

Improving the Implementation of Child-Friendly School Policy: A Case Study in Labuhanbatu Regency

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Abstract: This study examines the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Education Policy in Labuhanbatu Regency, to create a safe and inclusive educational environment for children's growth and development. The main objective is to assess the fulfillment of the essential components required for successful policy implementation, identify existing challenges and provide solutions. Using a qualitative methodology, the study analyzed data from schools and educators. The study findings highlight the importance of child-friendly school documents, the importance of teacher training for child-friendly education, the need for improved child-friendly learning processes, improved child-friendly school infrastructure, increased child participation in decision-making and the need for increased involvement of other stakeholders. All of these are important to create an educational environment that supports children's rights and development.

Keywords: Child-Friendly School Component, Child-Friendly Education, Child-Friendly School Policy

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A. INTRODUCTION

Education is the cornerstone of human development, forming the foundation for realizing children's potential as the nation's next generation. Schools play an essential role in developing this potential, shaping character, and protecting children's rights (Daryono et al., 2023). Globally, children's rights are recognized and protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a legal framework established in 1989 that serves as the basis for the protection and optimal development of every child worldwide (Putra et al., 2020). As a signatory to the UNCRC, Indonesia has committed to upholding children's rights, especially in education, through implementing the Child-Friendly School (CFS) policy (Liestyasari et al., 2023).

The UNCRC emphasizes the importance of creating safe, inclusive and supportive educational environments for children. This global commitment has been translated into national policy in Indonesia, particularly through Ministerial Regulation No. 11 of 2011 on the Development of Child-Friendly Regency and Ministerial Regulation No. 8 of 2014 on Child-Friendly School Policy (Surya et al., 2021). These regulations mandate the creation of educational environments that are not only safe and inclusive but also conducive to children's holistic development. The Child-Friendly School Policy (CFS) ensures that schools become places where children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) is not about building new schools but transforming existing schools into safe, clean, healthy environments supporting children's rights. Child-friendly schools include ensuring that schools are free from violence, discrimination, and other forms of mistreatment and encouraging children's active participation in decision-making processes that affect their education and well-being (Zaenal & Rahaju, 2024). The Child-Friendly School

Policy is an integral part of Indonesia's broader efforts to create Child-Friendly Regency, which aim to prioritize child welfare and protection across a range of sectors, including education, health and environmental sustainability (Rahardian et al., 2024).

In Labuhanbatu Regency, North Sumatra, the Child-Friendly School policy has officially been established through Regional Regulation No. 5/2015 on Child Protection. This regulation underlines the importance of fulfilling children's rights, especially in education, by encouraging the development of child-friendly schools. In 2019, 11 schools in Labuhanbatu declared themselves as implementing the Child-Friendly School policy, consisting of 8 primary education units, two first education units, and one upper secondary education unit. These schools expect to implement the six primary components of the Child-Friendly School policy, which include policy documentation, trained educators, child-friendly learning processes, supportive infrastructure, child participation, and stakeholder engagement.

Despite a clear legal framework and policy guidelines, the implementation of the Child-Friendly School policy in Indonesia still faces significant challenges. Research by M. Arifin et al. indicates that many schools struggle to fulfil the six essential components of a Child-Friendly School. For example, an important obstacle is the lack of trained educators understanding children's rights and child-friendly teaching methods. Many teachers in Indonesia have not received adequate training on how to create an inclusive and violence-free learning environment. This gap in training often results in teaching practices that are not in line with the principles of the Child-Friendly School policy, such as corporal punishment or other disciplinary measures that can harm children (Arifin et al., 2019).

Infrastructure is another area that still lacks attention in many schools. It noted that limited budgets often prevent schools from upgrading their facilities to meet the standards required for a child-friendly environment. It includes the provision of safe and accessible classrooms, clean water and sanitation facilities, and recreational areas that support children's physical and mental health (Amrullah et al., 2022). Research by Somariah Fitriani (Fitriani, 2020) highlights that parental and community involvement in school activities is often minimal, partly due to ineffective communication strategies that fail to engage these stakeholders meaningfully. It found that children's participation in decision-making processes is usually limited due to the lack of clear communication channels between students and school administrators. Similarly,

The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) To see the extent to which the school has fulfilled the six primary components of the Child-Friendly School policy; (2). To identify these schools' challenges in realizing child-friendly education; and (3) To propose solutions for schools to improve the implementation of the Child-Friendly School policy.

