy implementation network. The involvement of these various stakeholders essentially reflects the application of the principle of collaborative governance, which aims to improve the effectiveness of public services through the shared utilization of resources. However, if this collaboration is not accompanied by a clear division of authority, an effective coordination mechanism, and a clear accountability system, then the diversity of actors can actually give rise to overlapping functions, administrative conflicts, slowdowns in the decision-making process, and reduced bureaucratic efficiency. Therefore, the study of the fragmentation of authority is highly relevant to assess the extent to which the existing institutional design is able to support the successful implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program while also identifying various aspects of governance that need to be improved so that policy objectives can be achieved more effectively, integrated, and sustainably (Ayuni, 2025).

The fragmentation of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program not only creates administrative problems but also has direct implications for the effectiveness of policy implementation in the field. The division of tasks that has not been optimally integrated among ministries, regional governments, and other implementing agencies has the potential to create duplication of functions, procedural inconsistencies, and delays in the decision-making process. This situation is further complicated when each institution uses different coordination mechanisms and regulatory interpretations, resulting in a lack of alignment in program implementation across regions. As a result, the planning, procurement, distribution, and monitoring of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) do not always align with established policy objectives (Rahayu, 2025). From a public administration perspective, this situation demonstrates that the successful implementation of a national policy is determined not only by clear regulations but also by institutional capacity to build effective coordination, communication, and collaboration. Weak integration between institutions has the potential to reduce the efficiency of resource use, slow response to various implementation issues, and impact the quality of services received by the target community. Conversely, if the division of authority is clearly structured, supported by adaptive coordination mechanisms, and strengthened by an integrated accountability system, each actor can carry out its functions according to its responsibilities without creating conflicts of authority. Thus, strengthening collaborative governance is an important prerequisite for increasing the effectiveness of the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program while ensuring that the policy objectives of improving the quality of community nutrition and human resource development can be achieved optimally, equitably, and sustainably (Agnia *et al.*, 2025).

Various studies on public policy implementation show that the success of a national program is influenced not only by budget adequacy and regulatory clarity, but also by the government's ability to manage relationships between institutions involved in the implementation process. Although issues of bureaucratic coordination and collaborative governance have been widely discussed in public administration literature, discussion of the fragmentation of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program remains relatively limited. Most studies focus more on aspects of nutritional fulfillment, socio-economic impacts, the effectiveness of stunting reduction programs, and policy evaluation from a public health perspective. While the institutional dimensions related to the distribution of authority, relationships between implementers, and administrative coordination mechanisms have not received adequate attention. In fact, the successful implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program is greatly influenced by the integrated roles of the central government, regional governments, relevant ministries and institutions, nutrition fulfillment service units, and educational institutions as implementers at the field level. A lack of synchronization in the division of tasks and responsibilities has the potential to create overlapping authority, slow the decision-making process, reduce the effectiveness of oversight, and lead to variations in program implementation across regions. These conditions indicate that the implementation issues of the Free Nutritional Meal Program are not only related to the technical aspects of providing nutritious food, but also reflect governance challenges that require a more integrated institutional arrangement. Departing from this gap, this study is directed at analyzing how fragmentation of authority is formed in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program, the factors that influence it, and its implications for the effectiveness of policy implementation from a public administration perspective. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the

development of public administration studies and serve as a basis for consideration in the formulation of a more integrated governance model in the implementation of national strategic programs (Kamalawati *et al.*, 2025).

