



Child-Friendly School Management

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of Child-Friendly School (CFS) management at Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru as an effort to fulfill and protect children's rights within the educational environment. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through literature review and field observations to capture school policies, leadership practices, learning processes, and daily interactions that reflect child-friendly principles. The findings reveal that the principal plays a pivotal role in leading and sustaining child-friendly management through rights-based policies, positive discipline, inclusive learning strategies, and collaborative school culture. The implementation of CFS at MI Uways Alqorni emphasizes non-discrimination, student participation, safety, and emotional well-being, contributing to the prevention of violence and bullying while promoting students' holistic development. Supportive facilities, clear operational procedures, and strong involvement of parents and the community further strengthen the effectiveness of child-friendly practices. The study concludes that effective school leadership and integrated management are key determinants in translating child-friendly policies into sustainable educational practices. These findings highlight the potential of Child-Friendly School management as a practical strategy for improving educational quality and safeguarding children's rights.

Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental right of every child and is explicitly affirmed in various international human rights instruments, most notably the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Andem et al., 2023; Aukerman et al., 2026; Fredman et al., 2022). The CRC emphasizes that education should aim at the full development of children's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities, while fostering respect for human rights, cultural identity, and social responsibility (Drinkwater et al., 2019; Verhellen, 2015). As children spend a substantial portion of their daily lives in school, educational institutions carry a moral and legal responsibility to ensure learning environments that uphold children's dignity, safety, and well-being (Subur et al., 2019; Syafi'i, 2017).

In Indonesia, the right to education is constitutionally and legally guaranteed through Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and reinforced by Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection. These regulations mandate compulsory basic education and affirm the state's obligation to protect children's fundamental rights within educational settings (Aliana, 2024a; Ariany et al., 2023a). However, despite this legal framework, challenges in implementation persist, particularly for children from economically disadvantaged families, street children, and children with disabilities, who are often marginalized from equitable access to quality education (Mangku, 2020; Mulyawati & Rohman, 2024; Sholihah, 2021).

Structural conditions within the Indonesian education system further complicate the realization of children's educational rights. Although the number of schools and madrasahs continues to grow, disparities remain in the availability of facilities, classrooms, and qualified teachers across regions (Ruuhulhaq et al., 2024a). Educational quality is strongly influenced by teacher preparedness and effective educational planning, yet mismatches between teacher supply and demand persist, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas (Rhosada et al., 2024; Wahidah & Istiyono, 2020a). These challenges contribute to persistent educational gaps, as reflected in high dropout rates in several provinces (Khoirunnisa' et al., 2023; Sikhwari, 2024; Judijanto, 2025).

In addition to structural challenges, schools increasingly face social problems that directly affect children's safety and psychological well-being (Zhu et al., 2025; Xiao et al., 2025; Fulcher et al., 2023). Violence and bullying in school environments have become serious concerns, with far-reaching consequences such as trauma, anxiety, depression, and suicidal tendencies among victims (Hawanti et al., 2024a; Rahmah et al., 2025a; Susanto et al., 2024). Bullying can manifest in physical, verbal, and cyber forms, creating hostile learning environments that undermine children's academic engagement and emotional development (Ramadhani & Nurwati, 2023).

Research indicates that school-based violence and bullying are influenced by multiple factors, including aggressive behavior patterns in childhood, family environment, cultural norms that tolerate harsh discipline, and insufficient attention from educators and parents (Holipah & Asmawati, 2023; Ismawati & Lolita, 2021). Children who experience exploitation, neglect, or other violations of their rights face compounded barriers to accessing education and achieving academic success (Mulyawati & Rohman, 2024). These realities highlight the limitations of punitive disciplinary approaches and underscore the need for preventive, protective, and child-centered educational strategies.

In response to these challenges, the Child-Friendly School (CFS) concept has emerged as a strategic approach to ensuring the fulfillment and protection of children's rights within educational institutions. Rooted in the CRC and integrated into Indonesia's Child-Friendly City/District program, CFS emphasizes non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, meaningful child participation, and holistic development (Tedja & Chotim, 2023). However, studies have shown that limited understanding among teachers, insufficient training, and inadequate stakeholder involvement remain major obstacles to effective implementation (Azizah et al., 2024; Suwandayani et al., 2025a)

