

Optimizing child-friendly schools to prevent bullying in early childhood

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Abstract. Early childhood bullying is a severe issue that may affect kids' social and psychological development for a long time. Creating kid-friendly schools is one practical preventive measure to address this issue. The goal of Child Friendly Schools (SRA) is to establish a secure, welcoming, and developmentally supportive learning environment for kids. The purpose of this essay is to investigate how to make child-friendly schools more effective at preventing bullying among young children. This approach emphasizes the importance of the role of all elements in the educational environment, from teachers, parents, to the children themselves, in creating an atmosphere that supports a sense of security and respect for differences. Schools can become environments that safeguard students from bullying behavior by putting in place suitable regulations, instructional programs that emphasize the values of empathy, tolerance, and cooperation, and training teachers on how to spot the warning signs of bullying. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that children's active engagement in activities that foster social skills and open communication can effectively lower bullying instances. The findings of the study demonstrate that effective SRA implementation can lessen bullying's incidence and detrimental effects while also enhancing the caliber of relationships among students at school. As a result, making schools kid-friendly is a key tactic in stopping bullying at a young age and fostering a more inclusive and healthy learning environment.

Keywords: Child friendly school, bullying prevention, early childhood education

INTRODUCTION

A child's emotional growth, social skills, and character development all depend on early childhood education (ECE). This phase, known as the golden age, forms the fundamental foundation for a child's education. Character development has become a hot topic in education, even becoming the main discussion point. The groundwork for the moral character of the next generation is laid during early childhood (Sunarni, 2018). The golden age of a child is critical as it is a short period during which they begin to explore their potential, start learning, and interact with their environment (Yusuf et al., 2023). Therefore, the quality of the educational environment at school significantly affects a child's cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

In this context, Child-friendly schools (CFS) are intimately linked to the school environment. Regulation No. 8 of 2014 on Child-Friendly School Policies, issued by the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, states that the Child-Friendly City (KLA) initiative requires the presence of CFS. (Noer et al., 2021). A child-friendly school provides an educational environment that supports children's rights to protection, security, comfort, and respect for diversity and individual potential. Child-Friendly Schools are not limited to formal education but also include non-formal and informal educational settings that ensure a safe, clean, and healthy environment, guaranteeing and respecting children's rights while protecting them from violence, discrimination, and other forms of mistreatment. CFS also supervises and provides reporting channels related to the fulfillment of children's rights and protection within each educational setting (Noer et al., 2021).

The Child-Friendly School Program was developed for several reasons. First, there are educational processes that still treat children merely as objects of learning, with teachers assuming they are always right. Second, there is a significant amount of bullying occurring in schools or madrasahs. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) for 2014-2015 shows that 10% of school bullying cases—ranging from physical, psychological, sexual violence, to neglect—were committed by teachers. Most of these incidents involved bullying and non-educational punishments for students, such as pinching (504 cases), yelling (357 cases), and ear-pulling (379 cases) (DAN, 2015). According to research conducted in 2015 by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and the non-governmental organization Plan International, 84% of Indonesian children encounter violence at school, which is higher than the regional average of 70% (Inniyah, 2023).

In addition to emphasizing academic success, child-friendly schools seek to foster an atmosphere that fosters kids' social, emotional, and character development. In a child-friendly school, children are given the

opportunity to learn in an inclusive, attentive, and empathetic atmosphere. Additionally, child abuse remains a concern as 55% of parents provide their children with access to gadgets and the internet, yet 63% of parents admit they do not supervise their children's gadget use (DAN, 2015) (Andaru, 2021). The role of parents as the responsible party for the devices given to children is essential. Parents must supervise and provide guidance to children before they use gadgets (Dito Wicaksono, 2016).

The presence of the internet and social media among young children without supervision can have a negative impact on them. This situation also has adverse effects on children's mental health and hinders their optimal development. As Ricard J. Gelles stated, violence against children is an intentional act that can cause physical or emotional harm to children (Andaru, 2021). Therefore, it is important for schools to implement child-friendly education to prevent violence and create a safe and enjoyable environment for all children.

The quality of education and the welfare of children are significantly impacted by the establishment of child-friendly schools. Children learn academic courses in a child-friendly school, but they also learn the value of controlling emotions, valuing differences, and working cooperatively with others in a peaceful environment. Research related to the concept of child-friendly schools conducted by Na'imah et al. (2020) focused on how schools implement child-friendly principles in character development. The results of this study outline three categories in the implementation of child-friendly schools: preparation, planning, and execution. The preparation category includes understanding the concept of child-friendly schools, which is achieved by attending socialization sessions and designing school programs that accommodate child services (Na'imah et al., 2020). The planning category involves creating collaborative programs with various parties, such as parents, the Primary and Secondary Education Office (Dikdasmen), other institutions, and local health centers (Puskesmas). In the execution category, a child-friendly school can be realized by integrating the curriculum, learning programs, and school programs according to children's development (Na'imah et al., 2020).