Several previous studies have examined the implementation of nutritional fulfillment policies and the governance of public programs from various perspectives. Research conducted by Subianto *et al.*, (2026) focused on the effectiveness of the implementation of policies to accelerate stunting reduction through coordination between the central and regional governments. The results of this study indicate that program success is strongly influenced by regional government commitment and institutional capacity in implementing policies. However, this study has not yet examined in depth the issue of fragmentation of authority between institutions as a factor influencing the effectiveness of policy implementation. Furthermore, Khairiah *et al.*, (2025) examined collaborative governance in the implementation of social food assistance programs, emphasizing the importance of synergy between stakeholders. Although this study provides an overview of collaborative governance practices, it focuses more on inter-institutional partnership patterns and does not analyze the distribution of administrative authority that could potentially lead to overlapping tasks in policy implementation. Meanwhile, research by Febryanti *et al.*, (2025) discusses the decentralization of public administration in the provision of social services in Indonesia. The study highlighted the relationship between the central government and regional governments within the framework of regional autonomy, but did not specifically examine the dynamics of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program, which involves various ministries, institutions, regional governments, and implementing units. Unlike the three studies, this study specifically analyzes the fragmentation of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program through a public administration perspective, emphasizing inter-institutional relationships, coordination mechanisms, division of authority, and their implications for the effectiveness of policy implementation. Thus, this study is expected to provide a conceptual contribution to the development of public administration studies while offering practical recommendations for strengthening governance, institutional coordination, and harmonization of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics of authority fragmentation in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program (MBG). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of various public administration phenomena through an understanding of the policy implementation process, inter-institutional relationships, and the interactions of actors involved in program implementation. This study focuses on analyzing the division of authority, coordination mechanisms, organizational communication patterns, and forms of collaboration established among ministries, government agencies, local governments, and program implementing units (Ananta & Nadhira, 2025). The use of a case study design allows the study to examine in detail how authority fragmentation occurs while identifying various factors that influence the effectiveness of policy implementation within a public administration framework. This approach is deemed appropriate because the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program involves many institutions with interrelated functions, roles, and authorities, forming a complex governance system. Therefore, this study aims to understand this phenomenon based on the empirical conditions developing in the field, thereby providing a complete picture of inter-institutional relationships without intervening or manipulating the situation being studied (Aziz *et al.*, 2025).

Data collection in this study was conducted through a combination of several techniques to ensure the information obtained could represent the research phenomenon comprehensively and in-depth. The primary technique employed was in-depth interviews with stakeholders directly involved in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG), including representatives from relevant ministries or institutions, local governments, program managers, and various parties involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the policy. These interviews aimed to gain an understanding of the division of authority, coordination patterns, decision-making mechanisms, and various obstacles that emerged during program implementation (Dwijayanti, 2024).

To enrich the interview results, this study also conducted field observations of the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program to obtain an empirical picture of inter-institutional interactions, coordination mechanisms, and policy implementation at the operational level. Furthermore, the study utilized documentation studies by reviewing various regulations, policy documents, technical guidelines, institutional reports, and other supporting documents related to program implementation. The application of various data collection techniques was intended to obtain more comprehensive information, strengthen the data interpretation process, and produce a more

in-depth analysis of the dynamics of governance and fragmentation of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (Nufus *et al.*, 2026).

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, considering their level of knowledge, experience, and involvement in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program. Informant selection was carried out in stages until the information obtained indicated a level of data saturation, so that no significant new information was found. The entire data collection process was carried out while adhering to ethical research principles, including conveying the research objectives to informants, providing voluntary consent, protecting identity confidentiality, and using data solely for academic purposes (Wicaksono, 2026). Throughout the research process, researchers also conducted systematic field notes to document observations, interview dynamics, and various contextual findings that supported the data interpretation process. This approach is expected to produce credible information and reflect the empirical conditions of the Free Nutritional Meal Program implementation from a public administration perspective (Nasir *et al.*, 2026).

Data analysis in this study was conducted systematically using a thematic analysis approach to identify and understand various patterns emerging from the research data. All information obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and reviews of policy and regulatory documents was first organized based on themes related to the research focus on the fragmentation of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program. The analysis stage began with a data reduction process to filter relevant information, followed by coding, grouping data into categories with similar characteristics, and identifying relationships between themes to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of policy implementation (Wibowo *et al.*, 2026).

Next, the analysis results are interpreted by linking the empirical findings to the conceptual framework of public administration, particularly those related to inter-institutional coordination, collaborative governance, distribution of authority, and implementation of public policy. To ensure the validity and credibility of the research results, source and method triangulation were applied through a process of comparing information obtained from various groups of informants, direct observations, and official documents related to the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program. The implementation of this strategy aims to ensure data consistency while minimizing potential bias in the interpretation process. Thus, the analysis stages carried out are expected to produce valid, credible findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the forms of fragmentation of authority and their implications for the effectiveness of the Free Nutritional Meal Program implementation from a public administration perspective (Hakim & Yuliana, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research findings show that the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) involves various government institutions with interconnected roles, functions, and authorities at each stage of policy implementation. Interviews with informants from various institutions revealed that the established distribution of authority is not fully supported by an effectively integrated coordination system. Each organization tends to carry out its duties in accordance with its respective sectoral provisions and institutional mandates, resulting in various administrative obstacles in the process of policy alignment between institutions. This phenomenon is evident from the planning stage, budget allocation, development of operational standards, activity implementation, and oversight mechanisms, which still involve multi-layered bureaucratic procedures. Consequently, decision-making often takes longer due to the need for coordination and approval from several institutions with different authorities.

