

Strategies for Fostering a Child-Friendly Culture in Elementary School Environments

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify effective strategies for fostering a child-friendly culture in elementary school environments. The method used is a literature review through a systematic examination of journals and relevant documents published in the last five years. The implementation process includes the collection, selection, and analysis of literature related to inclusive education practices and humanistic approaches in elementary schools. The research is scheduled to take one month, with stages including data collection, thematic analysis, and synthesis of results. The findings indicate that a collaborative approach between teachers, students, and parents significantly impacts the creation of a child-friendly school environment. These findings have implications for the development of educational policies that are responsive to the needs of students.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars of a nation's development. It is a fundamental element in human life that plays an important role in shaping individuals who are of good character, knowledgeable, have strong moral values, and possess the skills needed to face the challenges of the times. Education serves as a means to develop students' interests and talents in accordance with their potential (Wuryandani & Senen, 2018). Through education, an individual can realize their potential, improve their well-being, and contribute to the development of society and the nation. Schools are expected to be a comfortable and safe place for students to engage in educational activities. A school is like a garden, which can function not only as a recreational space but also as a platform for children to be creative, with an educational environment filled with love and a child-friendly atmosphere (Rahmawati, 2021). It is only fitting that schools should be comfortable and enjoyable for children, so that the learning process and outcomes can be maximized (Sholeh, 2017).

Schools, as educational institutions, bear significant responsibility to ensure that students feel safe, valued, and respected throughout the learning process. In this context, strengthening a child-friendly culture in schools becomes crucial. A child-friendly culture in schools refers to an educational environment that is safe, inclusive, and supports the holistic development of students. This concept involves respecting children's rights, protecting them from violence and discrimination, and providing opportunities for children to actively participate in the educational process (Yosada & Kurniati, 2019).

A child-friendly culture in elementary schools is a critical foundation for realizing inclusive, safe education that optimally supports the growth and development of students. On a global scale, the right of children to receive education free from violence, discrimination, and intimidation has been emphasized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by nearly every country in the world, including Indonesia (UNICEF., 2021). However, various cases of violations of children's rights continue to occur in schools. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) recorded over 200 reports of violence occurring within school environments in 2022, including physical, verbal, and psychological abuse (KPAI, 2022).

Phenomenologically, many elementary schools in Indonesia still apply authoritarian interaction patterns, lack empathy, and offer limited participation from children in decision-making. This creates a non-conducive learning environment that negatively impacts the social-emotional development of students (Suryani, 2021). In fact, educational approaches that foster child-friendly values have been proven to enhance learning motivation, promote positive discipline, and reduce bullying rates in schools (Iskandar & Nugroho, 2023). Therefore, it is important to deeply examine how strategies for building a child-friendly culture can be implemented systematically and contextually in elementary schools. This study employs a literature review method, examining relevant literature from scholarly journals, institutional reports, and recent education policy documents. The main contribution of this study is to enrich both theoretical and practical perspectives regarding the implementation of a child-

friendly culture in elementary schools, particularly in the context of primary education in Indonesia. In addition to offering a synthesis of strategies that have been successfully implemented in various regions, this paper also highlights gaps in policies and practices that still require intervention. The uniqueness of this study lies in its cross-disciplinary analysis, which combines perspectives from education, child developmental psychology, and public policy.

Given the increasing cases of violence and marginalization of children in schools, the urgency of this research becomes even more important. It is hoped that the findings of this study will serve as a reference for policymakers, educators, and the school community to collaboratively create a truly safe, supportive, and child-friendly learning environment.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

A child-friendly culture in elementary schools is the result of a social construct formed through interactions between students, educators, school management, and national education policies. The concept of a child-friendly culture refers to a school environment that guarantees the physical and psychological safety of students, respects children's rights, and fosters active participation of children in the learning process and decision-making (Widiastuti, 2021). This principle aligns with a humanistic educational approach that places children as subjects in the learning process, rather than mere objects who are expected to comply with the system (Hidayat & Salamah, 2020).

Several key theories underpin the development of a child-friendly culture in schools, including Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecology theory, which emphasizes the importance of micro-environments (such as schools and families) in shaping children's behaviors and values (Bronfenbrenner dalam Fitriana, 2020). A supportive and child-friendly school environment contributes significantly to building children's self-confidence, engagement in learning, and preventing aggressive behavior and violence. A study conducted by (Marlina & Yusri, 2022) showed that schools implementing a character education strengthening program (PPK) based on a child-friendly culture experienced a significant reduction in bullying cases and an increase in students' social awareness.