B. METHODS

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore an in-depth understanding of schools' challenges and dynamics in implementing the CFS policy. This case study focused on three primary schools. The three schools were selected based on the diversity of education unit types and geographical locations to provide a representative picture of how this policy is implemented locally. The three schools are SDN 04 Rantau Selatan, SDN 12 Pangkatan and MIN 2 Labuhanbatu.

Data were collected through three primary methods: in-depth interviews, direct observation and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including teachers and principals. The interviews were designed to understand their perceptions and experiences regarding CFS implementation and identify their challenges.

Direct observations were conducted in the school environment to see the physical and social conditions of the school, including the availability of child-friendly infrastructure, interactions between teachers and students, and students' participation in school activities. In addition, document analysis was conducted on government policies, school reports and other records related to CFS implementation. These documents provide policy context and help track the progress of CFS implementation over time. Data analysis was done thematically, where data from interviews, observations and documents were categorized to answer the research problem.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementing the Child-Friendly School policy is seen as fulfilling the six components of the Child-Friendly School policy. The Child-Friendly School component consists of 6 (six) components, namely: (1). Child-Friendly School Policy Document. (2). Educators and Education Personnel Trained in Child Rights and Child-Friendly Schools. (3). Implementation of Child Friendly Learning Process. (4). Child-friendly Facilities and Infrastructure. (5). Child Participation. (6). Participation of Parents/Guardians, Alumni, Community Organizations, and the Business World. This section will present the achievement of the fulfilment of the six components of the Child-Friendly School policy by the implementing schools. In line with this, the challenges faced and solutions are also presented. All of them become an integral part of supporting the improvement of the implementation of the Child-Friendly School policy in the implementing schools.

1. Availability of Child-Friendly School Policy Document

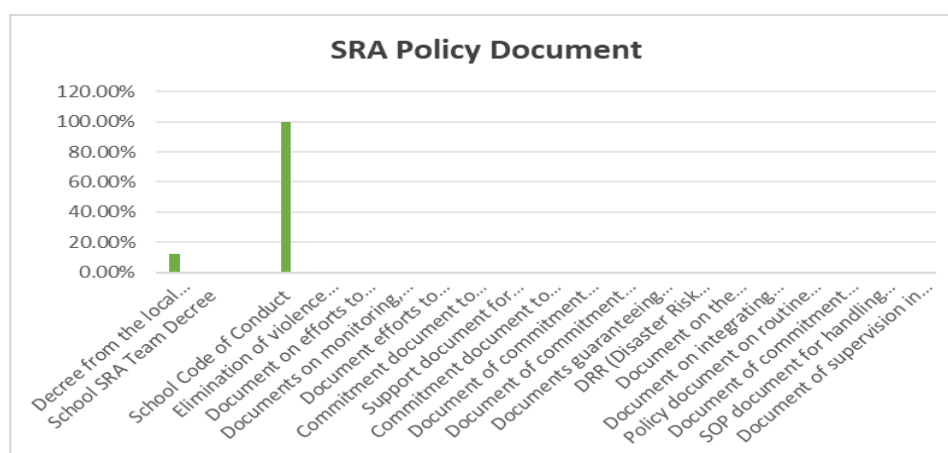


Figure 1. CFS Policy Document

The graph above shows that the completeness of documents supporting the implementation of the Sekolah Ramaha Anak policy is minimal. One crucial document, the decree from the local government (Pemda), is only available in one school with a percentage of 12.5%. In contrast, other documents, such as the School CFS Team decree, are unavailable in all schools (0%). School discipline is the only document fully implemented in all schools with a percentage of 100%, reflecting that although other elements have not been met, there is attention to managing school order. However, other strategic documents supporting the CFS principle, such as mechanisms to eliminate violence against children, efforts to prevent students from dropping out of school, and commitment to implementing the CFS principle in the MBS and annual RKAS, were unavailable.