Furthermore, differences in understanding the substance of the regulations have led to heterogeneity in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program across regions. This study confirms that the fragmentation of authority is not only related to the administrative division of tasks but also reflects the quality of inter-institutional coordinating relationships, which are crucial factors in supporting the effectiveness of policy implementation. From a public administration perspective, these findings demonstrate that the successful implementation of a national program is largely determined by the government's ability to build effective vertical and horizontal coordination, enabling all involved institutions to integrate their functions, authorities, and resources to achieve policy objectives more optimally.

To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of authority fragmentation identified during the research process, all findings obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis were classified into several key aspects that became the focus of the study. The results of this grouping are presented systematically in Table 1 as a basis for explaining the pattern of authority division and its implications for the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program.

Table 1. Findings of Fragmentation of Authority in the Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program

Aspects Analyzed	Research Findings	Impact on Program Implementation
Division of authority	Authority is spread across various ministries, institutions and local governments	Potential overlapping tasks and slow coordination
Coordination mechanism	Coordination is still sectoral and not yet integrated	Decision making takes longer
Policy interpretation	Differences in understanding of regulations among implementers	Variations in program implementation in various regions
Information Systems	Not all institutions use integrated information systems.	Data exchange and monitoring are less than optimal
Collaborative governance	Cross-sector collaboration is starting to develop, but is not yet running consistently.	The effectiveness of implementation is not yet even
Harmonization of regulations	Some regulations still require harmonization	Causes unclear boundaries of authority

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that fragmentation of authority occurred throughout almost the entire implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program, from the planning stage to the oversight stage. Conceptually, the distribution of authority among various ministries, institutions, and local governments is a strategy to optimize program implementation by dividing tasks according to the functions and competencies of each institution. However, research findings indicate that this division of roles has not been balanced by an integrated coordination system, resulting in various administrative obstacles that impact the effectiveness of policy implementation. Based on field observations, inter-agency coordination is still dominated by formal bureaucratic procedures, while more flexible and responsive collaboration mechanisms have not been optimally implemented.

These conditions cause the flow of information exchange, resolution of various operational issues, and the decision-making process to be slower than the needs of program implementation in the field. Furthermore, the lack of an integrated information system results in each institution implementing different reporting mechanisms, so that the program monitoring and evaluation process cannot be carried out comprehensively and continuously. Thus, this study confirms that the main challenge in implementing the Free Nutritious Meal Program is not solely caused by the large number of actors involved, but rather is influenced by the suboptimal coordination governance that is able to integrate the division of authority into a public administration system that is synergistic, effective, and oriented towards achieving policy objectives (Khatimah et al., 2025).

The research results indicate that fragmentation of authority is one of the factors influencing the effectiveness of inter-institutional coordination in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program. Based on information obtained through in-depth interviews, the majority of informants explained that the division of tasks and functions within each institution has been clearly regulated through various laws and technical regulations. However, this regulation of authority has not been fully balanced by a coordination system capable of synergizing the roles of all institutions into an integrated working mechanism (Robbani & Winata, 2025).

As a result, the policy harmonization process often takes longer because each decision must go through different administrative procedures and coordination channels in each institution. This finding indicates that clear distribution of authority does not always directly correlate with effective coordination if inter-institutional communication is not flexible, intensive, and adaptive to the needs of policy implementation. This condition is in line with the view of Rawis, (2025), who emphasized that the higher the level of differentiation in the organizational structure, the greater the need for coordination mechanisms to maintain the integration of organizational activities. In the context of the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program, the involvement of various ministries, institutions, and local governments requires strong horizontal and vertical coordination to minimize the potential for overlapping functions, conflicts of authority, and misalignment in policy implementation. Thus, coordination is not only positioned as an administrative procedure, but also as a strategic element that functions to integrate various institutional interests so that public policy objectives can be realized more effectively, efficiently, and sustainably.

