

Child-Friendly School Policy: Reflections on Obstacles and Innovative Solutions in Labuhanbatu Regency

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Education is a cornerstone of national development, shaping a competitive and well-rounded future generation. The Child-Friendly School (CFS) policy, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, seeks to foster safe, inclusive, and nurturing educational environments. Despite strong legal frameworks, challenges like limited resources and low awareness hinder its implementation, as seen in Labuhanbatu Regency. This study examines these obstacles and proposes innovative solutions to enhance the effectiveness of CFS.

Objectives: This study aims to identify the challenges in implementing CFS policies in Labuhanbatu Regency and offer innovative, collaborative solutions. It seeks to enhance understanding among stakeholders, improve resource allocation, and strengthen multi-stakeholder coordination to ensure the sustainable fulfillment of children's rights in education.

Methods: A qualitative approach was used, involving literature reviews, interviews with school principals, teachers, parents, and students, direct observations, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and relationships among variables affecting CFS implementation.

Results: Key challenges include limited understanding of CFS principles, resource constraints, resistance to change, weak stakeholder coordination, and low participation from parents and students. Proposed solutions include capacity-building for educators, technology integration, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and enhancing child participation through forums and creative programs.

Conclusions: Effective CFS implementation requires continuous socialization, budget allocation, regulatory reinforcement, and collaborative efforts to ensure its success. Addressing these challenges with innovative strategies can create a supportive educational environment, ensuring children's rights are upheld and their potential maximized.

Keywords: Child-Friendly school, children's rights, education policy, multi-stakeholder collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Education, as a key pillar of national development, plays a crucial role in shaping a high-quality, well-rounded, and competitive future generation. More than just the transfer of knowledge, education is a holistic process that encompasses the development of potential, moral formation, and the protection of children's fundamental rights. In this context, the concept of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) emerges as a progressive initiative to create an educational environment that is not only safe and inclusive but also conducive to children's optimal growth and development [1].

The CFS policy is firmly rooted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This international legal framework has been ratified by most countries worldwide, including Indonesia, through Presidential Decree No. 36 of 1996. The UNCRC affirms children's fundamental rights, including the right to quality education, protection from violence and discrimination, and active participation in all aspects of life that affect them [2]. These principles were then internalized into national regulations, such as the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation (Permen PPPA) No. 11 of 2011 concerning the Development of Child-

Friendly District/City (CFD) Policies and Permen PPPA No. 8 of 2014 concerning Child-Friendly School Policies [3], [4]. These two regulations serve as a solid legal foundation for the implementation of CFS throughout Indonesia.

Permen PPPA No. 8 of 2014 explicitly outlines six main components that schools must implement to be categorized as CFS. These components include: (1) the existence of clear CFS policy documents; (2) educators and educational staff who are trained in children's rights; (3) the implementation of child-friendly teaching and learning processes, including the application of non-violent discipline; (4) the availability of child-friendly, safe, and non-hazardous facilities and infrastructure; (5) active participation of children in planning, policy-making, learning, monitoring, and complaint mechanisms; and (6) participation of parents, alumni, community organizations, and the business sector in supporting the CFS program [4].

Various institutions reinforce the definition of CFS itself. According to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA) in 2015, CFS is a formal, non-formal, and informal educational unit that is safe, clean, healthy, caring, and environmentally conscious and can guarantee, fulfill, and respect children's rights and protect them from violence, discrimination, and other forms of mistreatment. CFS also supports children's participation, particularly in planning, policy-making, learning, monitoring, and complaint mechanisms related to the fulfillment of children's rights and protection in education [5]. In line with this, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) stated in 2016 that CFS is not about building new schools but rather about conditioning existing schools to be comfortable places for children, ensuring the fulfillment of their rights, and providing adequate protection [6].

One of the fundamental aspects of CFS policy is the emphasis on children's active participation in the educational process. Children are no longer viewed merely as objects of learning but as subjects who have the right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives and education. Initiatives such as the formation of student councils or student participation forums are vital means of realizing this principle, allowing children's voices to be heard and considered [7].

Although the legal foundation and concept of CFS have been well established, its implementation in the field still faces various challenges. Some studies indicate obstacles such as a lack of understanding and awareness among the public about the importance of CFS [8], limited financial and human resources [9], [10], resistance to change from schools that still apply traditional approaches [11], and weak coordination among stakeholders [12]. This reality indicates that the implementation of CFS has not yet reached an optimal level and requires innovative solutions to overcome these obstacles.

