

Evaluation of the child-friendly school policy in indonesia: analysis of effectiveness and implementation challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore in greater depth the role of implementing child-friendly schools, parental involvement in enhancing the effectiveness of child-friendly school policies and practices, and evaluating the challenges that arise in the implementation of child-friendly schools. This qualitative descriptive exploratory research utilizes the content analysis method. Purposive sampling was used to select five teachers, including the headmaster, three parents, and forty-seven students who participated in this study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations to explore the policy and practice of the child-friendly school, focusing on effectiveness and challenges in the teaching and learning process. The research results highlight the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive approach to early childhood education (ECE) to support the effectiveness of child-friendly schools, as well as the importance of ongoing evaluation, adaptation, and collaborative efforts in implementing and maintaining child-friendly schools in globally quality ECE efforts. The implications of this study offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers in improving and adjusting the child-friendly school model in various educational settings. This study contributes to the evolving discourse on child-friendly schools by providing understanding about the successes and challenges faced in a specific context.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Children under 18 years [1] are in a group vulnerable to the deprivation of their rights, thus requiring attention and protection of their rights. The convention on the rights of the child affirms that children have rights that must be protected, ranging from the right to life to education and welfare [1]. In the context of Indonesia, the state guarantees these children's rights as stated in the 1945 constitution, article 28B paragraph 2: "every child has the right to survival, growth, and development and is entitled to protection from violence and discrimination" [2], and is reinforced by article 54 of the child protection law emphasizing that children, especially in school environments, must be protected from all forms of violence that might be committed by teachers, school administrators, peers, or related parties in educational institutions. This aims to create a safe learning environment and support child development. Meanwhile, article 70 paragraph (2) prohibits

discriminatory treatment against children, including in terms of labeling and unequal handling of children with disabilities [3].

Although the state has guaranteed the protection of children's rights, various acts of violence and violations against children still often occur. According to real-time data from the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemenpppa) from January 2023 until November, there were 23,957 complaints of violence cases, and 57.6% of the victims were children [4]. Meanwhile, according to data from the Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (Indonesian Child Protection Commission) as quoted by Liestyasari *et al.* [5], in 2021 there were 5,953 cases of complaints and 1,138 children became victims of physical and/or psychological violence.

Child-friendly early childhood education (ECE) includes several key elements. First, it is important to implement progressive education principles, which emphasize the development of children's intellectual and emotional skills from an early age [6], [7]. Second, child-friendly in ECE must prioritize the best interests of the child, taking into account their unique needs and rights [8]. In addition, creating a conducive and comfortable learning environment is crucial, where children can freely express their potential and participate in the learning process [9]. The role of teachers is vital in facilitating children's learning and designing goals and a suitable learning environment that meets their interests and needs [10]. Child-friendly in ECE aims to provide non-discriminatory education, respect children's rights, and foster a child-centered learning approach [11].

Child-friendly ECE has several benefits in developing the potential and interests of children, making them responsible, independent, and creative individuals in the future [6]. It also creates an attractive learning environment that makes children interested in learning [7], [12]. Child-friendly in ECE focuses on respecting children's rights in healthcare, ensuring their needs are met, and they feel supported [13]. Positive experiences in healthcare help children learn the importance of respecting others and being respected, which has a broader impact on society [14]. In addition, child-friendly in ECE provides play activities and child-rearing techniques that enhance communication, problem-solving, and positive behavioral changes in children [15], [16]. Overall, child-friendly in ECE promotes holistic development, fosters positive relationships, and prepares children for their future endeavors.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of a child-friendly environment. The concept of a child-friendly environment in ECE has gained significant attention. Fauziati [17] emphasized the importance of providing a safe, clean, healthy, and protective environment in schools. This perspective is reinforced by Susanti *et al.* [18] who highlighted the successful demonstration of child-friendly criteria through curriculum implementation at Ummul Quro Elementary School. Similarly, Prasetya *et al.* [19] noted the promotion of a violence-free, healthy, safe, and comfortable environment in the schools of Binjai City, emphasizing the need for a conducive learning environment. Pada *et al.* [20] expressed the same sentiment, with a particular focus on safety, health, comfort, and security in elementary schools.