The research findings reveal that the complexity of the decision-making process is one of the main implications of the fragmentation of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program. Based on the results of interviews with informants, it was found that the resolution of various problems that arose during the program's implementation often experienced delays because each strategic decision had to go through approval mechanisms from several institutions with different authorities. This condition resulted in responses to the dynamics of program implementation in the field being unable to be carried out quickly, especially when policy adjustments were needed to address urgent needs. This phenomenon is in line with the policy implementation theory put forward by Lendra *et al.*, (2025) , which places bureaucratic structure as one of the important determinants in determining the success of public policy implementation.

According to Shientiarizki *et al.*, (2026) , bureaucracies with overly complex structures tend to prolong coordination flows, slow down information delivery, and reduce the efficiency of policy implementation processes. The results of this study provide empirical support for this view by showing that the more coordination stages that must be passed between institutions, the greater the chance of delays in the decision-making process and the increased administrative burden that must be handled by program implementers. Therefore, simplifying coordination mechanisms, clarifying authority boundaries, and strengthening inter-institutional communication systems are important steps to increase response speed, administrative efficiency, and the effectiveness of the Free Nutritional Meal Program implementation.

This study also revealed that the impact of fragmented authority is not only reflected in the effectiveness of coordination and the speed of decision-making, but also has implications for the emergence of differences in the implementation patterns of the Free Nutritional Meal Program in various regions. These differences are evident in the inter-agency coordination mechanisms, reporting systems, resource management, and even oversight practices, which are influenced by the organizational capacity and administrative capabilities of each regional government. Although the diversity of regional conditions is an unavoidable consequence of governance that applies the principle of decentralization, the results of the study indicate that the lack of an integrated coordination mechanism results in program implementation taking place with varying degrees of effectiveness (Nissa *et al.*, 2025) .

This phenomenon aligns with the Collaborative Governance perspective put forward by Ansell and Gash, who assert that the successful implementation of cross-sectoral policies is highly dependent on building collective commitment, continuous communication, trust between stakeholders, and clear division of roles among all actors involved. In the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program, the pattern of inter-institutional cooperation still tends to be oriented towards a sectoral approach and formal bureaucratic procedures, thus failing to establish collaborative governance that is flexible and responsive to the dynamics of program implementation. Therefore, efforts to strengthen institutional collaboration through regulatory harmonization, the development of more uniform operational standards, and the development of integrated information systems are urgently needed to minimize the fragmentation of authority while increasing the consistency and effectiveness of the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program at the national level (Wibowo *et al.*, 2026) .

The research findings indicate that strengthening collaborative governance is an effective strategy to minimize the impact of fragmentation of authority in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program. Based on information obtained through in-depth interviews, the majority of informants stated that regular coordination through cross-sectoral forums can strengthen inter-institutional communication, align understanding of policies, and facilitate the resolution of various operational issues that arise during program implementation (Bajuri *et al.*, 2026) . The existence of these coordination forums also contributes to the formation of mutual agreements regarding the division of tasks, responsibilities, and work mechanisms between institutions, thus enabling a more efficient implementation process.

Observational findings indicate that regions that consistently implement cross-sector coordination have a better level of program implementation integration compared to regions that still rely on incidental administrative communication. This condition suggests that the effectiveness of policy implementation is not only influenced by regulatory clarity, but also determined by the organization's ability to build sustainable and mutually supportive cooperative relationships. These findings reinforce the view of Aisyah *et al.*, (2025) regarding network governance, which emphasizes that the success of public policy implementation increasingly depends on the government's capacity to build collaborative networks capable of connecting various organizations to achieve common goals. In the context of the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program, the development of an integrated institutional network is a crucial element to ensure that the division of authority does not develop into administrative fragmentation, but rather becomes a foundation for creating effective coordination, improving organizational performance, and optimally achieving program objectives.