Another study by Nila Nofitasari and Liftiah (2023) integrates the adoption of kid-friendly educational programs with the Merdeka curriculum. As a result, kid-friendly schools play a crucial role in forming kids' morals and equipping them to handle obstacles in life. Every school should be committed to implementing child-friendly principles, whether in policies, teaching and learning processes, or daily interactions. A child-friendly school is a long-term investment for the future of children, producing a generation that is smarter, more empathetic, and prepared to face an increasingly complex world.

The issues above in implementing child-friendly schools must have a legal basis. The legal foundation for child-friendly schools in early childhood education is governed by several regulations and conventions that protect children's rights. The Regulation of the Minister for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia No. 8 of 2014 and Regulation No. 12 of 2011 on Indicators of Child-Friendly Cities and Districts, Article 11, provide the policy framework for Child-Friendly Schools (CFS). Furthermore, the right of children to have a high-quality and secure education is upheld by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection. This convention emphasizes the need for comprehensive legal protection for children in various aspects of life, including education. With this strong legal foundation, optimizing child-friendly schools to prevent bullying among young children becomes a tangible expression of the Indonesian government's commitment to protecting children's rights (Kurniawan & Adiputra, 2023).

As stated, Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) is "UNICEF's approach to promoting quality education in schools for all children, especially among the most vulnerable and hardest to reach populations, both in everyday and emergency situations" (Ardiansyah, 2022). Child-Friendly Schools are designed to provide children with a safe, comfortable, and free space to be creative in the learning process at school. Because of this idea and its goal, fostering a happy learning environment is crucial to pursuing high-quality instruction and students' (Fitriani & Qodariah, 2021).

From the background above, it is explained that Child-Friendly Schools serve as an alternative to minimize violence against children in an educational paradigm that places the welfare and holistic development of children as the top priority. By integrating physical, emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions, this approach aims to create a learning environment that supports and stimulates the optimal development of children. Optimizing the implementation of child-friendly schools in the context of early childhood education is an essential step to fostering positive social-emotional development in children. In this regard, all educational elements—including teachers, parents, and the community—need to collaborate to create a climate that supports children's comprehensive growth. Therefore, research and efforts to strengthen child-friendly schools are essential to create a better environment for the future of younger generations.

Definition of Child-Friendly School

A child-friendly school (CFS) is an educational concept focused on creating a safe, comfortable, and inclusive environment for children. This type of school not only emphasizes academic aspects but also pays close attention to the social-emotional well-being of children. According to Chairiyah et al. (2021), as a component of formal, non-formal, and informal education, a child-friendly school is one that can guarantee, fulfill, and respect children's rights and child protection; it also has a clean, safe, and healthy environment; and it is ecologically

conscious and cultured. Child protection include safeguards against violence, discrimination, and abuse in addition to promoting children's involvement, particularly in the areas of planning, policy, instruction, monitoring, and complaint procedures pertaining to the realization of children's rights and protection in the classroom.

A child-friendly school, according to Kristanto et al. (2011), is one that is open and works to implement learning that takes into account students' psychological development and cultivates learning habits in accordance with children's natural circumstances and psyche. According to Ripai (2020), a child-friendly school is a safe, non-formal, and unstructured learning environment that upholds children's rights by anticipating the violence that children may encounter.

From the various definitions presented, it can be concluded that a child-friendly school is an open space for children, providing safety, health, cleanliness, and protection from violence inflicted by others or the environment, whether in the external environment or within the child's educational setting.

Principles of Implementing a Child-Friendly School

The following guidelines serve as the foundation for creating and growing a kid-friendly school: (1) Non-discrimination: This guarantees that no child will be denied the chance to exercise their rights in school because of their gender, race, ethnicity, financial situation, parental history, or religion; (2) The Child's Best Interests: This concept guarantees that the child's best interests are always given top priority in all choices and actions made by educational administrators and providers regarding the children; (3) Life, Survival, and Development: This concept encourages the establishment of an atmosphere that upholds children's dignity and ensures their comprehensive and integrated growth; (4) Respect for the Child's Opinions: This concept encompasses the protection of children's rights to voice their opinions on any issue that impacts them in the educational setting; (5) Good Governance: This guarantees the rule of law, accountability, openness, involvement, and information access within the educational institution.

With a more holistic approach, child-friendly schools aim to develop children who are mentally and emotionally healthy, while also fostering their confidence, empathy, and social skills (Falera, 2024). The concept of a child-friendly school involves more than just physical structures or classroom design. Broadly speaking, it also encompasses the closest environment to the child, namely the family setting. A child-friendly school can be achieved when the educational center, comprised of schools, families, and the community, work in synergy.