Studies on the implementation of child-friendly school policy in Indonesia have also been a theme of research, such as on the legal framework that supports child-friendly schools as a policy pillar, Erdianti and Al-Fatih [21] noted that schools legally protect children's rights within educational units. Furthermore, Darma *et al.* [22] identified the existence of written commitment to child-friendly policies, indicating formal recognition and commitment to these principles. The implementation of child-friendly teaching-learning processes, as explained by Suharjuddin and Markum [23], meets the criteria of child-friendly schools. Fitriani *et al.* [24] identified thirteen characteristics of the well-implemented child-friendly school model, showing a structured approach to child-friendly education. The implementation of specific programs, as documented by Wright *et al.* [25], Weshah *et al.* [26], and Suharsiwi *et al.* [27], provides valuable insights into the practical aspects of implementing child-friendly school initiatives. Çobanoğlu *et al.* [28] noted that the characteristics of child-friendly schools vary based on socioeconomic levels, student gender, and class level, indicating the need for context-specific strategies.

The role of school culture in establishing a child-friendly environment has also been a widely researched theme. Umbase and Wua [29], for example, emphasized the importance of a school culture based on respect, protection, and the fulfillment of children's rights. However, challenges remain, as noted by Putriningtyas *et al.* [30] and Rosyidi and Supadi [31], who showed shortcomings in planning and the need for further development in managing child-friendly school environments. Other studies have highlighted challenges in implementing child-friendly schools. Hegde and Shetty [32], and Mandiudza [33] indicated resource and infrastructure challenges. It is including a lack of teaching and learning resources and ineffective use of information technology [34]. In addition, public perception issues, as noted by Maria [35], and Sukumaran [36], indicate a gap between parents' beliefs and the actual conditions of the school environment.

To realize child-friendly schools and environments, the need for collaboration among staff and school committees in creating an optimal child-friendly school is emphasized by Pratiwi and Hariri [37], while Krishnakumar and Geeta [38], and Fitriani and Istaryatiningtias [39] also emphasized the need to empower

teachers and the vital role of the school committee in monitoring the learning process. Furthermore, the proficiency of teachers and the support of parents are identified as pivotal factors that strengthen the human values education programs within schools [40]. Based on the existing problems and literature, this study seeks to explore in greater depth the role of implementing child-friendly schools, parental involvement in enhancing the effectiveness of child-friendly school policies and practices, and evaluating the challenges that arise in the implementation of child-friendly schools.

2. METHOD

This research is designed with a qualitative descriptive exploratory design, using the content analysis method [41]. The research was conducted from March 2023 to June 2023 to evaluate the implementation, success, and challenges of the child-friendly school. The qualitative exploratory approach allows researchers to explore the implementation of child-friendly schools, both successes and challenges [42], [43]. The qualitative descriptive method was chosen to describe the research object comprehensively, accurately, impartially, comprehensively, and systematically [44].

2.1. Participants and data collection process

This study engaged five teachers, including the school principal, three parents, and seventy-six Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sape students as research participants. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews to ascertain the teachers' perspectives and practices related to the implementation of a child-friendly school. Additionally, data collection involved non-participant observation. The process of triangulating [45], techniques and sources was undertaken to ensure the data's reliability.