Research findings indicate that regulatory harmonization is a crucial element in creating clarity in the division of authority among the various institutions involved in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program. Based on the results of an analysis of various regulations and policy documents, several provisions were found that open up the opportunity for differences in interpretation regarding the scope of duties and responsibilities of each institution (Carvallo et al., 2026) . This condition has implications for the emergence of overlapping administrative functions, differences in reporting mechanisms, and variations in the decision-making process at the regional level. The results of interviews with informants showed that regulatory certainty is a crucial factor in facilitating coordination because each institution has a common reference in exercising its authority.

This finding supports the policy implementation theory proposed by Virlana & Tjoneng, (2025) , which asserts that the success of policy implementation is greatly influenced by clarity of objectives, consistency of implementation standards, and the establishment of effective working relationships among implementing organizations. Therefore, regulatory alignment not only has a normative function as a legal basis for policy implementation, but also plays a role as an administrative instrument to clarify the distribution of authority, minimize potential inter-institutional conflicts, increase the effectiveness of coordination, and strengthen accountability in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program.

In general, research results indicate that fragmentation of authority is one of the fundamental issues affecting the successful implementation of the Free Nutritional Meals Program. The resulting impact is not only seen in suboptimal inter-agency coordination, but is also reflected in slow decision-making processes, increased administrative burdens, and inconsistent program implementation across regions (Emmanulle et al., 2025) . Although the involvement of many ministries, institutions, and local governments is a consequence of the cross-sectoral nature of the policy, this study shows that this distribution of authority cannot produce effective governance without an integrated coordination system, mutually supportive regulations, connected information infrastructure, and collaboration patterns based on shared goals (Carvallo et al., 2026) .

From a public administration perspective, the effectiveness of policy implementation is not only influenced by the design of the organizational structure, but also determined by the ability of each institution to build synergy through intensive communication, institutional relationships based on trust, and a clear division of responsibilities. Therefore, strengthening collaborative governance needs to be accompanied by regulatory harmonization, optimization of information system integration, simplification of coordination mechanisms, and realignment of the distribution of authority to make inter-institutional relations more effective and responsive. Thus, the findings of this study provide empirical evidence that the successful implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program is highly dependent on public administration governance reforms that are able to integrate various government actors into a coordination system that is adaptive, accountable, and oriented towards improving the quality of public services.

CONCLUSION

Research findings indicate that fragmentation of authority is one aspect influencing the successful implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program within the framework of public administration. The involvement of various ministries, government agencies, local governments, and implementing units demonstrates that this program has cross-sectoral policy characteristics that require inter-institutional cooperation. However, the established division of authority has not been fully supported by a coordination system capable of effectively integrating all actors. The impact is evident in the emergence of several administrative obstacles, such as a longer decision-making process, suboptimal coordination, differences in policy interpretation, and variations in program implementation across regions.

The research also shows that the complexity of inter-institutional relationships is not only influenced by the configuration of organizational structures, but is also determined by the effectiveness of communication, clarity of task distribution, and institutional capacity to build collaboration oriented towards achieving policy objectives. Therefore, the successful implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program does not rely solely on the existence of clear regulations, but also requires the government's ability to manage inter-institutional synergy through a coordinated administrative system that is adaptive to change and responsive to the various dynamics that arise during the policy implementation process.

Based on the analysis conducted, this study confirms that optimizing the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program requires a restructuring of the distribution of authority, accompanied by strengthening inter-institutional cooperation as the main foundation for creating effective, accountable, and sustainable governance. Achieving these goals is inseparable from efforts to harmonize regulations, develop an integrated information

system, refine coordination mechanisms, and increase institutional capacity at all levels of government to ensure more efficient, targeted, and consistent policy implementation.

From an academic perspective, the results of this study contribute to enriching public administration studies, particularly those related to cross-sectoral policy implementation and inter-institutional authority management. Furthermore, the research findings also have practical value as considerations for policymakers in designing governance models that can strengthen coordination among the various institutions involved. However, this study still has limitations because it focuses on a qualitative approach in analyzing the dynamics of authority fragmentation in the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program. Therefore, future research is recommended to develop a mixed methods approach, expand the scope of research locations, and test the effectiveness of various inter-institutional coordination models to produce a more comprehensive understanding of public policy governance involving multiple sectors and levels of government in Indonesia.

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