


The Role of the Principal in Realizing a Child-Friendly School at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka, Tanggamus Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka, Tanggamus Regency, with an emphasis on the role of the principal's policies, child-friendly learning, and student participation. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies, with the principal and teachers as key informants. The results show that the principal's policies play a central role in integrating the principles of CFS into school management, particularly in creating a safe, comfortable, and violence-free environment. Child-friendly learning is implemented through conducive classroom management, humanistic communication, and the application of positive discipline without violence. In addition, student participation is facilitated through open and inclusive policies, so that students have space to express opinions and be involved in school decision-making. However, this study also found a gap between the ideal concept of CFS and empirical practice, particularly related to differences in understanding among some school members and parents regarding positive discipline and the unequal courage of student participation. Overall, this study concludes that the success of SRA implementation is largely determined by the strength of the principal's policies, supported by child-friendly learning and a sustainable participatory culture. This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Child-Friendly School policies in junior high schools.

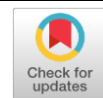
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INTRODUCTIONS

The growing attention to education that prioritizes the fulfillment of children's rights has encouraged the emergence of the concept of Child-Friendly Schools (SRA) as a strategic effort to create a sustainable educational environment. safe, inclusive, and supportive of students' holistic development. SRA is not just a policy program, but an educational paradigm that puts the best interests of children at the basis of every school activity, including policies, learning, facilities, and mechanisms for school citizen participation (Nasarudin et al., 2024).

In the context of primary and secondary education, the leadership of the principal plays a central role in effectively implementing the SRA principles. The principal not only acts as an administrative manager, but also as a visionary, facilitator of change, and director of school culture that fosters a sense of security and active involvement of students (Mikelsone et al., 2024). The literature shows that School leadership has a significant relationship with school climate, student participation, and the effectiveness of educational programs Overall (Shahin et al., 2024).

An effective principal is able to set Internal policies that are responsive to children's rights, as well as translating these policies into learning practices that respect the dignity and needs of students. This approach includes the creation of a school climate that is safe from violence, discrimination, and forms of treatment that optimally hinder the child's

development (Nicolaou & Anastasiou, 2023). When the learning environment is safe and supportive, students' motivation and participation at all stages of learning tend to increase and have a positive impact on their academic achievement and psychosocial well-being.

The principal also plays a decisive role Child-Friendly Learning Strategies, including the application of non-violent discipline, habituation of positive values, and student empowerment in school decision-making. These strategies enrich the quality of students' learning experiences and build a school culture that respects children's voices and aspirations (Huda et al., 2022).

Furthermore, research analyzing the relationship between leadership and implementation of SRA programs shows that Democratic, collaborative, and innovative leadership style Facilitate the successful implementation of the program, including the involvement of parents, teachers, and the community in the school's decision-making process (Siwy & Meilani, 2024). This confirms that the principal has a strategic impact not only on written policies, but also on the daily practice that students perceive directly.

However, obstacles in the implementation of SRA often arise due to the limited capacity of school leaders to translate macro policies into child-friendly practical actions, including the provision of facilities and infrastructure that support safety and comfort of learning. This indicates the need for a leadership approach that is more sensitive to the local context of the school and the developmental needs of individual learners (Chepngeno et al., 2024).

Case studies in various regions show that principals who successfully implement SRA generally strengthen Collaboration Between Stakeholders, such as teachers, parents of students, and the community around the school, so that synergy is created in realizing a common vision of a school that is friendly to children's rights. Students' active participation in student organization forums or other aspiration mechanisms is also an indicator of the success of the overall implementation of the SRA (Putri Mustaqim & Wahjoedi a Surabaya, 2024).

Referring to the literature review, this article aims to empirically analyze the role of school principals in realizing Child-Friendly Schools at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka Tanggamus Regency, with a focus on internal policies, child-friendly learning strategies, and empowering student participation. This approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how principals translate SRA principles into real-world practice in the school environment.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive type and case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the role of school principals in realizing Child-Friendly Schools (SRAs) through policies, learning practices, and children's participation in the natural context of schools. This approach allows researchers to explore meanings, processes, and social dynamics that cannot be quantitatively measured, especially in examining educational leadership practices and policy implementation at the education unit level.

The case study design was used because this study focuses on one case unit intensively and contextually, namely SMP Negeri 1 Semaka Tanggamus Regency, as a representation of schools that apply the principles of Child-Friendly Schools. The case study allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of principal leadership in a real context, taking into account the characteristics of the school environment, organizational culture, and interaction between school residents (Murtanti et al., 2024). The selection of the research location is based on the consideration that the school already has policies and programs oriented towards the protection and fulfillment of children's rights.