2.2. Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out with a qualitative approach based on the qualitative content analysis method by Graneheim and Lundman [43]. Analysis began after data collection, and interview and observation data were transcribed into text. Initial codes were obtained using words close to the participants' statements. These codes were then categorized based on differences and similarities and classified based on meaning, relationship, and consistency. Categories were placed together based on meaningful conceptual patterns, and themes emerged by realizing connections in the data. Data were then analyzed for its content, both manifest and latent meanings [42].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The study aims to analyze the implementation of child-friendly school principles, successes, and challenges at Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sape. Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sape is a school committed to the implementation of a child-friendly school environment, as articulated by the principal: "... Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sape has received materials and decrees regarding the child-friendly school Task Force and two child-friendly school decrees" (Interview T1-Q1). This statement is corroborated by all teachers, such as Teacher 5 who asserts: "*The school rightly claims the title of child-friendly school due to its implementation,*" (Interview T5-Q1). The school embodies its commitment to these principles through the adoption and implementation of inclusive and holistic educational practices. Active participation from the school and the school committee in this process not only reaffirms its status as a child-friendly school but also demonstrates a collective effort in realizing a child-centered educational vision (interview T1-Q1).

Drawing on interview data with teachers at Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sape, respondents ranging from "Teacher 1" to "Teacher 5" consistently report the school's success in applying child-friendly school principles. This unanimity suggests a strong and integrated school culture where the child-friendly educational concept is an intrinsic part of the school's identity and teaching practices. Such consistency not only reinforces the school as an institution that prioritizes child welfare but also reflects an effective synergy between school policies and their field implementation. The findings indicate that the child-friendly school concept at Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sape is broadly and deeply defined, encompassing safety, comfort, and protection from all forms of violence (physical and psychological) as detailed by "Teacher 1" through "Teacher 5". Teacher 1 emphasizes equality and non-discrimination with the following quote:

"... the concept of a child-friendly school by sheltering children so that they do not feel discriminated against, isolated, and always ensuring uniformity regarding the material they receive at school." (Interview T1-Q2)

"The concept of child-friendly education is to create an education that makes children feel safe, comfortable, and enjoyable." (Interview T2)

“Child-friendly education is education without violence, where children feel comfortable, happy, and joyful playing and learning at school and protecting children from threats outside the school fence.” (Interview T3)

“A child-friendly school that protects children from violence, whether physical or psychological, the effects of which will have long-term impacts on the child.” (Interview T4)

“.... child-friendly education is an education applied in both formal and non-formal settings that ensures children's rights and protection from violence, discrimination, or other deviant behaviors.” (Interview T5)

The above data, supported by observation results, illustrate that the implementation of a child-friendly school concept at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapen is realized by creating a safe, comfortable, and enjoyable learning environment for children. This approach integrates the physical, emotional, and intellectual needs of children, fostering an environment that supports their holistic development. Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapen also implements various safety and equality practices as part of the child-friendly school concept. Policies such as keeping gates closed during learning sessions and not discriminating by gender in teaching or play not only ensure physical safety but also support equality and inclusivity (Interview T1). This approach affirms that the school understands and applies safety and equality principles not merely as protocols but as core values. The provision of a safe physical environment is also realized through the availability of safe learning materials and facilities, as stated by Teacher 2: *“Providing safe play equipment and creating a pleasant atmosphere for children is the implementation of the child-friendly education concept,”* (Interview T2).

In addition to physical efforts, ensuring a sense of safety is also achieved through daily behavior exemplified by teachers, as Teacher 4 expresses: *“...TK implements good role models, such as not bullying, helping each other, and showing compassion...”* (Interview T4). This is complemented by policies against physical punishment and other forms of violence, as revealed by Teacher 5: *“...Creating a warm and friendly environment with policies against physical punishment, intimidation, harassment, and violence at school...”* (Interview T5). Other policies guaranteeing child safety and security, such as the child pickup system and teacher responsibility in ensuring the safety of children, including escorting children home, are illustrated by Parent 1: *“Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapen has a child pickup system, teacher responsibility if a child is not picked up, including escorting children to their respective homes,”* (Interview P1). This reflects a high level of attention and care for student welfare, showing that the school strives to exceed standard safety expectations by providing a holistic sense of security for children and their parents. The requirement for signatures at pickup is another effort to realize a safe physical environment as declared by Teacher 1: *“Signatures or initials at TK when children are picked up provide security for children and parents, as well as monitoring by the school principal for safety and smoothness,”* (Interview T1).