The needs of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) vary according to their context. Children's personality, which are greatly impacted by their homes, especially their families and local communities, are shaped by their schools. Intan claims that CFS represents a comprehensive understanding of each child's unique characteristics as well as the universal traits that kids need in order to learn. In addition to the facilities and teaching methods employed in schools, CFS thoroughly addresses the requirements of children, including their well-being, safety, comfort, health and sustainability, and child psychology (Pada et al., 2021).

Indicators of a Child-Friendly School

The study's Child-Friendly School (CFS) indicators are examined from the viewpoints of the community, family, and school in order to create a child-friendly school. For children, the family is the closest community. According to Kristanto et al. (2011), a child-friendly school should have a number of characteristics, including: (1) The capacity to give the child a respectable standard of living (clothes, food, and housing), as well as sufficient medical attention and education; (2) The capacity to give kids the freedom to express themselves creatively and to engage in activities appropriate to their developmental stage; (3) The capacity to provide children with safety and a feeling of security; (4) A child will grow and develop at their best in a home that is peaceful, prosperous, and safe; (5) The community is one of the other settings that optimizes the implementation of child-friendly schools. Children grow and search for their identity in a community setting that is safe, comfortable, and protective. Children often try new things and look for approval from their environment throughout this quest. According to this concept, kids frequently want to mimic or set themselves apart from others; (6) Children's needs for participation, expression, and appreciation must be met in a healthy community.

In order to establish a favorable learning environment for kids, maximizing the implementation of child-friendly schools requires not only interactions between educators but also the involvement of all stakeholders, including parents and the community. Teachers act as facilitators, attending to each child's unique requirements while promoting exploration and a feeling of safety and self-assurance. Furthermore, it is anticipated that constructive student interactions will provide the groundwork for the growth of sound social and emotional competencies.

Children's character development can thus be greatly aided by providing a safe, exciting, and encouraging learning environment in schools as part of their formal education. Additionally, putting the child-friendly school concept into practice can promote efficient learning, offer satisfying experiences that foster a love of learning, and lay a strong basis for future growth.

METHOD

The type of research used by the researcher is library research. This research applies a qualitative library research method and concept, which emphasizes analysis on descriptive data in the form of observed written words. Books and other literature sources are obtained and used as data sources. The data sources in this library research are various primary, secondary, and tertiary documents (Zed, 2008). The data collection technique in library research involves several steps, including gathering literature relevant to the theme and objectives of the research. The theme of this research is optimizing child-friendly schools to prevent bullying in early childhood; classifying books, scholarly journals, documents, or other sources based on their level of importance, namely primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. Here, data classification has been conducted based on the data sources described previously; quoting necessary data in line with the research focus along with sources following scientific citation techniques; performing cross-checking of data from main sources or with other sources for validation purposes; grouping data based on the systematic structure of the research.

Data analysis is conducted both during and after data collection. There are three stages in the data analysis technique: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The data obtained in this study is recorded, selected, and then classified based on categories. The approach used by the author is descriptive-analytical. According to Ulfah in Yusuf et al. (2023), descriptive-analytical involves finding facts or results of someone's ideas through searching, analyzing, interpreting, and generalizing the research findings. Once the materials for this study are collected, the author then analyzes and narrates them to draw conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Child-Friendly School (CFS) is an educational concept that prioritizes the well-being of children within the school environment. This concept not only focuses on academic achievement but also emphasizes the social, emotional, and moral aspects of a child's development. One of the main goals of CFS is to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all children. In this context, peace education becomes an integral element of a child-friendly school, as both focus on shaping children's character to appreciate differences, avoid violence, and build harmonious social relationships.

A child-friendly school is defined as a school committed to creating a safe and comfortable environment for children. This environment must be free from physical and mental violence and should support the holistic development of children. A child-friendly school upholds the right of each child to be respected as a unique individual and to receive quality education without discrimination.

The involvement of various components greatly influences the optimal implementation of a child-friendly school. These components need to work together synergistically to create an ideal child-friendly school. There are at least six components of a child-friendly school: a. A written commitment regarding Child-Friendly School policies; b. Implementation of child-friendly learning processes, where discrimination does not occur; c. Educators and staff who are trained and understand children's rights and the child-friendly school concept; d. Facilities and infrastructure that support the implementation of a child-friendly school; e. Participation of students; f. Participation of parents, community organizations, businesses, stakeholders, and alumni.

Child-friendly school policies are created with the participation of various community elements. Parents can be invited to collaborate in implementing CFS programs that continue into the family environment. Businesses can serve as partners in conducting various activities, such as sponsorships.