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were used to explore the perceptions, experiences, and strategies of school principals and teachers in implementing the

principles of Child-Friendly Schools. Observations were carried out to directly observe learning practices, the application of non-violent discipline, and interactions between teachers and students in the school environment. Meanwhile, the documentation is used to review school policy documents, work programs, and applicable Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for Child-Friendly Schools.

Data analysis in this study was carried out in an interactive and continuous manner by following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data obtained from various sources were thematically analyzed to identify patterns of the role of school principals in policy, child-friendly learning, and student participation. The analysis process is carried out from the time the data collection takes place until the research is completed,

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation techniques and triangulation methods. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing data obtained from administrators and cadres so that the information received is not subjective, while method triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation obtained from organizational activities (Ratnaningsih et al., 2024). In addition, the researcher also conducts member checks, which are reconfirming research findings to informants so that there are no misinterpretations, and conducting peer discussions to test the strength of the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Child-Friendly School Policy

The results of the study show that the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools (SRA) at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka Tanggamus Regency has been implemented in a planned manner in the management of the school environment. The educational environment created reflects a safe, orderly, and conducive atmosphere for students. Interaction between school residents took place in a positive and respectful manner, and no dominant indications of physical or verbal violence were found in learning activities and other school activities.

The results of the study also show that the Child-Friendly School policy is implemented through school rules and regulations that are oriented towards fulfilling the rights of students. The policy emphasizes the application of discipline that is educational, proportional, and fair. The discipline approach applied prioritizes fostering behavior and providing understanding to students, so that SRA policies function as an instrument for character formation and strengthening positive values in the school environment.

In the aspect of school leadership, the results of research obtained through interviews with school principals show that the role of school principals is very central in supporting the implementation of Child-Friendly School policies. The principal emphasized that the implementation of the SRA is positioned as part of the school's commitment to guarantee students' rights to a sense of security, comfort, and fair treatment. The principal also said that all school policies and programs are directed to be in line with the principles of positive discipline, by emphasizing a persuasive approach, open communication, and humane student problem solving. Students are also given space to participate and express opinions responsibly. These findings are in line with the view (Nugraha, 2022) which emphasizes that children's participation in the educational environment is an important aspect in creating an inclusive school climate and supporting the development of students.

Furthermore, the results of the study show that the implementation of the Child-Friendly School policy has a positive impact on the school climate and student behavior. Students show a better level of discipline based on self-awareness, increased security in interaction, and courage in expressing opinions. Although there are still challenges in harmonizing the understanding of all school residents and parents regarding the application

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of positive discipline without violence, in general, the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka can be considered to run effectively and sustainably.

Child-Friendly Learning

The results of the study show that child-friendly learning at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka is carried out by placing students as the main subject in the learning process. Teachers pay attention to the safety and comfort aspects of students through orderly classroom management, the creation of a learning atmosphere that is free from threats and intimidation, and supervision of interactions between students during learning. In addition, teachers build polite communication, respect the differences in students' character, and provide fair treatment, so as to create a safe, comfortable classroom atmosphere, and support the active involvement of students.

The results of the study also show that the application of non-violent discipline is an important element in supporting child-friendly learning. Discipline enforcement is carried out through an educational approach that emphasizes fostering behavior and developing students' awareness of the applicable rules. Teachers avoid the use of physical and verbal punishment that is degrading, and prioritize giving direction and reprimands that are guided. This approach aims to maintain the psychological condition of students so that they remain stable and support the sustainability of the learning process.

One of the teachers said that learning planning was carried out by choosing interactive methods, adjusting the material to the students' abilities, and creating a classroom atmosphere that supports a sense of security and comfort. The teacher also explained that the class rules are prepared through mutual agreement with students so that they understand and are responsible for the rules that have been set. These findings are in line with the results of the study (Ismail et al., 2025) which emphasized that a safe and supportive school climate plays an important role in reducing violence and improving the learning comfort of students.

Furthermore, the results of the study show that the implementation of child-friendly learning supported by non-violent discipline has a positive impact on student behavior. Indicators of change that can be seen include increasing student discipline, decreasing disciplinary violations, and establishing a more harmonious relationship between teachers and students. This condition shows that child-friendly learning contributes to creating a conducive classroom climate and supports the development of students' character in a sustainable manner.

Children's Participation

The results of the study show that children's participation in the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka is realized through the active involvement of students in conveying opinions, suggestions, and aspirations related to school policies and activities. Children's participation is not only understood as participation in formal school activities, but also as involvement in the decision-making process related to the interests of students. The provision of participation space reflects the school's commitment to respecting children's rights to be heard and involved in school life.

The results of the study also show that children's participation is seen as an important element in supporting the success of Child-Friendly Schools. The involvement of students contributes to fostering a sense of belonging to the school, increasing responsibility, and creating a more democratic school climate. With the participation of children, school policies and activities become more responsive to the needs of students and encourage the development of mutually respectful relationships between students and other school residents.