Further efforts include aligning perceptions and socializing through parenting activities as mentioned by Teacher 3: *“Conducting parenting about child-friendly schools as one example of implementing the child-friendly education concept,”* (Interview T3). It fosters good synergy and cooperation between the school, teachers, and parents. This is evidenced by observations that show parents also exhibit similar views and support for the school. A parent describes Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapen as a place that provides a positive influence on children, both in terms of environment and interaction with teachers (Interview P2). This indicates that positive perceptions of the school are not limited to the internal school environment but also permeate the parent community, which is a crucial stakeholder in ECE.

The benefits of implementing the child-friendly school concept are extensive and varied, including aspects of child happiness, the development of independence, confidence, creativity, and good physical and psychological health. Testimonies from “Teacher 1” to “Teacher 5” and “Parents” depict how this approach positively influences children across various life dimensions. Teacher 1 states: *“The benefit (gained) by children from the child-friendly school at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapen is happiness, without feelings of disappointment because they are treated equally while playing and learning by peers and teachers,”* (Interview T1). This is reinforced by Teacher 3 who says: *“...Children in a child-friendly educational environment can play and learn safely and comfortably, allowing optimal development in all aspects,”* (Interview T3). Teacher 4 also declares: *“The direct and indirect benefits for children at a child-friendly school are creating a sense of security, comfort, and good physical and psychological development,”* (Interview T4). Supported by Teacher 5's statement that with the implementation of a child-friendly school, *“Children feel comfortable at school as if at home, providing benefits for them,”* (Interview T5). Another benefit of a child-friendly school is making children more confident, creative, and facilitating their comprehensive development appropriate to their age (Interview T2).

Nonetheless, despite the numerous benefits, the implementation of the child-friendly school concept also faces complex challenges, including the arrangement of communal meals and less effective external

coordination. These challenges underscore the importance of adaptability and flexibility in applying a child-friendly approach, given the diversity of individual needs and contexts of children. The challenges encountered in optimizing the implementation of a child-friendly school at this kindergarten include varying preferences and characters of children (Interviews T1 and T5), less responsive parents, and lack of involvement such as during socialization and parenting activities which hinder communication and program implementation (Interview T3), as well as impeded coordination and support for school policies (Interview T4). From the teachers' perspective, self-control in disciplining and directing children is a particular challenge that needs to be enhanced, as stated by Teacher 2: *"Challenges faced in treating children by accompanying teachers, especially in admonishing children with good sentences to be orderly and not disturb classmates,"* (Interview T2).

Based on the above data, the results of this study indicate that Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapeen has successfully integrated the principles of a child-friendly school into every aspect of its operations, from policy to classroom practice. This reflects a deep understanding and application of child-centered educational principles, evident in policies, curriculum, and daily interactions at the school. The research data also reveal a paradigm shift in education at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapeen. The school does not only focus on teaching and learning in the traditional sense but also actively promotes the holistic wellbeing of children, including emotional and psychological aspects. This reflects an educational orientation that is more inclusive and comprehensive, where each child is seen as a unique individual with different needs and potentials.

3.2. Discussion

This study comprehensively evaluates the implementation, success, and challenges of the child-friendly school concept, with a specific focus on ECE at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapeen. This research is based on the importance of creating a conducive, nurturing, and inclusive learning environment, emphasizing the importance of a child-centered educational environment [6], [12]. By referring to various literature, such as Siswanto [13] and Kilkelly and Savage [14], this study recognizes the vital role of a child-friendly educational environment in shaping responsible, independent, and creative individuals [46]. This research combines a basic understanding of child-friendly schools, revealing how educational practices at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapeen serve the holistic development of young learners and make a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Research at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapeen reveals the successful implementation of the child-friendly school concept, reflecting a strong commitment to creating an inclusive and fair educational environment. Significant findings show the school's adherence to child-centered policies, with active involvement of teachers and the school committee in this process. The adopted teaching approach aligns with child-friendly school principles, focusing on supportive pedagogy, non-discrimination, and promoting educational equality. This includes emphasis on safety, comfort, and gender diversity, as well as reducing children's feelings of isolation. Significantly, this implementation is recognized for its positive impact on the physical and psychological development of children, as noted by educators and parents. These results affirm conscious efforts to create a supportive and nurturing environment, important for the holistic development of children.