In the context of national policy, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation No. 8 of 2014 on Child-Friendly School Policy serves as an important reference for the implementation of a child-friendly culture in educational units. This policy emphasizes the role of all stakeholders in the school – principals, teachers, educational staff, parents, and students themselves – in building a system that protects and empowers children (Kemendikbud, 2022). However, the implementation challenges remain considerable, particularly concerning awareness, teacher training, and the unequal distribution of supporting infrastructure across different regions (Arifin & Sulastri, 2023).

This literature review also highlights the importance of building a school culture that is inclusive and responsive to the diverse backgrounds of students. Elementary schools that are able to foster values of empathy, tolerance, and openness to differences will more easily create a child-friendly learning atmosphere. According to Latifah & Damanik, (2021), strengthening these values

through co-curricular activities, thematic learning, and project-based real-life experiences is highly effective in instilling a child-friendly culture. In this literature review, the author has explored various accredited national journals, policy reports, and the latest research findings from the last five years to formulate effective strategies for building a child-friendly culture. The search was conducted systematically using keywords such as "child-friendly schools," "inclusive school culture," and "child protection in elementary schools." The analysis was carried out thematically by grouping findings into aspects such as implementation strategies, structural barriers, and the roles of school actors.

Thus, this study not only outlines the conceptual importance of a child-friendly culture but also offers empirical contributions to enrich the literature and practices in primary education in Indonesia. The emphasis on the literature review method allows the researcher to construct a strong synthesis from various perspectives and diverse social contexts. The urgency of this research lies in the fact that many elementary schools in Indonesia still lack an optimal child protection system. Therefore, systemic and knowledge-based efforts are required to foster a sustainable child-friendly culture.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method. This method involves examining and analyzing various relevant written sources, such as academic journals, books, education policy reports, and official documents that discuss child-friendly culture in elementary school environments. The data collection process begins by identifying the main topics and keywords such as "child-friendly culture," "elementary school," and "inclusive education." The gathered literature is selected based on relevance, depth of analysis, and its contribution to both conceptual and practical understanding. Subsequently, the data is analyzed thematically to identify patterns, strategies, and challenges in efforts to create a child-friendly school environment. The results from this literature synthesis are used to formulate strategies that can be applied contextually in elementary schools, as well as provide recommendations for strengthening school culture that supports children's protection and participation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This research is conducted through a series of systematic steps in the literature review method. The first step is to formulate the focus of the study, which is the strategy for fostering a child-friendly culture in elementary schools. This focus is determined based on the urgency of child protection issues and the importance of creating a safe, inclusive, and educational school environment. The second step is the collection of literature data. The researcher explores various scholarly sources such as journal articles, books, education policy reports, and educational institution documents that discuss child-friendly schools, humanistic pedagogical approaches, and strategies for building school culture. The literature is gathered through academic search engines and journal databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda, and digital campus libraries. This search results in several relevant findings from previous studies, as follows:

(Na'imah et al., 2020) conducted a study titled *"Implementasi Sekolah Ramah Anak untuk Membangun Nilai-Nilai Karakter Anak Usia Dini"*. This study used a grounded theory approach with the research subjects consisting of teachers and principals from several 'Aisyiyah kindergartens in Purwokerto. Data was collected through interviews and observations, then analyzed using the constant comparative analysis technique. The results of the study showed that the implementation of a child-friendly school, through the stages of preparation, planning, and implementation, was able to form early childhood character values, such as responsibility, honesty, and care.

(Nashiruddin & Yuliana, 2022) in their study titled *"Implementasi Sekolah Ramah Anak dalam Mewujudkan Nilai-Nilai Karakter Anak Usia Dini di RA Hidayah Tayu Kabupaten Pati"*, used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques including observation, interviews, and documentation. The study found that the implementation of child-friendly school principles was carried out through the stages of preparation, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The impact was evident in the development of students' character, such as discipline, tolerance, and self-confidence.