In addition, various documents related to supervision, such as child protection monitoring and SOPs for handling perpetrators of violence, have not been found in all schools. The percentage for this document is 0%, indicating the weak implementation of child protection mechanisms in the school environment. Commitment documents to create smoke-free areas, drug-free areas, and disaster risk reduction integration documents are also missing, hampering the potential to create a genuinely child-friendly environment. This is a big challenge to ensure that child protection policies can be integrated holistically into the school system.

From this perspective, although the school discipline has been maximally implemented, other strategic documents are very low, indicating that the implementation of CFS has not been running optimally. This data illustrates that there are still shortcomings in the policy framework that supports the principles of CFS. Collaboration between schools, local governments and other stakeholders is needed to accelerate the development of appropriate core policy documents. With more substantial support, schools can build systems that reflect a commitment to children's rights and a safer and healthier learning environment.

Given this condition, improvement measures need to focus on preparing core policy documents such as monitoring mechanisms, SOPs for handling cases of violence, and documents that support the fulfilment of children's rights in the education ecosystem. In addition, schools can start building capacity through specialized training for educators and managers so that they can understand and implement the principles of CFS properly. With a comprehensive and structured approach, implementor schools are expected to become models for other regional educational institutions while ensuring that every learner receives maximum protection in the learning process.

2. Availability of Educators and Education Personnel Trained in Children's Rights and CFSs



Figure 2: Educators and education personnel trained on children's rights and CFSs

Based on the graph above, training on children's rights and CFS in the three schools shows that training and mentoring activities related to children's rights are still very minimal. None of the schools have conducted child rights training for educators, education personnel, students, or parents. In addition, the availability of at least two educators trained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and CFS was also not found in all schools. These

shortcomings indicate that there has not been sufficient attention paid to developing the capacity of educators and education personnel to respect children's rights, which is one of the key elements in the implementation of CFS. However, one in three schools received socialization, training, and/or mentoring from relevant programs, such as UKS, PHBS, and Honesty Canteen, with a percentage of 12.5%. Although the number is minimal, this is an early indication that the school has an opportunity to build a system that supports the implementation of child-friendly policies. The existence of programs such as UKS and PHBS can be a supporting element, but their implementation is not yet fully integrated with the holistic CFS principles.

In general, the lack of training and mentoring indicates that implementing schools do not have a strong foundation to meet the standard of trained educators and education personnel in children's rights. The absence of training and capacity of trained educators specifically hinders schools' ability to support children's rights through a systematic approach. Therefore, strategic measures to improve capacity and training should be a priority in implementing the CFS program. Thus, improvement efforts must provide intensive training for educators, education personnel, students and parents to explore children's rights and CFS principles. Collaboration with expert institutions such as children's organizations or educational institutions can be a solution to accelerate this process. Educators and education personnel can become the leading actors in creating a child-friendly learning environment with a more structured approach and adequate support.

