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Using a School Meal Report Book to Improve Preschool Children's Packed Meals in Tanjung Morawa

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Abstract

This article critically evaluates the use of a School Meal Report Book as a tool for monitoring packed meals and facilitating teacher–parent feedback at PAUD Bintang Harapan, Tanjung Morawa, North Sumatra. The study draws on documentation of a 2022 community programme and uses a descriptive-evaluative approach with repeated observations. Teachers assessed seven meal components—food types, nutrient-group composition, preparation, presentation, consumption, beverages and containers—using scores of 6, 8 or 10 and relayed weekly suggestions to parents. School records identify 104 enrolled children, 63 report-book recipients and 60 children in the reported outcome analysis; the reason for the discrepancy is undocumented. Before implementation, approximately 80% of children reportedly brought meals dominated by rice and simple side dishes. At the end of the programme, approximately 75% reportedly brought more varied meals including fruit or vegetables. The six-week records suggest broadly improving scores, with consumption rated relatively highly and beverages relatively poorly. These are descriptive observations, not estimates of causal effects or nutrient intake. The contribution lies in evaluating a practical, multidimensional feedback process and its reporting limitations. Replication requires clearer denominators, validated scoring criteria and longer-term assessment.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is an important stage for establishing eating routines and practices that can support subsequent growth, health and participation in learning. Meals and snacks provided during school hours form one part of children's daily diets. Their quality cannot be inferred merely from the presence of food: diversity, nutrient-dense choices, preparation, suitability and children's actual consumption all matter. The World Health Organization (2021) recommends that early childhood education and care

settings support healthy foods and beverages through practical service standards. In Indonesia, family-prepared packed meals offer opportunities for parental involvement, but they may also reflect limited time, food access and knowledge of diverse meal composition.

At PAUD Bintang Harapan, Tanjung Morawa, programme documentation described an initial pattern in which approximately 80% of children brought rice or fried rice with a simple side dish, commonly eggs or nuggets. Packaged products were also observed, while fruit and vegetables appeared less frequently; Maisuari (2022) previously examined packaged-food provision in an Indonesian early-childhood setting. This observation concerned meal appearance and reported ingredient groups rather than a laboratory measurement of nutrients. The percentage was reported in the programme materials without the supporting numerator or an explicit observation-day denominator; it is therefore treated as an approximate descriptive statement rather than an independently recalculated prevalence.

The practical challenge was not simply persuading households to provide food. Teachers could see the packed meals and leftovers at school, whereas parents selected ingredients, prepared meals and chose containers at home. Without a structured channel for sharing observations, important feedback remained fragmented. Prior Indonesian work on packed meals has emphasized parental understanding of nutrition (Umasugi et al., 2020), and research on school–family engagement has emphasized purposeful communication (Triwardhani et al., 2020). Together, these studies suggest that meal guidance should connect the setting in which food is prepared with the setting in which it is consumed.

Evidence also points to the limits of communication alone. In an Australian cluster-randomized study, Sutherland et al. (2019) assessed a multicomponent school-lunchbox intervention involving school guidance and parent communications; the trial did not establish a statistically significant improvement in the mean energy packed from the targeted comparison. A Cochrane review similarly distinguished the implementation of healthy-eating practices from measured changes in children's diets (Wolfenden et al., 2020). These findings caution against assuming that distributing information automatically establishes sustained dietary improvement.

PAUD Bintang Harapan therefore introduced a School Meal Report Book, a paper-based instrument of approximately 20 pages containing scoring criteria, weekly results, teacher recommendations, parent response space, child-related information and illustrated examples. Seven aspects of a packed meal were scored using the categories 6, 8 and 10. Teachers observed meals daily and communicated their weekly summaries to parents, who were invited to respond before the next cycle. This process moved beyond a one-off awareness session by introducing repeated assessment and dialogue.