Alfifah et al., (2023) researched the topic *"Implementasi Sekolah Ramah Anak (SRA) dalam Pembentukan Karakter Peduli Lingkungan di SDN 1 Cimenga"*. The approach used was descriptive qualitative, with data gathered through interviews, observation, and documentation. The results indicated that the school applied a child-friendly culture through activities that encouraged awareness and concern for the environment, such as school cleanliness programs, greening movements, and waste management.

Rahmawati (2021) in her research *"Manajemen Program Sekolah Ramah Anak dalam Upaya Pembentukan Karakter Siswa di MAN 4 Bantul Yogyakarta"* used a descriptive qualitative approach. The data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. The study found that the management of the SRA program encompassed planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. This strategy played a crucial role in shaping students' character to be polite, disciplined, and responsible.

Awliya et al. (2023) wrote about *"Efektivitas Penerapan Program Sekolah Ramah Anak dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Pendidikan Karakter di SMP Negeri 4 Pakem Yogyakarta"*. This study used a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The study showed that the consistently implemented SRA program was effective in instilling character values, such as cooperation, fairness, and integrity, both in the learning process and non-academic activities.

The third step, after collecting literature from various academic sources, the researcher proceeded with content selection and analysis using a thematic approach. All the gathered literature was systematically selected based on three main criteria: relevance of the topic, clarity of the argument, and the referential quality of each source. Literature that did not directly address the concepts of child-friendly schools, humanistic pedagogy, or the development of school culture was excluded from further analysis. Additionally, only sources with

logical and well-structured arguments, supported by credible scientific references, were considered for analysis.

The analysis process was carried out by identifying recurring thematic patterns emerging from various sources. This thematic approach allowed the researcher to organize information from different studies into strategic categories that indicate the direction of establishing a child-friendly school culture. From this in-depth analysis, it was found that, despite differences in geographical context, educational levels, and research designs, all the studies revealed common principles in strategies for building a child-friendly school culture at the elementary school level. Three main strategies identified from the literature are as follows. First, strengthening values and character through the development of a positive school climate. A safe, inclusive, and supportive school climate has proven to be a crucial foundation for nurturing character values in children. Teachers, principals, and all school members collaborate to build an environment free from violence, discrimination, and bullying. This environment encourages children to feel valued, accepted, and empowered to express themselves.

Second, the formation of a child-friendly culture is carried out through the implementation of humanistic pedagogy and participatory learning. Teachers no longer act as the sole source of knowledge, but as facilitators who understand the individual needs and potentials of their students. In several studies, including the research by Nashiruddin dan Yuliana (2022) serta Alfifah et al. (2023), it was found that learning which involves children in decision-making and collaborative projects not only improves social skills but also cultivates values such as responsibility, tolerance, and environmental awareness.

Third, the success of a child-friendly school culture cannot be separated from the support of school management and the involvement of the education community. A principal with an inclusive and humanistic vision is able to design policies and programs that support the implementation of the SRA (Child-Friendly School) program. In addition, the participation of parents and the surrounding community further strengthens the child-friendly educational ecosystem. In the study by Rahmawati (2021), the involvement of school management through the planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation of the SRA program comprehensively proved to create a school climate that is conducive to the development of students' character.

Thus, the results of the thematic analysis indicate that the formation of a child-friendly culture in elementary schools is not solely the responsibility of teachers, but rather a result of collaboration between learning approaches, social environment support, and institutional management that is responsive to the rights and needs of children. The final step is the synthesis of findings as the basis for making recommendations. The research results show that the implementation of a child-friendly culture is heavily influenced by the synergy between appropriate pedagogical approaches, institutional commitment, and support from the social ecosystem around the school.

DISCUSSION

The results of this literature review emphasize that fostering a child-friendly culture in elementary schools requires a multidimensional approach that combines

pedagogical, structural, and social aspects. Based on thematic analysis of various literatures and previous studies, it can be understood that strategies for building a child-friendly school culture are inseparable from the context of inclusive education values, humanistic approaches, and the active role of the school community.

First, the strategy of strengthening students' values and character through the creation of a positive school climate serves as a key pillar in building a child-friendly culture. This finding is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which asserts that children's development is heavily influenced by their immediate environment, in this case, the school. When the school environment supports a sense of safety, is free from violence, and prioritizes respect for diversity, children will grow into confident, empathetic individuals with a sense of social responsibility. Na'imah et al. (2020) demonstrated that the strengthening of character traits such as honesty, responsibility, and social care develops as a result of creating a warm, open, and respectful atmosphere in early childhood education environments.