The findings of this study show significant alignment with the existing literature regarding the benefits of child-friendly education, as highlighted by Siswanto [13], Kilkelly and Savage [14], and added by Sovieti *et al.* [6] and Aryani [12]. These studies emphasize the positive impact of a conducive educational environment on the development of respect, responsibility, independence, creativity, and holistic development of children. In addition, the findings of this study provide insights into the importance of gender diversity and emotional security, enriching existing knowledge about child-friendly schools. However, the study also reveals implementation challenges, such as coordination between parents and teachers and managing diverse food preferences, highlighting the complexity and the need for a more nuanced approach in applying child-friendly school principles, following concrete examples from Medwid and Weston [15] in applying theory to practice.

The significant emphasis on safety, comfort, and inclusivity in the approach of Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapeen can be interpreted as a response to the increasing recognition of these elements in effective ECE. This aligns with Fauziati [17] and Susanti *et al.* [18], who emphasize the importance of a protective, healthy, and non-violent learning environment. Moreover, proactive steps in curriculum implementation and pedagogical approaches reflect a commitment to the legal framework and policies supporting child-friendly schools in Indonesia [21], [22]. Consequently, it can be recommended that adopting enjoyable learning strategies, such as singing and dancing, can mitigate aggressive behavior and instances of violence among students [47], thereby fostering a conducive and pleasant learning environment. Another important aspect of this study is the role of school staff and committees in the successful implementation of child-friendly schools. The collaborative efforts of teachers and school committees at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapeen reflect the findings of Pratiwi [37] and Krishnakumar and Geeta [38], who emphasize the

importance of empowering educators and committees in monitoring and guiding the child-friendly school process. This affirms the importance of a holistic approach, where all stakeholders contribute to a supportive and nurturing educational environment.

The school's success in implementing a child-friendly environment can be attributed to several factors. A protective and nurturing atmosphere, as emphasized by Fauziati [17] and Susanti *et al.* [18], is evident in school policies and practices. However, the challenges faced, such as dietary preferences and parent engagement issues (Teacher 1; Teacher 3), indicate the need for flexible and context-specific strategies, in line with findings from Mandiudza [33] and Hegde and Shetty [32]. Additionally, effective teaching and learning processes, in line with Suharjuddin and Markum [23], and Fitriani *et al.* [24], play a significant role. These findings highlight the importance of organizational culture and management in creating a conducive learning environment, as noted by Umbase and Wua [29], and Rosyidi and Supadi [31]. While having positive aspects, the challenges faced emphasize the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation, in line with recommendations from Putriningtyas *et al.* [30] and Çobanoğlu *et al.* [28].

The study's findings also highlight challenges in implementing the child-friendly school concept. These challenges, such as effective parent engagement, reflect broader issues highlighted in the literature on the implementation of child-friendly schools [32], [33]. The need for careful and context-sensitive application of child-friendly school principles is clear, especially regarding teacher-student interactions and external community coordination [34], [35]. The implications of these findings are manifold. First, they reinforce the importance of child-friendly schools in promoting holistic child development. This study also highlights the need for schools to adapt to local contexts and challenges, ensuring the sustainability of such initiatives. The importance of teacher-parent collaboration and the need for a strong policy framework to support and maintain child-friendly educational practices. Thus, this study makes a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on optimizing the ECE environment, with a focus on inclusivity, equality, and child welfare.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on child-friendly schools by providing an understanding of the successes and challenges faced in a specific context. Findings from Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Sapen underscore the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive approach to ECE. The implications of this study extend beyond the immediate context, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers in enhancing and adjusting the child-friendly school model in various educational settings. The importance of ongoing evaluation, adaptation, and collaborative efforts in implementing and maintaining child-friendly schools is clear, marking a step forward in quality ECE efforts globally.

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