An important publication-context issue must be acknowledged. Sinaga, Sitanggang, and Manalu (2023) previously reported a community-service programme at the same PAUD with the same seven-item report book, six-week observations and closely corresponding outcomes. The present manuscript consequently does not present this programme as a newly discovered intervention or assert an independent dataset. Its defensible value is a more explicit descriptive appraisal of the documented seven-component assessment, cross-class patterns, teacher–parent feedback cycle and evidence limitations. Whether that appraisal is sufficiently distinct for a new journal publication must be determined by the authors and the editor, with full disclosure of the prior report.

Three questions guide the analysis: (1) How did the observed characteristics of children's packed meals differ between the initial and end-of-programme descriptions? (2) How did the seven recorded assessment components develop over six documented weeks, including variation between classes? (3) How was the report book used as a communication mechanism connecting teacher observations, parent responses and subsequent meal preparation? The objective is to evaluate these questions within the descriptive limits of the available programme records rather than to attribute changes to a controlled intervention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Achievement motivation and actionable feedback

McClelland's account of achievement motivation emphasizes striving toward standards and improving performance (McClelland, 1961). As a sensitizing concept, this perspective can help explain why a parent receiving clear weekly information about meal preparation might wish to improve subsequent results. The account does not, however, show that an increase in motivation actually occurred in this programme: no validated achievement-motivation instrument was administered to parents. Accordingly, motivation is treated as a proposed mechanism and not a measured outcome or mediator.

Feedback theory provides a complementary rationale. Hattie and Timperley (2007) explain that feedback can be constructive when it clarifies current performance and helps identify improvement actions, although effects depend strongly on how feedback is communicated. In this programme, a numerical rating alone could be ambiguous or discouraging; the accompanying teacher comment is important because it can translate a score into an achievable action, such as offering a broader variety of suitable ingredients. This interpretation is conceptual and should not be confused with a direct experimental test of feedback effectiveness.

Packed-meal quality and operational definitions

In this manuscript, "meal performance" means observable characteristics within a seven-item school assessment, not a validated index of dietary adequacy. Food types describe ingredient diversity; nutrient-group composition concerns the visible presence of food sources commonly associated with major nutrient groups; preparation and presentation address practical and visual aspects; consumption concerns the amount eaten or left; beverages concern what is brought to drink; and containers concern the carrying and storage medium. These indicators are not interchangeable: a visually appealing lunch can still lack dietary diversity, and a lunch that is completely consumed is not automatically nutritionally balanced.

The report book used three score categories (6, 8 and 10). The source records an explicit example for food-type diversity: one or two kinds of food receive 6, three or four receive 8, and more than four receive 10. The full decision rules for all other items, information on assessor agreement and evidence of instrument validation were not included in the available materials. The article therefore does not invent additional cutoffs. Weekly figures are interpreted only as descriptive changes within the local scoring system.

School–family communication and implementation

Home-packed meal practices are shaped outside the classroom, so improvement relies on cooperation rather than unilateral instruction. Triwardhani et al. (2020)

describe how teacher–parent communication supports participation in educational activities. The PAUD report-book process made that interaction regular: observation, rating, an explanatory note, distribution, parent response and renewed observation. Research into the implementation of childcare nutrition programmes also indicates that improving practice is a distinct challenge from demonstrating an improvement in diet-related health outcomes (Wolfenden et al., 2020).