Within this framework, school leadership plays a pivotal role in translating child-friendly principles into daily educational practices. Principals are expected to function not only as administrators but also as managers, educators, and leaders who shape school culture and decision-making processes (Hidayatullah & Dahlan, 2019; Sholeh & Ni'am, 2016). This study therefore examines the management of a Child-Friendly School at MI Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru, focusing on how school leadership contributes to the implementation of child-friendly policies and practices. By analyzing this case, the study aims to provide insights into effective school management strategies that support the creation of safe, inclusive, and nurturing educational environments for children.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine Child Friendly School management at Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru. This was seen to be appropriate, given that this study was not designed to statistically assess changes resulting from

the child friendly school principles, but to describe and interpret implementation of the principles in the daily management of the school. The study aimed to focus on policies and practices at the school, learning activities, disciplinary practices, involvement of children and their rights, involvement of stakeholders and support of facilities at school, which facilitate children's rights and well being, safety and comfort.

The study was carried out at Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru that is considered to have practices that have been implemented in the school program of Child Friendly. The aim of the study was to examine the management of child friendly school implementation, the school leadership and institutional practices that support the protection and realization of children's rights within school.

The data collection methods used for this study were literature review and field observation. The literature review involved reviewing scientific articles, books, policy and regulations pertaining to Child Friendly Schools, children's rights in education, school management, positive discipline and safe learning environments. The sources used to construct the conceptual base for the study and to aid in understanding the observed practices at the research site include text from the literature and published materials.

A field observation was conducted to gain first hand information on the implementation of child friendly school management within the madrasah settings. The observations were made on school routines, relationship among the school stakeholders, the learning activity in the classroom, classroom discipline, student involvement, and school facilities and infrastructures. Specific focus was placed on practices that demonstrated actions of non discrimination, safety, emotional comfort, inclusion, positive discipline, and protecting from violence and bullying.

Data were collected by observing the school environment through a process of field notes which documented visible practices, patterns and situations within the school environment. The data was then categorized according to the research focus which is school policy, leadership role, learning process, discipline system, facilities, student participation, and involvement of the stakeholders. The data were then categorized and analysed, drawing comparisons with the principles of the Child Friendly School management and literature on children's rights in school.

Three key steps in data analysis were followed. The data collected was subsequently tabulated corresponding to the research objective. Second, the data were analysed to find out patterns, similarities, differences and important issues in implementing child friendly school management. Third, the findings were compiled into an explanation of how school leadership, institutional culture, learning practices and community participation work to foster a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Results and Discussion

Conceptualization of the Child Friendly School at MI Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru

The concept of a Child Friendly School at Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru is built upon the school's commitment to protecting and fulfilling children's rights within the educational environment. Based on field observations, this concept is not only presented as a formal policy, but is also reflected in school routines, classroom interaction, disciplinary practices, and the arrangement of the school environment. The school recognizes students as individuals who have dignity, developmental needs, emotional rights, and the right to participate in a safe learning process.

The principle of non discrimination is reflected in the school's effort to provide equal treatment for students in learning activities and daily interaction. Teachers are encouraged to avoid discriminatory language, harsh treatment, and practices that may embarrass students in front of their peers. In classroom activities, students are given opportunities to ask questions, respond to teacher explanations, and participate in learning without being treated differently based on ability, background, or personal characteristics.

The prioritization of the best interests of the child is also visible in the school's effort to replace punitive disciplinary approaches with more constructive and educational responses. Instead of directly punishing students, teachers are encouraged to provide advice, reflection, and corrective guidance. This shift shows that the school attempts to build a learning culture that protects children from intimidation while still maintaining classroom order. However, the implementation is still developing because some teachers need continuous guidance to apply positive discipline consistently.

The school also attempts to respect children's voices by encouraging students to express their opinions during classroom activities and school routines. This practice indicates a move toward a more democratic school environment where students are not positioned only as passive recipients of instruction, but also as participants in the learning process. Although student participation still needs to be expanded into more formal school decision making, the existing practices show that the concept of child friendly education has begun to shape the school's management culture.

Stages of Child Friendly School Implementation

The implementation of the Child Friendly School program at MI Uways Alqorni follows a structured process consisting of preparation, planning, implementation, and evaluation. These stages show that the program is not implemented instantly, but through gradual institutional adaptation involving school leadership, teachers, students, parents, and the wider school community.

The Preparation Phase

The preparation phase focused on building awareness among teachers and school stakeholders regarding the meaning and importance of child friendly education. During this phase, the school introduced key principles such as children's rights, non discrimination, protection from violence, positive discipline, emotional safety, and student participation. This stage was important because not all school members had the same understanding of child friendly school management.