Peace Education in the Context of a Child-Friendly School

Peace education is an educational approach that aims to teach values of peace, mutual respect, and peaceful conflict resolution (Kusnadi & Wulandari, 2024). In the context of CFS, peace education can be realized through various programs and activities that teach children to manage emotions, empathize with others, and resolve issues non-violently. Some key elements of peace education that can be applied in CFS.

Character Education Oriented Toward Peace. A child-friendly school instills values such as tolerance, empathy, mutual respect, cooperation, and justice. This character education is essential to prevent violence, discrimination, and bullying in schools. Activities that promote the development of peaceful character may include group discussions, role-playing, and reflections on handling differences of opinion or conflicts without violence (Wulandari, 2010).

Peaceful Conflict Management. Children are taught to resolve conflicts in a peaceful and constructive way. Peer mediation programs are an effective method for helping children solve their problems non-violently. Children learn to listen to others' opinions, understand others' perspectives, and seek fair solutions for all parties.

Creating an Inclusive Environment. A child-friendly school supports diversity and ensures that all children, regardless of social, cultural, ethnic background, or physical and mental conditions, feel accepted and valued. This contributes to peace within relationships among children and individuals in the school. Activities that celebrate differences and encourage respect for pluralism—such as introducing children to various cultures, religions, and traditions—can help foster respect and reduce the potential for conflict arising from ignorance.

Social and Emotional Skill Education. One essential element of peace education is teaching children social and emotional skills, including emotional regulation, teamwork, and effective communication. Programs like social-emotional learning (SEL) can be implemented to help children recognize their feelings, manage stress, and interact with their peers positively and productively.

The Role of Child-Friendly Schools in Preventing Violence and Bullying

One of the major challenges in education is cases of bullying and violence among children. Child-Friendly Schools play a crucial role in creating a school culture free from violence by integrating values of peace into every aspect of school life. **Anti-Bullying Policy:** Child-Friendly Schools should have clear policies on addressing bullying and violence. These policies focus not only on sanctions but also on prevention through education on empathy, social skills, and managing differences in opinion. **Counseling for Children and Parents:** Child-friendly schools provide counseling for students and parents about the importance of maintaining peace at home and at school. This includes educating children to report if they or their friends are victims of bullying and teaching parents how to support their children in dealing with social issues at school. **Provision of Supportive Facilities:** Child-Friendly Schools also ensure that school facilities foster a safe and peaceful environment, such as counseling rooms for children experiencing stress or social problems, as well as open spaces for activities that strengthen cooperation among children (Ningrum et al., 2024).

Implementation of a Child-Friendly School That Creates Peace To establish a child-friendly school that supports peace education, there are several steps that schools can take: (1) **Training for Teachers and School Staff.** Provide training on the concepts of a child-friendly school and peace education for teachers and staff. Children need to develop skills to identify and handle cases of violence, as well as to implement approaches based on peace and harmony in their daily interactions; (2) **Children's Participation in Decision-Making.** Encourage children to be involved in decision-making related to school rules, activity programs, and conflict resolution. By giving them a voice in these processes, children learn about democracy, justice, and responsibility; (3) **Collaboration with Parents and the Community.** Create strong relationships between the school, parents, and the community to ensure that peace values are also applied outside the school environment. Schools can hold regular meetings with parents to discuss the child's development and the importance of character education and peace.

Benefits of a Child-Friendly School That Creates Peace Schools that prioritize peace education and a child-friendly environment offer various benefits, including: (1) **Reducing Violence.** By fostering awareness of the importance of peace, schools can reduce incidents of violence and bullying, creating a more conducive learning environment; (2) **Improving Children's Social Skills.** Children educated in an environment that emphasizes peace tend to have better social skills, such as the ability to cooperate, manage emotions, and solve problems; (3) **Building Positive Character.** Peace education instills positive values that shape children's character to be more tolerant, empathetic, and fair; (4) **Preparing Children to Be Good Global Citizens.** Schools that teach peace education help children prepare to become responsible, caring individuals who can contribute to a more peaceful global society.

CONCLUSION

A Child-Friendly School is a place that not only educates children to be intelligent but also to become kind, empathetic individuals with the capacity to build peace within themselves and their environment. The peace education implemented in this school provides a strong foundation for children to grow into individuals who respect differences and are able to resolve conflicts peacefully. By creating a compassionate and violence-free environment, Child-Friendly Schools play a significant role in shaping a more peaceful future for upcoming generations. The optimization of child-friendly schools in preventing bullying at an early age can be achieved through character strengthening, consistent anti-bullying policies, training for educators and parents, and creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Schools also need to strengthen cooperation with parents and the community to minimize bullying incidents. The ideal hope in the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) is the creation of a school environment that is completely safe, inclusive, and supportive of the development of all students, free from the risk of bullying. In this scenario, every child feels valued, heard, and free to learn and grow in a positive atmosphere.

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