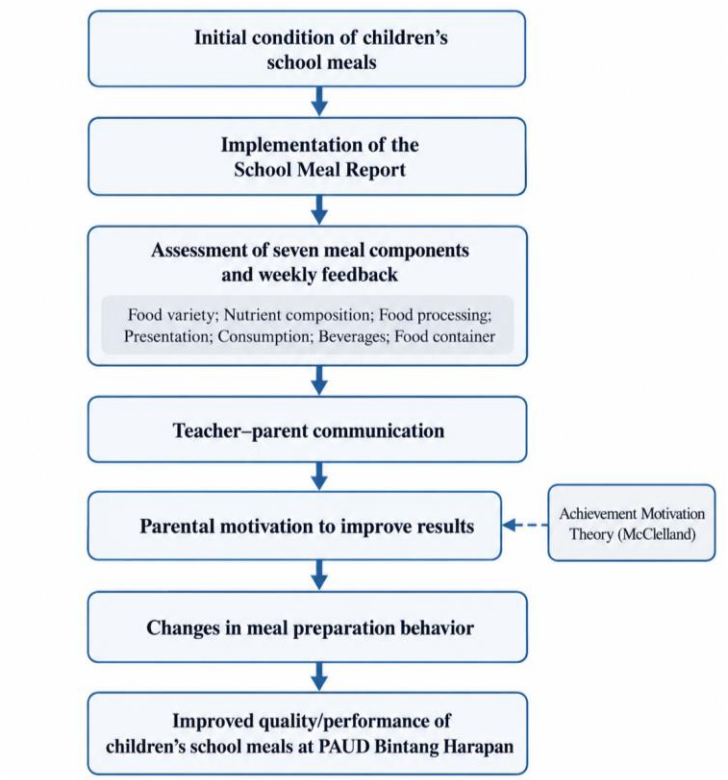
Related evidence and the research contribution

Sinaga et al. (2021) evaluated a meal-report intervention in a quasi-experimental kindergarten study using a comparison group and reported favourable differences in meal-performance ratings. The earlier intervention assessed five items rather than the seven described here; its outcomes and statistical design must not be transplanted into the present site-level descriptive evaluation. Sinaga et al. (2023) described the same PAUD Bintang Harapan community programme, making novelty claims especially sensitive. The current article contributes through explicit measurement definitions, acknowledgement of denominators and missing data, interpretation of classroom heterogeneity and a disciplined separation of observed changes from claims of causation.

Conceptual framework

The proposed mechanism is best understood as a sequence of school–family practices. The programme provides an observable standard, and repeated feedback may help parents identify achievable adjustments. Because parental motivation was not measured, the framework specifies a plausible pathway rather than a tested mediation model.

Figure 1. Conceptual Sequence of School-Meal Assessment and School–Family Feedback



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METHODS

Design, Setting and Timeframe

This is a descriptive-evaluative analysis of documentation from a 2022 community-service programme at PAUD Bintang Harapan, Jalan Harapan, Tanjung Morawa District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Programme preparation and coordination were documented between June and October 2022, while report-book implementation occurred between August and October. Operational descriptions refer to approximately two months of activity, but the outcome charts available for analysis consistently cover only Weeks 1–6. Consequently, all trend interpretation in this manuscript is restricted to the six documented weeks.

The design combines an initial and final descriptive comparison with repeated teacher-scored observations. It is neither a randomized controlled trial nor a formally controlled before–after study. There was no comparison group, random allocation, prespecified inferential analysis or independent verification of all daily observations. The appropriate outputs are descriptive patterns and an evaluation of programme procedures, not causal effect sizes.

Participants, Denominators and Units of Observation

Five classes participated: A, Bintang Plus, Pelangi, Matahari and Bulan. Programme records list 104 enrolled children across these classes and 63 children who received or used the report book. The narrative outcomes separately state that 60 children were included in the analysis of seven components. No attrition log or explanation of the three-person difference was available. Rather than silently changing the counts, this manuscript distinguishes the total school population (N = 104), report-book recipients (n = 63) and reported outcome-analysis group (n = 60). Claims using approximately 80% and 75% are retained exactly as reported because their specific denominators and raw frequencies are not established.

Table 1. Participants and Report-Book Recipients by Class, as Reported in the 2022 Programme Documentation

Class	Enrolled children	Age Range	Report-Book Recipients
A	22	3–5 years	15
Bintang Plus	15	5–7 years	12
Pelangi	28	5–7 years	12
Matahari	27	5–7 years	12
Bulan	12	5–7 years	12
Total	104	—	63

Instrument and Measurement Procedures

Teachers used the School Meal Report Book to record the appearance and observed use of home-packed food. Its seven components and qualitative operational definitions are set out in Table 2. The 6/8/10 classification is treated as an ordinal assessment framework. Arithmetic weekly averages already present in the original programme records are described as programme-generated summaries; the current paper does not recompute individual-level averages without access to raw score sheets.