Field observations indicate that the preparation phase required adjustment, especially among teachers who were more familiar with conventional classroom control and direct disciplinary correction. Some teachers needed time to understand that positive discipline does not mean allowing students to behave without rules. Instead, it requires teachers to guide students through communication, reflection, and consistent classroom procedures. The school leadership therefore played an important role in helping teachers understand that child friendly practices must still be accompanied by clear rules and responsible behavior.

Student involvement in the preparation phase also required adjustment. Students were gradually encouraged to express their opinions and participate more actively in classroom interaction. Since students were previously more accustomed to teacher centered routines, this process required continuous encouragement. This shows that the preparation stage involved not only policy introduction, but also cultural change within the school environment.

The Planning Phase

During the planning phase, the school attempted to integrate child friendly principles into school programs, daily routines, classroom management, and the use of available facilities. Planning was directed toward creating a safer, more inclusive, and more comfortable school environment for students. The school also considered how child friendly values could be reflected in learning activities, disciplinary procedures, student participation, and cooperation with parents.

The planning process also revealed several practical limitations. The school had to adjust the implementation of child friendly practices to the availability of facilities, budget, teacher capacity, and administrative workload. For example, not all ideal facilities for a child friendly school could be provided at the same time. Therefore, the school prioritized practices that could be implemented immediately, such as improving teacher communication with students, strengthening positive discipline, maintaining cleanliness and safety, and involving parents in supporting school programs.

Planning also involved consideration of teacher workload. The implementation of child friendly learning requires teachers to prepare inclusive classroom activities, manage student behavior constructively, and pay attention to students' emotional conditions. These responsibilities require stronger coordination among teachers and school leaders. Therefore, the planning stage was not only about designing programs, but also about ensuring that teachers could realistically implement them in daily school practice.

The Implementation Phase

The implementation phase shows how child friendly principles are translated into school routines and classroom practices. Based on observations, the school attempts to create a welcoming atmosphere for students from the beginning of the school day. Students are greeted in a friendly manner, classroom routines are organized to support order and comfort, and teachers are encouraged to communicate with students using respectful language.

In classroom learning, teachers attempt to involve students actively and avoid practices that may create fear or excessive pressure. Students are encouraged to participate in discussions, answer questions, and engage in learning activities according to their abilities. The learning process is directed not only toward academic achievement, but also toward emotional comfort, confidence, and social interaction.

Disciplinary practices are implemented through positive reinforcement and corrective guidance. When students make mistakes, teachers are encouraged to provide advice and reflection rather than humiliation or harsh punishment. This approach helps students understand the consequences of their actions while maintaining their dignity. However, the implementation is not yet fully uniform. Some teachers still need further support to consistently apply positive discipline in difficult classroom situations.

The school also attempts to reduce excessive academic pressure by managing homework and learning tasks more proportionally. This practice is intended to give students enough time for rest, play, and family interaction. The school views this as part of child friendly management because children's development should not be limited to academic performance alone.

The Evaluation Phase

The evaluation phase was carried out to review the implementation of child friendly school practices and identify areas that still need improvement. The evaluation focused on the extent

to which school routines, classroom learning, disciplinary practices, facilities, student participation, and stakeholder involvement supported child friendly principles.

The evaluation showed that several aspects had been implemented relatively well, particularly the creation of a safer school environment, the use of positive communication, and the involvement of parents and the community. However, several aspects still require continuous improvement. Emotional well being, bullying prevention, consistency in positive discipline, and meaningful student participation need stronger monitoring and documentation.

The evaluation process also indicates that child friendly school management should be understood as a continuous cycle rather than a completed program. The school needs to regularly assess whether policies and routines are truly experienced by students as safe, inclusive, and supportive. Therefore, evaluation should not only measure the availability of programs, but also the quality and consistency of their implementation.

Navigating Material and Structural Constraints

The implementation of Child Friendly School management at MI Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru is also shaped by material and structural constraints. The school cannot always rely on complete facilities or ideal financial support to implement all child friendly school indicators. However, the school attempts to respond to these limitations through cooperation, gradual improvement, and the use of available resources.