Furthermore, the results of the interview with the principal show that the school consciously formulated policies that provide space for student participation. The principal stated that the school provides a means of participation through student organizations, such as the student council, as well as a communication forum that allows students to convey their aspirations directly or through representatives. Meanwhile, the results of interviews with

students showed that they felt an opportunity to express their opinions regarding school activities and rules related to student interests. Students stated that the support from teachers and principals made them feel safer, appreciated, and courageous in conveying their aspirations. These findings are in line with the view (Rezeki et al., 2026) which affirms that meaningful children's participation in education must include the provision of space, opportunities to express their voices, and the assurance that those voices are heard and considered in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the results of the study show that children's involvement in the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools has a positive impact on the development of students' attitudes and personalities. Students show increased confidence, courage in expressing opinions, and concern for the school environment. Although there are still obstacles in the form of embarrassment and lack of courage for some students, the open and democratic leadership of the principal contributes significantly to creating a participatory and welcoming school environment for students' rights.

Discussion

Child-Friendly School Policy

The discussion on the aspect of the Child-Friendly School policy shows that the implementation of SRA at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka Tanggamus Regency is carried out in a planned and relatively effective manner, especially supported by the policy of the principal as the main driver of change. The principal's policy not only functions as an administrative regulation, but also becomes a strategic guideline in the management of a safe, orderly, and conducive school environment. This is reflected in the policy direction that emphasizes the protection of students' rights, the application of positive discipline, and the creation of a humane school climate. Thus, the indicator of the success of SRA implementation in this study lies in the consistency and commitment of school principals' policies in integrating child-friendly principles into daily school governance. These findings are in line with (Bhaga et al., 2022) which emphasized that the success of Child-Friendly Schools is greatly influenced by the principal's leadership policies that are oriented towards the protection and welfare of students.

The principal's policy is strongly related to the theory of education based on children's rights (*child rights-based education*), which places the fulfillment of the rights to protection, participation, and development of students as the foundation of the implementation of education (Asbari et al., 2024). Principals' policies that support positive discipline have proven to be effective in building an inclusive school climate and supporting the social-emotional development of students

Nevertheless, a critical analysis of the results shows that there is a gap between the ideal conditions of school principals' policies and the empirical reality in the field. Ideally, the SRA policy formulated by the principal is expected to be comprehensively understood and supported by all school residents and parents. However, the facts in the field are still found by some parties who interpret discipline in a conventional framework that is oriented towards punishment. This gap shows that the effectiveness of school principals' policies has not been fully accompanied by changes in the culture and mindset of all stakeholders. These findings are in line with research (Setiyadi et al., 2025) which states that the main challenge of implementing the SRA lies in cultural resistance to the principle of positive discipline without violence.

The theoretical implications of this study strengthen the view that the principal's policy is a strategic instrument in realizing a sustainable Child-Friendly School. In practical terms, the results of the study recommend that school principals strengthen the socialization of SRA policies in an ongoing manner, especially to parents and all school residents, and develop operational guidelines that are more applicable and easy to understand. In addition, the principal's policy needs to be directed at strengthening student participation in a structured manner as part of the implementation of children's rights in schools. By narrowing

the gap between ideal policy and empirical practice, the implementation of SRA at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka has the potential to become an effective model of child-friendly school policy for other schools with similar characteristics.

Child-Friendly Learning

The discussion of the results of the study shows that child-friendly learning at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka Tanggamus Regency has been implemented through a pedagogical policy of teachers who place students as the main subject of learning. Classroom management practices that are safe, comfortable, and free from bullying reflect teachers' commitment to creating a learning climate that supports active student engagement. Indicators of the success of child-friendly learning in this context can not only be seen from the regularity of the classroom, but also from the consistency of teachers in applying a communicative, fair approach, and respecting the differences in students' characters. This emphasizes that child-friendly learning functions as a strategic instrument in supporting a meaningful learning process oriented towards the fulfillment of children's rights. These findings are in line with research (Razita et al., 2025) which emphasizes that safe and supportive learning increases the comfort of learning and active participation of students.

However, a critical analysis of the research results shows that there is a gap between the ideal conditions of child-friendly learning and the empirical practices faced by teachers. Ideally, all teachers are expected to have an equal understanding and skills in applying interactive methods, humanist classroom management, and non-violent discipline. However, the fact that the implementation of child-friendly learning in the field still depends on the individual readiness of teachers, teaching experience, and training support received. This gap indicates that the sustainability of child-friendly learning requires systematically strengthening the capacity of teachers. These findings are in line with research (Adikasari, 2025) which states that the main challenge of child-friendly learning lies in the consistency of implementation and pedagogical readiness of teachers.