Table 2. Operational Definitions of the Seven Observed Meal Components.

Component	Operational meaning	Observable basis
Food types	Diversity of food ingredients included in the packed meal	Number and variety of food items
Nutrient-group composition	Visible food sources representing	Sources associated with

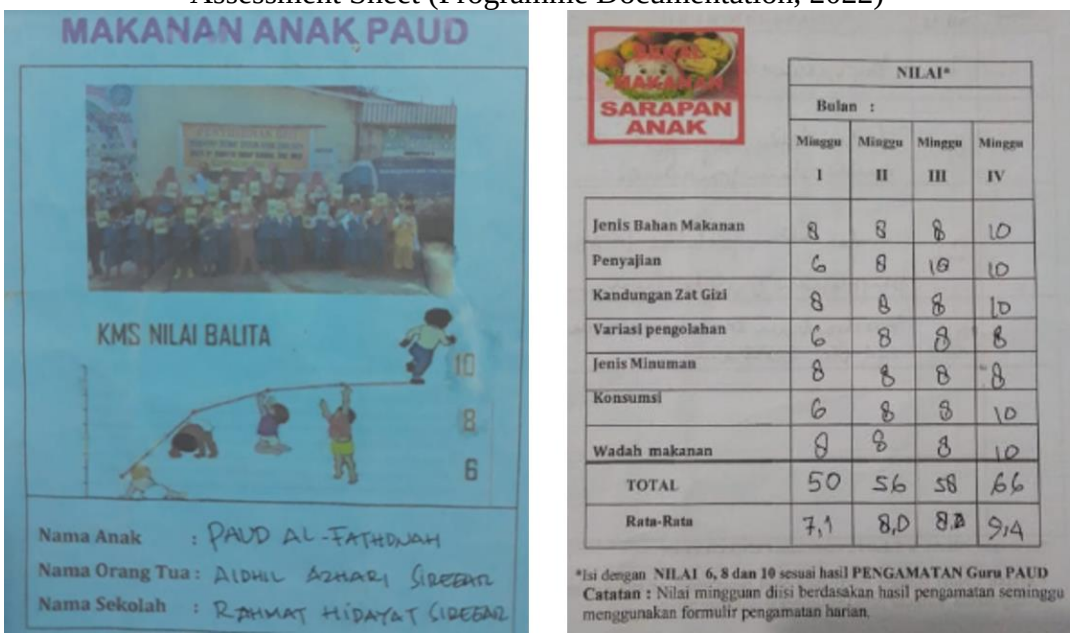
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Component	Operational meaning	Observable basis
	different nutrient groups	carbohydrate, protein, fat, fruit and vegetables
Preparation	Method by which food is prepared before consumption	Form and variety of preparation
Presentation	Arrangement and visual suitability of the packed meal	Layout, colour, shape and child-oriented appearance
Consumption	Extent to which the packed meal is eaten	Consumed portions and leftovers
Beverages	Drink brought with the packed meal	Presence and type of beverage
Container	Carrier and storage medium for the meal	Suitability of the packed-meal container

A teacher observed the lunchbox before mealtime, recording features that could be assessed in advance, including food variety, preparation and presentation. During or after the shared mealtime, consumption-related observations were added. Daily scores were assembled into weekly summaries. The books were sent home on Fridays together with teacher suggestions; teachers used a WhatsApp group to check receipt. Parents were invited to read the record, write a response and return the book on the following Monday. The cycle continued with subsequent lunches.