One important constraint is the availability and quality of facilities. The school has provided basic facilities such as classrooms, toilets, handwashing areas, worship facilities, learning spaces, and other supporting facilities. These facilities contribute to student comfort and safety. However, some facilities still need improvement in terms of arrangement, accessibility, cleanliness, and function. Facilities related to counseling, student reflection, and emotional support also need to be strengthened so that students have a more supportive space when they experience problems.

The school addresses these limitations through collaboration with parents and the surrounding community. Parents and community members contribute to improving the school environment and supporting school programs. This collaborative approach shows that child friendly school management is not only the responsibility of the principal and teachers, but also requires shared responsibility among stakeholders.

Teacher workload is another structural constraint. Child friendly school implementation requires teachers to manage learning, discipline, emotional support, and student participation at the same time. This can increase teachers' workload if it is not supported by clear coordination and practical guidance. The school leadership therefore needs to continue helping teachers by providing direction, simplifying unnecessary administrative burdens, and encouraging collaboration among teachers.

Indicators of Child-Friendly School Implementation

Despite the tensions and constraints navigated during implementation, the school has achieved a high level of alignment with national CFS indicators. These indicators function as aspirational benchmarks that guide continuous improvement rather than mere compliance checklists.

Table 1. Verification List of Child-Friendly School Indicators

No	Component	Availability	Observed Evidence
1	Child Friendly School Policies including minimum	Available	The school has begun to apply policies that support student safety, non

	service standards, anti violence policies, positive discipline, inclusion, health, disaster safety, and environmental integration		violence, positive discipline, inclusion, health, and environmental awareness. These policies are reflected in school routines, teacher guidance, and efforts to prevent harsh treatment toward students.
2	Curriculum Implementation including child friendly lesson plans, inclusive learning, non discriminatory materials, process based assessment, and extracurricular development	Available	Learning activities are directed toward active student participation, inclusive classroom interaction, and reduction of excessive academic pressure. Teachers attempt to use learning practices that do not discriminate among students and provide opportunities for students to participate.
3	Educators and Education Personnel Trained in Children's Rights	Available	Teachers are encouraged to understand children's rights, communicate positively with students, and apply non violent disciplinary practices. However, teacher consistency still needs to be strengthened through continuous guidance.
4	Facilities and Infrastructure including classrooms, toilets, handwashing stations, counseling room, library, playground, worship facilities, healthy canteen, and safety signs	Available	The school provides basic facilities that support safety and comfort. However, several facilities still need improvement in quality, arrangement, and function, especially spaces that support counseling, reflection, and emotional well being.
5	Child Participation in school planning, policy formulation, evaluation, and student organizations	Available	Students are involved in classroom interaction, school routines, and selected school activities. However, their participation in formal planning and evaluation still needs to be expanded and documented more clearly.
6	Participation of Parents, Community, Business Sector, Stakeholders, and Alumni	Available	Parents and community members support school programs and help improve the school environment. Their involvement strengthens the implementation of child friendly practices, especially when the school faces limited resources.

The table shows that MI Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru has fulfilled the main components of Child Friendly School implementation. However, the availability of each component should not be interpreted as complete or final achievement. Several indicators have been implemented in daily school practices, while others still require continuous improvement, particularly teacher consistency, student participation, facility quality, and documentation of implementation.

Therefore, the indicators function not only as evidence of compliance, but also as a basis for continuous evaluation and institutional development.

The Role of the Principal

The principal plays a central role in directing the implementation of child friendly school management at MI Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru. The principal does not only function as an administrator, but also as a mediator, motivator, and capacity builder. The principal helps connect child friendly school principles with the practical realities of classroom management, teacher workload, parent expectations, and school resources.

One important role of the principal is guiding teachers in applying positive discipline. Since some teachers may still be influenced by conventional disciplinary habits, the principal encourages them to avoid harsh punishment and use more educational responses to student behavior. This role is important because the success of child friendly school management depends strongly on how teachers interact with students in daily classroom situations.

The principal also acts as a mediator between the school and parents. Some parents may interpret reduced homework or non punitive discipline as a decrease in academic seriousness. The principal therefore needs to explain that child friendly school management does not reduce academic standards, but aims to create a safer, healthier, and more balanced learning environment for children.

In addition, the principal supports collaboration with parents and the community to respond to limited facilities and resources. This leadership role helps the school maintain the implementation of child friendly practices even when material resources are limited. The principal's ability to build shared responsibility among teachers, parents, and the community becomes an important factor in sustaining the program.