Second, the formation of a child-friendly culture is also supported by the implementation of a humanistic pedagogical approach and participatory learning. This approach encourages teachers to better understand the individual needs and potentials of their students, as well as provide space for children to participate in the learning process. This aligns with Paulo Freire's concept of liberating education, where students are positioned as active subjects in the educational process, rather than passive objects. Studies by Nashiruddin & Yuliana (2022) and Alfifah et al. (2023) highlight that learning approaches that provide space for children's participation, through experiential activities, collaborative projects, and joint decision-making, positively impact the strengthening of character values and environmental awareness.

Next, the third strategy that supports a child-friendly culture is the existence of responsive and collaborative school management. The role of the principal as a transformational leader is crucial in building an institutional culture that is child-friendly. Good management includes organizing programs, training educators, and continuous evaluation involving all school stakeholders. Rahmawati (2021) demonstrated that the implementation of the SRA program at MAN 4 Bantul was optimized due to a well-planned and participatory managerial system. Equally important, the involvement of parents and the local community in the educational process also contributes to strengthening the child-friendly culture in elementary school environments.

This discussion reveals that fostering a child-friendly school culture cannot be achieved with a partial approach. It requires integration across micro dimensions (teachers and students), meso dimensions (school management and community), and macro dimensions (policies and system support). Implicitly, the results of this study also emphasize the importance of integrating humanistic approaches and the principles of inclusive education into daily teaching practices. Elementary schools, as the foundational stage of formal education, have a strategic responsibility to create spaces that not only impart knowledge but also develop character, respect children's rights, and foster a culture of peace. Thus, this study

enriches both academic and practical understanding of strategies for building a child-friendly culture through a synthesis of systematically obtained findings. The implications of this discussion are the need for enhanced teacher capacity, strengthening value-based school management, and formulating educational policies that are more responsive to children's protection and participation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research concludes that the strategy for fostering a child-friendly culture in elementary school environments cannot be carried out in isolation but must be implemented in an integrated manner through pedagogical, managerial, and social approaches. The literature review findings indicate that there are three key strategies that have proven effective in building a child-friendly culture. First, strengthening students' values and character by creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive school climate. Second, the application of a humanistic pedagogy approach and participatory learning that positions children as active subjects in the learning process. Third, the support of school management and the involvement of the educational community, which collaboratively promotes the realization of a sustainable system for child protection and participation. By implementing these strategies, elementary schools can become environments that not only educate academically but also shape children's character, protect their rights, and create a healthy and empowering learning atmosphere.

FURTHER STUDY

Based on these findings, there are several recommendations that can be implemented:

1. For schools and educators, it is important to integrate child-friendly values into school policies, curricula, and daily teaching practices. Teachers should be provided with ongoing training on humanistic approaches and participatory methods that are responsive to students' needs.
2. For school principals and education management, there is a need to develop school policies that guarantee the protection of children's rights, encourage their participation in decision-making, and establish a system of supervision against potential violence or discrimination in the school environment.
3. For the government and policymakers, it is important to strengthen regulations and affirmative programs that support the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools, including through resource allocation, teacher training, and regular supervision.
4. For the community and parents, active involvement in school activities and healthy communication with the school authorities is key to creating a harmonious ecosystem that supports children's holistic development.

By implementing these recommendations, it is hoped that a child-friendly, inclusive, and sustainable elementary school culture can be created, which will produce a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also emotionally and socially mature. This research has several limitations that need to be

acknowledged. Since it uses a literature review method, all the data and findings analyzed are theoretical and derived from secondary sources. As such, the results of this study do not reflect the dynamics and empirical implementation of child-friendly culture in the field, especially in different local contexts.

Furthermore, this study has not deeply explored the differences in the implementation of child-friendly culture between public and private schools, or between urban and rural areas. Factors such as socio-cultural backgrounds, school resource capacity, and regional policy support have not been comprehensively addressed.

Based on these limitations, it is recommended that future research be conducted with a field-based qualitative approach through observations, in-depth interviews, or case studies in elementary schools that have implemented the principles of child-friendly schools. Further studies could also examine the direct involvement of students in building a safe, inclusive, and democratic school culture. With an empirical approach, it is hoped that the contribution to the development of child-friendly education theory and practice will be stronger, and that it will support the formulation of evidence-based policies.

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