Figure 2. Source-Document Photograph of the School Meal Report Book and Sample Assessment Sheet (Programme Documentation, 2022)



Data Analysis and Methodological Safeguards

Analysis was based on the documented baseline and end-of-programme meal descriptions, weekly summary graphs, classroom-level narratives and photographs. The comparisons focus on direction and variation rather than statistically significant differences. There are no raw nutrition-intake measurements, purchasing records, parent surveys, socioeconomic measures, confidence intervals or longitudinal health outcomes. The report does not calculate changes in percentages by subtracting 80% from 75%, because the two percentages describe different meal patterns and their denominators are unclear.

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Internal consistency checks focused on the timing discrepancy (six documented weeks within a longer programme period), the difference between 63 report-book users and 60 analysed children, and interpretation of the ordinal scoring system. The visual records were used as documentation of meal appearance rather than proof of a quantified nutrient change. Where the original rubric or raw values were unavailable, this limitation is reported explicitly.

The underlying activity involved observation of young children's packed meals and school–family communication. Although the programme description reports ordinary school practice, the provided manuscript does not contain details of written guardian consent, institutional ethics review, child-image permissions or a data-governance procedure. These details must be verified by the authors before publication; the present revision makes no unsupported assertion that ethics approval was granted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of Packed Meals Before and After Programme Use

At baseline, teachers recorded relatively limited meal diversity. Approximately 80% of children reportedly brought white rice or fried rice with eggs or nuggets; packaged foods and ready-to-eat items also appeared in the documented examples. The meal descriptions suggest that fruit and vegetables were less prominent than carbohydrate-rich foods and familiar side dishes. After use of the report book, approximately 75% of children were described as bringing rice, bread or noodles accompanied by vegetables or fruit, and some lunches were arranged in more colourful or creative ways. These are observations of meal composition and presentation, not evidence of measured energy or micronutrient adequacy.

Figure 3. Programme Photographs of Packed Meals Before and After Report-book Implementation (source documentation, 2022).



Table 3. Descriptive Differences in Packed-meal Characteristics.

Aspect	Initial Description	End-of-programme Description
Common foods	Rice or fried rice with eggs/nuggets	Rice, bread or noodles with vegetables and fruit
Reported approximate proportion	~80% followed the initial common meal pattern	~75% reportedly included vegetables and fruit
Diversity	Limited ingredient variation	Greater variety reported
Fruit and vegetables	Less frequently documented	More frequently included
Presentation	Generally simple	More colourful and varied
Packaged items	Present in some examples	Photographs emphasize meals assembled from several foods

The two proportions represent different categories and cannot be interpreted as a 5-percentage-point decline or a directly paired outcome. The records do not specify

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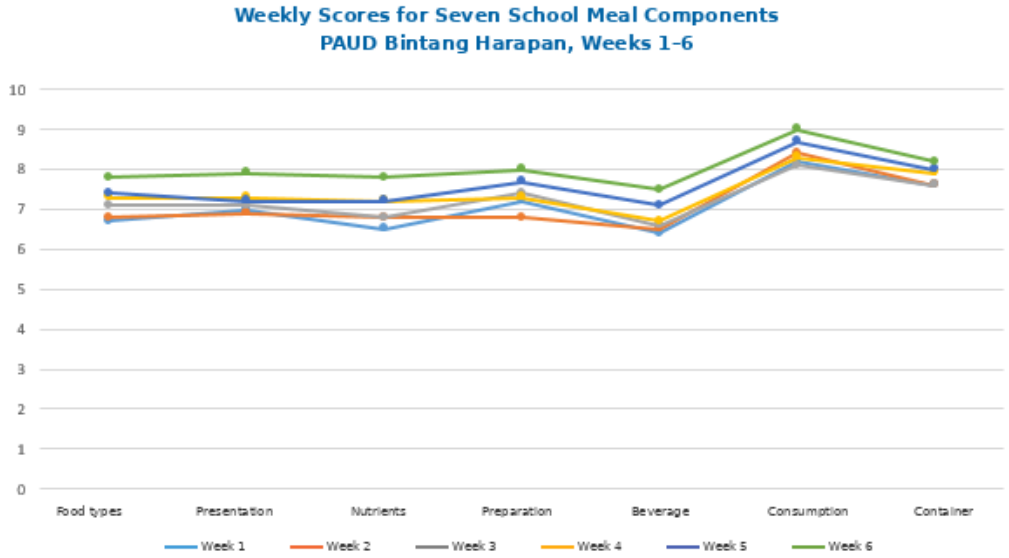
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whether the same children were assessed at both endpoints, the exact number of observation days or whether classification rules were constant. Nonetheless, the photographs and descriptions jointly support a limited conclusion: more varied, visually attractive packed meals were documented at the end of the implementation period.

