



CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOL AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN FORMING THE STUDENTS' CHARACTER THROUGH SCIENCE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Curriculum demands student competence and character formation through the Pancasila Student Profile (called P3). Through science learning, P3 indicators can be achieved. This study aims to (1) analyze Child-friendly School (CFS) implementation in SHS-X, (2) analyze SHS-X students' characters, and (3) identify teachers' attitudes during learning in SHS-X. This research uses a qualitative approach. The sample was obtained using purposive sampling from a child-friendly school implementing a Merdeka curriculum. The data validity was tested by triangulation. Data was explored based on participants' said, felt, and done or an emic perspective. Science learning activities inside and outside the classroom were observed. The subjects were principals, teachers, alumni, parents, and students at SHS-X. Data was collected through observation, interviews, analyzing documents, and giving questionnaires. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model. Based on the research and discussion results, implementing the child-friendly school policy at SHS-X has met the indicators set out in the Child-Friendly School Guidelines. The characters formed in SHS-X students include (1) nationalism, (2) religion, (3) leadership, (4) politeness, (5) honesty, (6) cooperation, and (7) anti-corruption. Another thing that makes SHS-X superior is that the teachers' attitudes during learning are friendly, humane, and fun. With the two-way discussion method, learning becomes more interactive. With teachers teaching humanely, many students experience changes in behavior and learning outcomes. It is hoped that SHS-X's best practices in implementing CFS can inspire other schools.

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Keywords: child-friendly school; Merdeka curriculum; student character; Pancasila student profile

INTRODUCTION

Schools are where education and learning occur. In providing education, educators are expected to become good facilitators so that students can also shape their good character. Good learning certainly requires adequate facilities. Students study in a safe, comfortable, clean, and

healthy place, get equal rights, and be free from violence, discrimination, and bullying. Students need to be facilitated learning according to their needs. The Merdeka Curriculum encourages educators to facilitate learning that shapes students' character by implementing P3. The hope is that faith, noble morals, an independent spirit, working together, global diversity, and critical and creative reasoning will be formed with a Merdeka curriculum based on P3.

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Mistreatment can make emotional and mental changes in students. The task of a teacher is not only to teach subjects to students but also to educate and fulfill their rights. The Child-Friendly School (CFS) policy was created to protect, fulfill, and guarantee students' rights. Every education unit must guarantee students' freedom to respect each other, tolerate and work together for progress and peace, and develop their interests, talents, and abilities. This policy is expected to create the next generation who are intelligent intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually (Deputi Tumbuh Kembang Anak, 2015).

Afubwa et al. (2016) stated that Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) must help students be independent. The education provided should not only be excellent academically but should also emphasize holistic development. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was the first organization to develop the concept of CFS (Swan & Coppock, 2016). CFS implements children's rights into classroom practices and school management. CFS was established on the Declaration of Education for All (EFA) based on the philosophy of children's rights, which views their development as a central position in education (Godfrey, 2012). The CFS approach aims to ensure that every child receives education per its development optimally and ensures their dignity (Miske & Patel, 2012). The main principles of CFS are child protection, democratic partition, and inclusiveness (UNICEF, 2009a). CFS engages all stakeholders to strengthen children's right to a good education, including parents, families, teachers, school principals, national education administrators and civil society groups, local governments, and their external partners (UNICEF, 2009b). Children must also feel safe, comfortable, and excited at school without discrimination or intimidation because of differences in ethnicity, skin color, religion, gender, and socioeconomic background.

UNICEF shows that around 300 million children worldwide are subjected to exploitation, violence, and weakening (UNESCO, 2007) and counting (UNICEF, 2009c). Violence to children has recently increased (KPAI, 2020). Data for 2014-2015 shows that violence occurred in education (Kompas, 2020), and 10% were conducted by teachers (Kemendikbud, 2015). Childhood bullying increases the risk of poor health and social and educational outcomes (Armitage, 2021). Schools that declare themselves as CFS have not entirely succeeded in freeing themselves from bullying. Children's point of view in facilitating development in educational settings needs to be

heard. Thus, meeting children's needs and contributing to their well-being and development provide enjoyable and meaningful experiences. In Sweden, children's views were identified using pictures and interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis (Lundqvist et al., 2019). The case study in a New Zealand school involved inclusive education (Alesech et al., 2019). This method can be adopted to identify the perspectives of children in Indonesia regarding their needs as CFS so that the objectives of establishing CFS can be achieved optimally. In rampant violence and bullying that occurs, there is one school that has succeeded in educating students to become human beings with character, noble character, and politeness both at school and after they graduate. One school that has succeeded in shaping student character well is SHS-X. This research was conducted to analyze the implementation of CFS in SHS-X so that other schools in Indonesia can adopt it.

SHS-X was chosen as the research subject because it was the first winner of the CFS evaluation at senior high school and the equivalent level in the city. The results of this study are expected to provide an overview and be used as an example by other schools to realize CFS policies in realizing Pancasila student profiles for their students. It is hoped that more schools will implement CFS policies so that they can suppress cases of violence, bullying, and bullying against children and the formation of characters as demanded in the Pancasila students profile.

This study aims to (1) analyze CFS implementation in SHS-X, (2) analyze SHS-X students' characters, and (3) identify teachers' attitudes during learning in SHS-X.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach. The place used to conduct this research was SHS-X in Central Java, Indonesia. The sample was obtained using purposive sampling from a child-friendly school implementing a *Merdeka* curriculum. The data validity was tested by triangulation. Data was explored based on participants' said, felt, and done or an emic perspective. Science learning activities inside and outside the classroom were observed. Observations were made, especially observations and analyses of the emergence of child-friendly dimensions.