3. Child-Friendly Learning Process

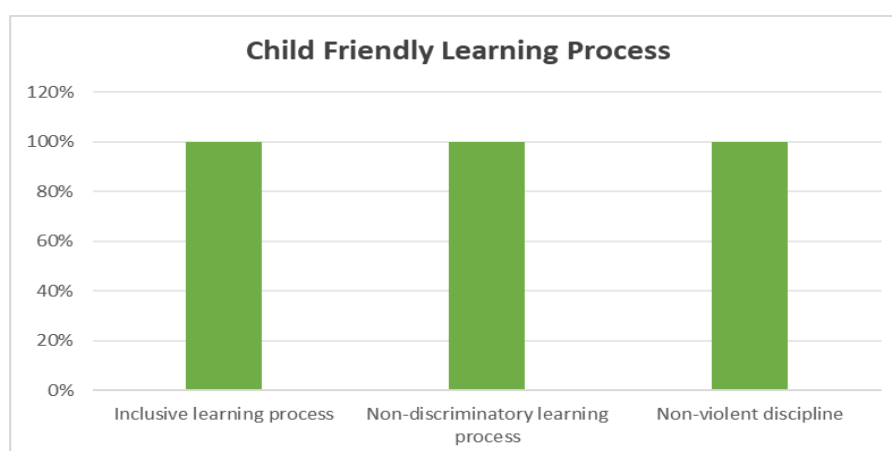


Figure 3: Child-friendly learning process

Based on the graph above on child-friendly learning processes, all three implementing schools have met all the key indicators with a 100% achievement percentage for each category. Inclusive learning processes are implemented in all schools, reflecting the commitment to ensure that every learner, regardless of background, has fair and equal access to education. In addition, non-discriminatory learning processes have become part of daily practices in these schools, demonstrating efforts to create an environment that values diversity and equality. In addition, one of the essential components of a child-friendly learning process, non-violent discipline, is also consistently implemented in all three schools. This demonstrates a commitment to child protection in the school environment, ensuring that coaching methods are educational and do not hurt learners' emotional development. In her research, Hindina

Maulida (2020) wrote that educating without violence would support positive academic and psychological development (Maulida, 2020).

Overall, the data shows that the implementation of child-friendly learning processes in the three implementing schools is perfect and consistent. However, to maintain this achievement, these schools need to continue to evaluate and strengthen the policies and practices that are already in place. This could involve further training for educators to ensure the sustainability of implementing child-friendly principles in learning. Moving forward, schools are expected to serve as examples and share best practices with other schools that may still experience difficulties implementing child-friendly learning processes. Collaboration with stakeholders, such as parents, local governments and education organizations, is also essential to support the development of a more comprehensive policy. Thus, the principle of child-friendly learning is not only an internal policy but also a joint movement that strengthens the quality of education nationally.

4. Availability of Child-Friendly School Facilities and Infrastructure

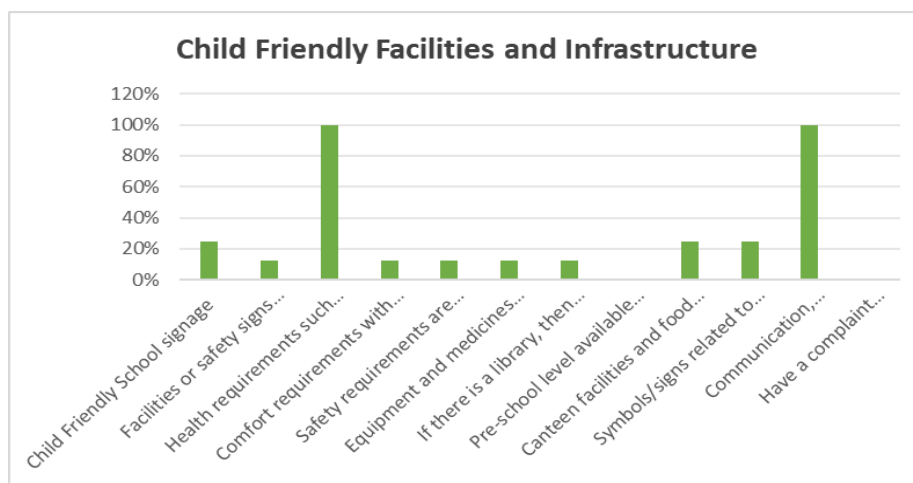


Figure 4. Child-friendly Facilities and Infrastructure

Based on the graph above on child-friendly facilities and infrastructure, only a few indicators were met in the three implementing schools. One notable finding is the child-friendly school signboard, which is only found in two schools with a percentage of 25%. Safety-related indicators, such as safety signs and evacuation routes, and comfort requirements, such as clean and separate toilets for boys and girls, were also only met in one of the schools, with a percentage of 12.5% each. Other limited facilities are functioning UKS equipment and building security facilities, which were only achieved at 12.5%. This shows that most schools still lack critical supporting facilities to realize a child-friendly learning environment. In a study, Leny Madhani (2024) wrote that with child-friendly infrastructure, schools can become inspiring, safe and supportive places for children's growth and learning (Madhani & Patilima, 2024)