Weekly Patterns Across Seven Components

The six-week programme chart reports generally more favourable assessments in later weeks, although the trajectories are not strictly monotonic for every category. Across the displayed values, consumption tended to be the strongest component, often around 8.0–9.0. Beverages tended to be weaker, commonly in the approximate range of 6.5–7.5, while the final week was comparatively favourable for several food and presentation categories. Because the chart was available as an image rather than a dataset, exact series means, standard deviations and percentage changes were not reconstructed.

Figure 4. Original Six-week Score Graph with English-translated Labels; the Underlying Plotted Series are Unchanged (Programme Documentation, 2022)



The contrast between consumption and beverages is substantively useful. A high consumption score indicates that children ate much of what was offered under the local scoring system; it cannot establish that dietary requirements were met. Conversely, comparatively low beverage scores identify an assessment dimension that may warrant more specific teacher guidance. Since the original records do not set out all beverage scoring thresholds, it would be unjustified to infer precisely which drink types or quantities caused the lower marks.

Differences between Classrooms

Class A displayed a clearer upward pattern for several indicators. The programme narrative reports that beverage scores rose from approximately 6.8 at the start to approximately 8.2 in Week 6, while container scores remained near 8.2. Presentation and preparation were described as reaching about 9.2 by the sixth week. These values illustrate that changes concerned not only food selection but also how meals were prepared and arranged. They remain approximate because the corresponding classroom raw data were not provided.

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Class B Matahari showed fluctuating patterns from one assessment week to the next. Beverage ratings remained comparatively low and no component was described as reaching 9.0. Class B Pelangi also showed a non-linear pattern; preparation ratings rose and fell, while consumption approached 8.8 in Week 6 without any component reaching 9.0. Such differences caution against assuming a uniform classroom response to the reporting routine.

Class B Bulan exhibited a relatively clearer improvement across most components, interrupted by a decline during one of the observed weeks. Its consumption component was reported as reaching approximately 9.4, whereas food-type or nutrient-group dimensions remained weaker. In Bintang Plus, the available narrative and graph described favourable end-period changes in several areas, with consumption appearing among the higher indicators. Because complete item-by-week numerical tables were unavailable for the latter classrooms, their comparisons are deliberately qualitative.

Taken together, these classroom descriptions indicate that the report-book process operated alongside heterogeneous responses. This may reflect differences in household preferences, practical constraints or teacher assessment, but the programme did not measure these proposed explanations. The responsible interpretation is that continuous monitoring helped document change and variation, not that all parents responded in the same way or that the book by itself caused improvement.

Teacher–Parent Communication as a Practical Feedback Loop

The operational contribution of the programme is its structured sequence. Teachers observed children's meals every day, consolidated their assessments each week and sent a report home with practical comments. Parents could then read the assessment, provide a written response and consider a different meal for the subsequent week. The WhatsApp follow-up supported book receipt but was not itself a separately evaluated intervention. The cycle made feedback recurrent and more specific than a general instruction to bring healthy food.