Child Friendly Daily Practices

Child friendly principles at MI Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru are reflected in several daily practices within the school environment. One visible practice is the effort to create a positive emotional climate for students. Teachers are encouraged to greet students warmly, communicate respectfully, and create classroom situations where students feel accepted and safe.

In learning activities, teachers attempt to create inclusive and participatory classrooms. Students are given opportunities to ask questions, respond to learning materials, and engage in classroom tasks. The classroom atmosphere is directed toward reducing fear and encouraging students to participate according to their abilities. This practice supports the principle that children should experience learning as a safe and meaningful process.

Discipline is carried out through positive reinforcement, advice, and corrective guidance. When students violate rules or show inappropriate behavior, teachers are encouraged to guide them through explanation and reflection rather than intimidation. This approach helps students develop responsibility without feeling humiliated. However, consistency remains an important issue because child friendly discipline requires continuous teacher readiness and shared understanding.

The school also manages academic pressure by limiting excessive homework and encouraging more balanced student development. This practice supports students' right to rest, play, and develop socially and emotionally. At the same time, the school continues to maintain learning expectations through classroom activities and teacher guidance.

Daily school routines are also supported by clear operational procedures that promote order, safety, and comfort. These routines include classroom management, student interaction, use of facilities, and supervision of student behavior. The school reports a more positive atmosphere and a stronger awareness of violence and bullying prevention. However, claims related to reduced violence and bullying need stronger documentation through regular records, monitoring notes, or school evaluation reports.

The findings of this study indicate that the management of a Child-Friendly School (CFS) at MI Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru is strongly aligned with the principles of children's rights. However, unlike studies that portray CFS implementation as a straightforward adoption of policy (Aliana, 2024b; Ariany et al., 2023b), this study highlights that institutionalizing rights-based principles is a complex process of negotiation, resistance, and adaptation.

The analysis reveals that the quality of education and the success of CFS are not determined merely by the absence of structural constraints, but by the school's adaptive mechanisms. While previous literature emphasizes structural inequality, such as uneven teacher distribution and inadequate facilities, as dominant barriers (Ruuhulhaq et al., 2024b; Wahidah & Istiyono, 2020b), the case of MI Uways Alqorni demonstrates that values-based leadership and community collaboration can creatively navigate and mitigate these material limitations.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature on school violence and bullying (Hawanti et al., 2024b; Rahmah et al., 2025b) by showing that the shift from punitive to restorative discipline is not an overnight paradigm shift. It requires acknowledging teacher hesitation and providing continuous, empathetic capacity building. The friction experienced during the transition to positive discipline underscores that institutional actors require time and psychological safety to internalize new pedagogical paradigms (Suwandayani et al., 2025b; Yusuf et al., 2024).

The involvement of parents and the community also proved critical, not just as supporters, but as co-navigators of the CFS vision. When parental concerns regarding academic pressure arose, the school's responsive communication strategy transformed potential resistance into collaborative support, reinforcing the necessity of cross-sectoral dialogue (Almusyarofah et al., 2025; Nurdianto et al., 2025).

Ultimately, this discussion demonstrates that the "success" of CFS at MI Uways Alqorni is not the result of a flawless, linear process. Rather, it is the outcome of a leadership model that anticipates tension, acknowledges partial failures, and leverages structural constraints as opportunities for community engagement. This provides a more authentic, transferable model for other educational contexts grappling with the messy realities of school reform.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of Child-Friendly School management at MI Uways Alqorni Pekanbaru has been effectively realized through a rights-based and child-centered approach. The findings demonstrate that strong school leadership, particularly the active role of the principal, is central to integrating child-friendly principles into school policies, daily practices, and organizational culture. The application of positive discipline, inclusive learning strategies, and supportive school environments contributes significantly to the protection of children's rights, the prevention of violence and bullying, and the promotion of students' holistic development. These results confirm that Child-Friendly School management is not only a policy framework but a practical and sustainable strategy for improving educational quality and ensuring children's well-being at the school level.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that policymakers and educational stakeholders strengthen capacity-building programs for school leaders and teachers to enhance their understanding and implementation of child-friendly education principles. Schools are encouraged to institutionalize positive discipline, expand student participation in decision-making processes, and reinforce collaboration with parents and local communities. Future research is suggested to employ comparative or longitudinal designs to examine the long-term impact of Child-Friendly School management across different educational contexts and regions. Such efforts would contribute to refining policy implementation and ensuring the sustainability of child-friendly education practices nationwide.

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