Some encouraging indicators, such as the availability of segregated waste disposal sites and clean environments and classrooms, were successfully implemented in all schools (100%). In addition, communication, information, and education (IEC) media, such as steps to wash hands with soap and dispose of garbage in their place, were also available in all three schools, with the same percentage of 100%. It reflects awareness of the importance of health and hygiene. However, the presence of CFS-related symbols or signs, such as the prohibition of

smoking and bullying, was only found in two schools with a percentage of 25%, indicating that child-friendly visual messages still need to be expanded.

On the other hand, some essential components are entirely unavailable. For example, the preschool level did not have any Educational Game Equipment (EPE) labelled with the Indonesian National Standard (SNI), with a percentage of 0%. Complaint mechanisms for students, such as chat boxes, are also not found in all schools. Library facilities that are comfortable and meet the rules of child-friendly information are only found in one school with a percentage of 12.5%. In addition, well-monitored school canteens exist in only two schools, with a rate of 25%. These shortcomings indicate that many children's basic needs in the school environment have not been fully met. Efforts can be made to improve the availability of child-friendly school facilities and infrastructure by building cooperation with external parties, such as local governments, child-care organizations and businesses, to provide currently unavailable facilities. Schools can meet the CFS standards and create a safe, healthy and inclusive learning environment with these measures.

5. Child Participation



Figure 5: Child Participation Graph

Based on the graph above on children's participation, some indicators show that learners' involvement in school policies and activities is minimal. One positive thing is that children can choose extracurricular activities according to their interests, with a 100% achievement percentage. In addition, students create a pleasant classroom and education unit environment, which was also fully achieved in all three schools with a rate of 100%. It shows that although there are shortcomings in strategic participation, there is an initial commitment to integrating children into activities that support their well-being in the school environment.

However, other indicators related to student participation are still very low. For example, none of the schools provide opportunities for children to form peer communities, such as the abolition of violent learner communities, with a percentage of 0%. In addition, learners are not involved in formulating school policies and rules nor in mapping the school's potential, which also has an achievement rate of 0%. Learner representatives are included as members of the CFS Implementation Team in the three schools, and there is no specific mechanism that allows students to provide input without intimidation, with a percentage of 0% for both indicators. This lack of participation hinders students' potential to create a more child-friendly environment actively.

The lack of student participation in policy-making processes and important school activities reflects the need for system improvements to integrate children's voices into school policies. Although involvement in extracurricular aspects and a pleasant environment gave good results, the absence of students' roles in strategic elements such as policy-making and complaints shows that these schools have not optimally utilized children's potential as strategic partners in realizing CFS principles. Nurul Izza (2023), in her research, provides an example of a school that has been able to accommodate student participation through the Rapat Besar program, which is a forum for all students, teachers, and staff to discuss various daily problems and think together about solutions (Izza et al., 2023).

To improve in the future, schools are highly expected to create a special platform for students to convey their ideas and suggestions through peer communities, Children's Forums, or safe and intimidation-free complaint mechanisms. In addition, schools need to involve children in strategic decision-making, such as drafting rules, mapping the school's potential, and being part of the CFS Implementation Team. Collaboration with external parties, such as child protection agencies or education organizations, can help accelerate the implementation of more inclusive and child-friendly policies. With these measures, student participation can be enhanced so that they are not only beneficiaries but also essential actors in creating a more inclusive education ecosystem.