The theoretical implications of this study reinforce the view that child-friendly learning and non-violent discipline are effective approaches in building a conducive classroom climate and supporting the formation of students' character. Practically, this study recommends the need to strengthen school policies in the form of continuous training for teachers related to child-friendly learning, humanist classroom management, and positive discipline strategies. In addition, schools need to encourage teachers' reflective practices and the development of class rules based on mutual agreement so that students have a stronger sense of responsibility. By narrowing the gap between ideal concepts and learning practices, the implementation of child-friendly learning at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka Tanggamus Regency is expected to run more optimally, consistently, and sustainably.

Children's Participation

The discussion of the results of the study shows that children's participation in SMP Negeri 1 Semaka does not arise spontaneously, but is the result of the principal's policy of consciously opening up space for student participation in school life. Participation is interpreted as the active involvement of students in conveying their opinions, aspirations, and experiences through formal and informal mechanisms, such as student councils, class representatives, and direct communication with school leaders. This policy indicates that the principal positions the child's voice as an important part of school decision-making, so that children's participation is an indicator of the success of child-friendly school leadership. These findings are in line with the *child-centered education* which affirms that the fulfillment of children's right to participation is the foundation in building democratic and inclusive schools (Setiyadi et al., 2025)

The relationship of research findings with the theory of leadership of children's rights-based education shows that the role of school principals is not only administrative, but also strategic in creating a safe psychological climate for students. An open and inclusive policy encourages students to dare to express their opinions without fear of negative

consequences (Dwi, F., & Fathoni, 2025). Theoretically, this condition reflects the practice of *supportive school leadership* which emphasizes trust, two-way communication, and respect for student voices as part of the school's culture. Research (Rohimah Aprilia Irawati et al., 2025) emphasized that supportive school leadership contributes significantly to increasing students' courage in participating and strengthening a sense of belonging to the school.

However, a critical analysis of the results shows that there is a gap between ideal and empirical conditions in the implementation of child participation. Ideally, all students are expected to have the courage and equal opportunity to participate actively. However, the fact in the field is that there are still some students who are passive, embarrassed, or hesitant to express their opinions. This gap shows that the principal's policy of opening up space for participation needs to be accompanied by a more intensive mentoring strategy so that participation is not symbolic. These findings are in line with (Caldwell, 2023) which states that children's participation will only be meaningful if schools not only provide a platform, but also ensure that the participation mechanism is responsive, inclusive, and sustainable.

The theoretical implications of this study reinforce the view that child participation is a key element in the implementation of effective Child-Friendly Schools, especially when supported by consistent and rights-oriented policies of school principals. Practically, this study recommends the need to strengthen participatory policies through the habit of dialogue in the classroom, student involvement in the evaluation of school activities, and the development of aspiration forums that are more friendly to students who lack confidence. By reducing the gap between ideal concepts and empirical practices, the principal's policy in encouraging children's participation in SMP Negeri 1 Semaka Tanggamus Regency has the potential to strengthen a democratic school climate, improve the social-emotional welfare of students, and support the sustainability of the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research and discussions that have been described, it can be concluded that the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools (SRA) at SMP Negeri 1 Semaka Tanggamus Regency is running in a planned and relatively effective manner, with the principal's policy as the main key driving factor. School principals' policies play a strategic role in integrating child-friendly principles into school governance, especially through the protection of students' rights, the implementation of positive discipline, and the creation of a safe, orderly, and humane school climate. The consistency of the policy is the main indicator of the success of the implementation of SRA in this school. In the learning aspect, this study concludes that child-friendly learning has been implemented through a pedagogical approach that places students as the main subject of learning. Safe, communicative, and violence-free classroom management practices show the commitment of teachers in supporting child-friendly school policies. However, the sustainability of child-friendly learning still faces challenges in the form of gaps in teacher readiness and pedagogical competence, so it is necessary to systematically strengthen teacher capacity so that implementation can run more consistently and evenly. Furthermore, in the aspect of child participation, this study concludes that the involvement of students in school life is a direct result of the principal's open and inclusive policy. Providing space for participation through formal and informal mechanisms contributes positively to increasing students' confidence, responsibility, and sense of belonging to the school. However, there is still a gap in participation among students, which shows that participatory policies need to be accompanied by mentoring and habituation so that children's participation is not symbolic, but meaningful and sustainable. Overall, this study confirms that the success of Child-Friendly Schools is largely determined by the power of school principals' policies supported by child-friendly learning and student participation. The implications of this study show that strengthening school policies, improving teacher competence, and developing a consistent participatory culture are important prerequisites for the sustainability of SRA. By narrowing the gap between ideal concepts and empirical

practices, SMP Negeri 1 Semaka has the potential to become an effective and adaptive model of Child-Friendly School implementation for other schools with similar characteristics.

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