Labuhanbatu Regency, as one of the regions in North Sumatra, has demonstrated its commitment to the CFS policy. This implementation is normatively established through Labuhanbatu Regency Regulation Number 5 of 2015 concerning the Implementation of Child Protection. Article 43, paragraph 2(d) of the regulation explicitly states that fulfilling children's rights includes education, leisure activities, and cultural activities, which indirectly support efforts to protect and fulfill children's rights through the CFS policy [13]. Data from the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Agency (DP3A) and the Labuhanbatu District Education Agency indicate that 11 schools have declared themselves as CFS implementers, as per Labuhanbatu Education Agency Decree No. 420/806.SD.1/2019 and Labuhanbatu Ministry of Religious Affairs Decree No. 103 of 2019. Most of these implementing schools are at the primary education level (SD and MI), in line with Ki Hajar Dewantara's view on the importance of education and character development from an early age [14].

However, based on initial observations, the implementation of CFS in Labuhanbatu District still faces several realities that need to be addressed. Some implementing schools still lack the necessary CFS policy documents, which is one of the main requirements. Additionally, violations of CFS principles, such as discrimination, non-educational discipline, and bullying by teachers or fellow students, are still being observed. The lack of understanding and support from parents, as well as the inadequate child-friendly facilities and infrastructure due to budget constraints, also pose significant barriers [14].

OBJECTIVES

This study aims to deeply reflect on the obstacles faced in the implementation of CFS policies in the education sector, particularly in Labuhanbatu Regency. Furthermore, this article will offer innovative solutions based on multi-stakeholder collaboration that are expected to overcome these challenges, thereby enabling CFS policies to be implemented more effectively and sustainably, and ensuring that children's rights are fulfilled to the fullest extent. Thus, it is hoped that this research can serve as a valuable reference for education practitioners, policymakers, and the community in strengthening the implementation of CFS in the future.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, where data is collected through literature studies of policy documents, CFS implementation reports, and previous research, as well as interviews with school principals, teachers, parents, and students in schools that have implemented CFS. Additionally, direct observations were conducted on the condition of facilities and infrastructure, the learning process, and stakeholder participation within the school environment, as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with stakeholders to explore deeper perspectives. The collected data was then analyzed thematically to identify patterns and relationships between variables.

RESULTS

1. Challenges in Implementing the Child-Friendly School Policy in Labuhanbatu District

Although the Child-Friendly School (CFS) policy has become an integral part of the national education system and is supported by strong regulations, its implementation in the field, particularly in Labuhanbatu District, still faces significant challenges. These challenges are multidimensional, encompassing aspects of understanding, resources, resistance to change, coordination, and active participation from various stakeholders. One of the main obstacles that often lies at the root of the problem is the lack of understanding and awareness of the essence and urgency of CFS among various parties. This superficial understanding results in partial and incomplete implementation. CFS is not only about creating a safe physical environment but also involves a paradigm shift in interactions, teaching methods, and the overall school culture. When teachers do not understand that CFS requires a different pedagogical approach, for example, they tend to maintain traditional methods that may be less participatory or even repressive. Similarly, parents who are unaware of children's rights at school may not be proactive in supporting or monitoring the implementation of CFS and may even be permissive of practices that are not child-friendly [8]. In Labuhanbatu District, initial observations suggest that this lack of understanding is reflected in ongoing violations of CFS principles, including discrimination, non-educational discipline, and bullying by teachers and fellow students [14]. This suggests that socialization and education about CFS have not addressed the substance of the issue and have not been able to change profoundly rooted mindsets and behaviors.

The next obstacle is the limitation of resources, both financial and human. The implementation of CFS requires adequate budget allocation for the provision of child-friendly facilities and infrastructure, such as clean and safe toilets, adequate play areas, health facilities, and counseling rooms. However, the reality in many schools, including in Labuhanbatu, shows that budget constraints are a serious obstacle to meeting CFS infrastructure standards [14]. Research by A. Putri and Akmal (2019) and Riyanto et al. (2022) consistently show that budget constraints and human resource limitations are the main barriers to implementing the curriculum and providing trained educational staff knowledgeable about children's rights [9], [10]. Additionally, the availability of educators and academic staff with a thorough understanding and relevant skills in children's rights issues remains limited. Uneven training or a lack of incentives for teachers to develop competencies in this area further exacerbates the situation. Without substantial financial and human resource support, efforts to create an ideal CFS environment will be hampered.