This mechanism is consistent with the broader rationale for school–family partnership discussed by Triwardhani et al. (2020), and with the emphasis on goal-related feedback in Hattie and Timperley (2007). An achievement-motivation perspective (McClelland, 1961) also offers a plausible interpretation of the parent's wish to improve a previous score. However, the study lacks interviews or psychometric measurements that would identify a psychological pathway; feedback frequency, parental engagement and perceived usefulness were not quantified. The analysis therefore interprets the documented workflow, not an empirically verified mediation process.

Critical Interpretation, Practice Implications and Sustainability

The strongest practical implication is to assess packed meals multidimensionally. Teachers should not equate finishing a meal with nutritional adequacy, and parents should not be encouraged to optimize scores at the expense of the child's preferences, food safety or budget. A useful report-book rubric would describe each score explicitly, distinguish food-group diversity from laboratory-based nutrient measurement and use supportive rather than punitive comments. Whenever possible, recommendations should offer affordable local food substitutions and respect dietary restrictions and household circumstances.

A second implication concerns the sustainability of the reporting process. The book requires consistent teacher observation, clear aggregation rules, timely return of forms and parent participation. Schools considering adoption should provide assessor

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orientation, create a practical reporting schedule and monitor the burden on teachers and families. A simple monthly audit could track missing books, missing assessments, response rates and disagreements between teachers while protecting children's personal information. These are recommendations arising from identified documentation gaps, not procedures verified as already implemented.

The existing score trend is insufficient to establish long-term programme sustainability, improved nutrient intake, changes in anthropometric status or reductions in childhood illness. This distinction matters in light of Wolfenden et al. (2020), which found that childcare implementation efforts can improve the delivery of practices without necessarily producing measurable effects on child diet or weight. Further evaluation should therefore combine reported lunchbox components with validated dietary measures, longer follow-up, parental feasibility feedback and a comparison condition.

Synthesis in Relation to the Research Questions

Table 4. Synthesis of Evidence and Cautious Interpretation.

Research Question	Documented Finding	Permissible Inference
Initial versus final characteristics	~80% initial rice/simple side-dish pattern; ~75% final meals with fruit or vegetables; more varied photographs	Descriptive improvement in observed variety and presentation; no causal estimate
Seven-component trajectories	Generally favourable ratings over six documented weeks; consumption highest, beverages lower; varied class profiles	Different aspects change unevenly; no validated dietary-intake outcome
Report-book communication	Daily observations, weekly scores and suggestions, Friday distribution, parent response and Monday return	A workable school–family feedback cycle was documented; psychological mechanism untested

The synthesis supports a bounded evaluation of operational implementation. It does not replicate the causal claims from earlier controlled studies, and it does not establish a newly independent dataset relative to the 2023 report from the same school. For publication, authors should disclose the relationship to prior reporting and show how the present analysis adds intellectual substance beyond translation or reformatting.

CONCLUSION

The PAUD Bintang Harapan documentation indicates descriptive improvements in the diversity and presentation of home-packed meals during a six-week period of School Meal Report Book use. Early observations described a predominance of rice with simple side dishes, while end-of-programme accounts reported more fruit, vegetables and varied presentation. Within the seven-component ratings, consumption tended to score more highly than beverages, and the patterns varied across classes. The report book also provided a structured route for regular teacher observations and parent feedback.

These conclusions are intentionally limited. The programme lacks a control group, raw person-level score files, complete scoring rules, clear denominators for the reported percentages and an explanation for the difference between 63 book recipients and 60 analysed children. It did not directly measure parental motivation, actual nutrient intake, longer-term dietary practices or child health. For future implementation, a standardized rubric, inter-rater checks, denominator tracking, parent-informed practical suggestions,

explicit consent and a longer follow-up are recommended. A comparative or controlled evaluation would be needed to examine whether report-book use produces changes attributable to the intervention.

The same school, programme and closely related outcomes were already described in Sinaga et al. (2023). The present manuscript should therefore be assessed as a transparent reappraisal of programme documentation and not submitted as an independent novel experiment. The editor and authors must determine whether its analytical additions are sufficient and consistent with the journal's duplicate-publication policy.

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