6. Participation of Parents/Guardians, Alumni, Community Organizations, and Businesses

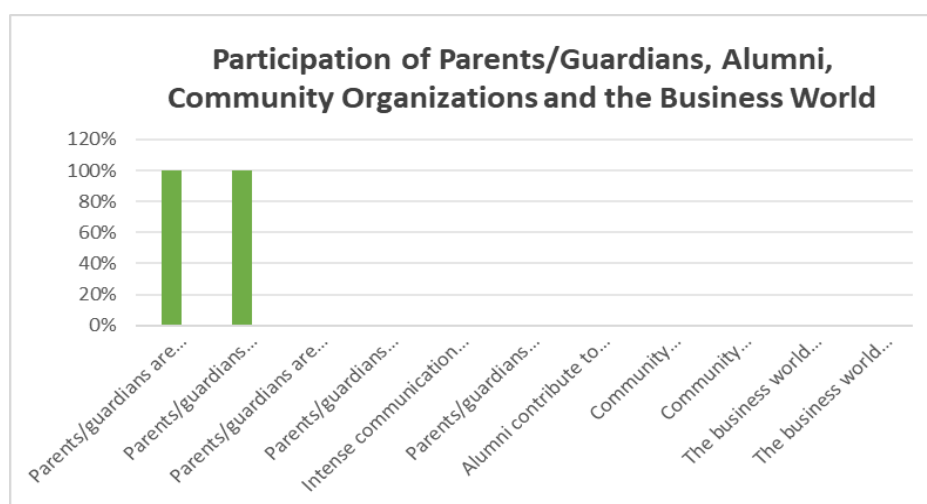


Figure 6: Graph of Participation of Parents/Guardians, Alumni, Community Organizations and Businesses

Several participation indicators show mixed results based on the graph above regarding the participation of parents/guardians, alums, community organizations, the business world, other stakeholders, and alums. The most prominent indicator is the involvement of parents in the preparation of rules and regulations in education units and the mapping of school potential, which has been fulfilled in all schools with a percentage of 100%. In addition, parents also actively supervise the security, safety and comfort of learners, including ensuring the use of healthy internet and child-friendly social media, which was also achieved in all schools with a percentage of 100%. These results reflect parents' commitment to supporting a child-friendly learning environment.

However, some other participation indicators still show no involvement from parents, alumni, community organizations, and the business world. Some indicators were not met, such as parents' involvement in the preparation and accountability of the RKAS, intense communication with homeroom teachers, and active participation in CFS coordination meetings (0%). It shows that the role of parents in strategic aspects is still minimal. In addition, alums have also not contributed to supporting the implementation of CFS activities in schools, which is one of the critical gaps. Participation from community organizations and businesses in facilitating CFS activities or providing access to creative activities such as street vendors and working tours was also not found (0%).

In general, while there are significant contributions from parents in some aspects, the data shows that strategic participation from all other stakeholders is minimal. This lack of involvement hinders the creation of the collaborative ecosystem needed to realize a genuinely child-friendly school environment. The article highlights the need for a more inclusive strategy to involve parents, alumni, community organizations, and businesses in supporting the full implementation of CFS. For future improvement, it is recommended that schools develop special mechanisms to increase the involvement of all stakeholders, such as building intensive communication between homeroom teachers and parents through social media groups. Schools can also encourage community organizations and businesses to support CFS activities through mutually beneficial collaborations. Alums must contribute to school activities, such as training or mentoring relevant to CFS. With these steps, all supporting elements are expected to work together more actively in building a child-friendly and sustainable learning environment.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) policy in the three implementing schools still faces various challenges, especially in the availability of policy documents, trained teaching and education personnel, limited facilities and infrastructure supporting children's safety and security, as well as the participation of parents and the community. Nevertheless, there are positive achievements, such as implementing school rules and commitment to child-friendly learning processes. The overall data shows that the holistic approach supporting a child-friendly learning environment still needs strengthening. In addition, the lack of support from alumni, community organizations, and businesses also shows that collaboration opportunities have not been optimally utilized. With improvements in these aspects, implementing CFS in schools can achieve a more comprehensive standard.

For future suggestions, future research can explore more deeply how the involvement of students, parents, and external stakeholders can systematically integrate into CFS policy and implementation. It is also essential to study the effectiveness of educators' training related to children's rights and the influence of supporting facilities such as evacuation routes and educational game tools (APE). Future researchers expect to provide measurable solutions to overcome the challenges of CFS implementation so that it can be a reference for future policy development.

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