Resistance to change is also a challenge that cannot be ignored. Many schools, including educators and educational staff, have become accustomed to traditional approaches to education that tend to be authoritarian and do not accommodate child participation. The transition to CFS requires significant adaptation in mindset, teaching methods, and school culture. This resistance can manifest in various forms, ranging from outright rejection to passive attitudes or a lack of initiative. Salam et al. (2023) found that the lack of teacher participation in relevant training resulted in their not achieving the necessary skills to implement CFS policies effectively [11].

Changes in school leadership can also affect the sustainability of CFS programs, as each leader may have different priorities and strategies, which can disrupt the consistency of implementation [11]. In Labuhanbatu, observations indicate that some implementing schools still lack complete CFS policy documents, suggesting resistance or a lack of commitment to meeting the administrative requirements underlying this change [14].

In addition, weak coordination and collaboration among stakeholders are crucial obstacles. The implementation of CFS is not the sole responsibility of schools but instead requires synergy among schools, local governments, communities, parents, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, there is often fragmentation of efforts and a lack of effective communication among these parties. Riyanto et al. (2022) highlight barriers to communication and coordination among relevant agencies [10]. In Labuhanbatu, although Labuhanbatu Regency Regulation No. 5 of 2015 serves as the legal framework, coordination between the Education Office, the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Office (DP3A), and schools may not be optimal in ensuring integrated and sustainable implementation. The lack of effective forums or mechanisms to bring together and align the steps of all parties can lead to overlapping programs or even gaps in interventions in certain areas.

Finally, the lack of active participation from parents, teachers, and students themselves is a challenge that needs to be addressed. Parental participation is crucial in supporting CFS, both through home supervision and involvement in school activities. However, in Labuhanbatu, some parents of students were found to have a lack of understanding and support for the implementation of CFS policies in their children's schools [14]. This could be due to a lack of socialization, parental busyness, or a lack of awareness of their role. Similarly, student participation in school decision-making remains minimal. Obsesi et al. (2022) highlight the obstacles to giving children an active role in decision-making [12]. Child participation is one of the main pillars of CFS, which aims to empower children as subjects who have rights and a voice. When this participation is not optimal, CFS loses one of its most important dimensions.

2. Innovative Solutions for Optimizing CFS Implementation

Faced with various obstacles in implementing the Child-Friendly School (CFS) policy in Labuhanbatu Regency, an innovative and collaborative approach involving all stakeholders is necessary. These solutions must be designed to address the root causes of the problems, from increasing understanding to optimizing resources and participation. The following are some innovative solutions that can be applied to optimize the implementation of CFS:

a. Enhancing the Capacity of Educators and Educational Staff

One of the main pillars of CFS is the quality of human resources in schools, particularly educators and educational staff. Their lack of understanding and competence in children's rights issues and child-friendly learning approaches is a significant obstacle. Therefore, continuous training must be a top priority [15]. Additionally, the development of an adaptive and inclusive curriculum is also crucial. The CFS curriculum must be able to integrate child rights values into every subject, not just as a separate topic. For example, in language lessons, students can be encouraged to analyze stories that raise child rights issues; in social studies, they can learn about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its impact. The curriculum must also be adaptive to the specific needs of children, including children with special needs, and encourage creativity and critical thinking. This will help create a learning environment that is enjoyable and relevant for all children, thereby reducing the potential for child rights violations [16].

b. Utilization of Technology for Efficiency and Accessibility

In this digital age, technology offers significant potential to overcome various obstacles in implementing CFS. The use of technology to improve the efficiency of communication and coordination among stakeholders can be done through the development of an integrated digital platform. This platform can serve as a CFS information center, a place to share training materials, best practices, and related regulations. Additionally, this platform can facilitate communication among schools, parents, relevant agencies, and the community, enabling the exchange of quick and transparent information. For example, parents can access information about the CFS program at their child's school, provide feedback, or report concerns through a mobile app [17].

An CFS information and education platform for the public should also be developed. This could be an interactive website or app that provides comprehensive information about CFS, children's rights, and how to report violations

of these rights. Content should be presented in a clear and easy-to-understand format, with engaging visuals and simple language. Digital campaigns through social media can also be used to raise public awareness about CFS and encourage active community participation. Thus, technology can bridge the information gap and increase public engagement in supporting CFS [18].

c. Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

The implementation of CFS is a shared responsibility, not just that of schools. Therefore, strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration is key to success. Partnerships with the business world can be an innovative solution to overcome budget constraints and provide facilities. Companies can be invited to participate in CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) programs focused on CFS development, for example, by providing funds for facility renovations, equipment procurement, or supporting teacher training programs. These partnerships must be based on a clear understanding of shared goals and benefits [19].

The establishment of a collaborative forum involving schools, parents, local government (Education Office, DP3A, Bappeda), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field of children's welfare, and community leaders is crucial. This forum can serve as a platform for formulating joint strategies, sharing experiences, resolving problems, and monitoring the implementation of CFS. Regular meetings and participatory decision-making mechanisms will ensure that all voices are heard and considered. Additionally, the involvement of alums and community organizations can enrich the resources and support networks for the CFS. Alums can contribute through mentoring, sharing experiences, or providing financial support, while community organizations can assist with outreach, advocacy, and community-level monitoring [20].

d. Enhancing Children's Participation

Child participation is at the heart of CFS. To address the lack of child participation, effective mechanisms for child participation in decision-making at the school level must be created. Establishing a student council or children's forum at the school level with clear roles and functions to voice their aspirations and needs is an initial step. Children should be involved in planning school activities, formulating rules and regulations, and even evaluating CFS programs. This will foster a sense of ownership and responsibility in children, as well as ensure that the policies and programs developed are genuinely relevant to their needs [21].

Additionally, programs that encourage children's expression and creativity should be promoted. Diverse extracurricular activities, interest clubs, or student-based projects can be a means for children to develop their potential, channel their talents, and learn to interact positively. An environment that supports self-expression can reduce the potential for bullying and discrimination while also increasing children's sense of safety and comfort at school [22].

DISCUSSION

To ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of implementing the Child-Friendly School (CFS) policy in Labuhanbatu District, a comprehensive and integrated set of policy recommendations is necessary. These recommendations should not only focus on the technical aspects of implementation but also on strengthening the regulatory framework, allocating resources, and enhancing the participation and accountability of all stakeholders. The following policy recommendations may be considered:

1. Intensive and Continuous Socialization to All Stakeholders

A lack of understanding is one of the primary obstacles to implementing CFS. Therefore, the local government, through relevant agencies such as the Education Office and the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Office (DP3A), needs to conduct intensive and continuous socialization regarding the concept, principles, and benefits of CFS to all stakeholders. The target audience for socialization should include school principals, teachers, educational staff, parents, students, school committees, community leaders, community organizations, and the business world. This socialization should not be merely formalistic but interactive, using easy-to-understand language and involving case studies or best practices from schools that have successfully implemented CFS. The use of various media, including local mass media, social media, and community meetings, will expand the reach of socialization. Parent

education programs on children's rights and their role in supporting CFS also need to be strengthened, perhaps through regular workshops or seminars at schools [24].

2. Special Budget Allocation and Transparent Funding Mechanisms

Budget constraints are a significant obstacle to providing child-friendly facilities, infrastructure, and training programs. Therefore, local governments need to establish a special budget allocation for the development of CFS at the local level. This budget must be allocated in the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD) and prioritized for essential CFS needs, such as facility renovations, equipment procurement, and human resource capacity-building programs. Additionally, transparent and accountable funding mechanisms must be established to ensure that the use of each allocated fund is monitored and publicly accounted for. Local governments can also facilitate schools' access to alternative funding sources, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds from companies, grants from donor agencies, or partnership programs with non-governmental organizations [25].

3. Strengthening Regulations and Oversight of CFS Implementation

Although there is already Labuhanbatu Regency Regulation No. 5 of 2015, it is necessary to evaluate and, if necessary, strengthen regulations that are more specific regarding the implementation of CFS. These regulations can include minimum CFS standards that every school must meet, mechanisms for periodic reporting and evaluation, and sanctions for schools that do not meet the standards. In addition, supervision of CFS implementation must be strengthened. The formation of an independent supervisory team involving government officials, academics, and civil society can ensure that CFS implementation proceeds in accordance with established principles. This team can conduct periodic audits, provide constructive feedback, and identify areas requiring improvement [26].

4. Establishment of a Collaborative Forum and Integration of CFS into Regional Development

To overcome weak coordination, a collaborative forum involving all CFS stakeholders should be established on a formal and ongoing basis. This forum can serve as a platform for coordinating, planning, and evaluating CFS programs at the district level. Its members must be representatives of various sectors, including education, health, social affairs, and child protection. In addition, CFS policies must be explicitly integrated into regional development plans, both in the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) and the Regional Government Work Plan (RKPD). This will ensure that CFS becomes a development priority and receives ongoing political support and adequate resource allocation [27].

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