The research procedures include: (1) Data analysis, (2) Research result discussion, and (3) Giving conclusions and suggestions (Creswell, 2016). Researchers conducted direct observations at schools and interviews with informants, inclu-

ding school principals, teachers, students, parents, and alumni. Participants were given a questionnaire containing questions and statements about implementing the CFS in Google Forms via WhatsApp. Data was analyzed using interactive method with the following steps: (1) observations regarding the implementation of CFS in SHS-X, interviews with the principal, curriculum deputy, secretary of the CFS policy, and teachers related to the implementation of CFS, formation of students' character, teachers' attitudes during learning, and school facilities that support learning; (2) Interviews with alumni, students, and parents related to the implementation of the CFS policy, how students' characters are formed, teachers' attitudes towards students during learning, school facilities to support learning; (3) Summarizing the research results into concepts, categories, and themes and classifying them into a broader pattern; (4) Completing the data by digging up information again by distributing questionnaires to 38 students; (5) Analyzing and comparing data from

various sources; (6) Confirming research results to informants to see whether the data obtained are appropriate or not. If the informant agrees and signs the research results, then the research can be considered consistent and credible.

Qualitative research subjects use a social situation consisting of three elements: places, actors, and activities that integrate synergistically. The child-friendly school, SHS-X, is located in Central Java, Indonesia. Research subjects can be used as sources of information to obtain data related to the required variables. In qualitative research, research subjects are divided into primary and secondary data sources.

Primary data sources are obtained when conducting research at the location through observations, interviews with informants, and questionnaires. The informants are principals, teachers, alumni, parents/guardians, and students of SHS-X. Secondary data are obtained from documents and infrastructure. The informants in this study are displayed in Table 1 in detail.

Table 1. The Research Informants

No.	Informan Category	Number of Informants	Informan Code	Position
1.	Key	2	Re Sh	Team Leader the Child-friendly School of SHS-X. Supervisor of the Child-friendly School at SHS-X
2.	Main	3	Y W R	Principal Vice Principal Teacher
3	Supporter	4	MA, CR, P, F I, N, S, M	Students Student parents
		4	FA, AR	Alumni
		2		

Data was collected through observation, interviews, analyzing documents, and giving questionnaires. The instruments were observation sheets, interview guides, checklists of documents and infrastructure, and questionnaires on a 4-Likert scale. The instrument for collecting data used a valid CFS assessment instrument, which consists of 10 aspects and 23 indicators (Deputi Tumbuh Kembang Anak, 2015)

Data was analyzed using descriptive percentages. The validity or credibility of the data was tested using triangulation. The data was analyzed using the Miles et al. (2014) analysis model, carried out interactively until the data is saturated. Data analysis steps include data reduction, data display, and concluding/verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The characteristics of the Merdeka curriculum are the strengthening of soft skills and character through the strengthening of Pancasila student profile projects and the focus on essential material and flexible learning (Kemdikbud, 2023). Many things, including implementing child-friendly schools can support the successful implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. With child-friendly schools, efforts can be made to strengthen character and implement safe, comfortable, and enjoyable learning.

Child-friendly schools can provide a sense of security and comfort and are far from acts of violence or bullying so that students' rights can

be fulfilled. This opinion was conveyed by informants Sh, W, and Y. Violence against children is not only verbal, physical, or sexual violence. The point is that a child-friendly school is far from these things, and children feel comfortable in school, feel that their rights are protected, their opinions are respected, and their learning and learning are facilitated.

Based on the interviews with key and main informants, implementing a child-friendly school policy in SHS-X has realized the government's goal to provide a sense of comfort, pleasure, and happiness away from violence or bullying, both physically, verbally, and sexually. In addition, there is the fulfillment of learning facilities and patterns of material delivery in child-friendly learning. Therefore, children feel their rights are protected, and they can study well without reluctance with teachers and friends.

The environments that are clean, comfortable, and not noisy from vehicle noise support the successful implementation of child-friendly schools. SHS-X won first place in the CFS competition as an Adiwiyata School, which has a Drug and Narcotics Free School policy and a Religious-based School. It is a support force in realizing character according to the profile of Pancasila students.

Child-friendly high schools in Nepal show that creating a conducive environment is the key to successfully implementing CFS. The implementation of planned teacher and parent meetings, effective teaching methods and materials, and extracurricular activities greatly support the success of a child-friendly school (Kriti, 2014). Parent participation was also a protective factor in schools with a high racial/ethnic minority and poverty (Song et al., 2019). Schools with increased parental participation and involvement in field activities have decreased abuse rates (Lesneskie & Block, 2017). Strengthening the previous description, schools need to establish good relationships with parents to benefit students (Mires et al., 2017). Parent participation is necessary because it directly or indirectly affects the development of students in school (Hay et al., 2016). Development activities for all students through sightseeing, hiking, and educational tours once a year can make students enjoy learning. The school also formed a Parent-Teacher Association to strengthen relations with parents and held a meeting every two months. Similar research was conducted by Çobanoğlu and Sevim (2019) and Fitriani and Istaryatiningtias (2020).

The data from structured interviews with informant Y follow the data from interviews

with W. Both said that the CFS predicate was initiated from the Child-friendly City policy, which subsequently received a decree as a Child-friendly School. The academic community, including principals, teachers, students, education staff, parents, and school committees, pledged to support the child-friendly school policy. School committees have a wide-ranging autonomy regarding personnel matters, buildings' infrastructure, resource allocation, and assessment (Uiterwijk-Luijk et al., 2019a).

Support for SHS-X comes from the government, mayors, government agency officials, city and provincial education offices, sub-districts, and local village heads. The declaration of child-friendly schools is carried out apart from being a form of commitment, but it also aims to create a school that is comfortable, fun, and safe from acts of violence, bullying, and the like.

After implementing the child-friendly school policy in SHS-X, many changes occurred, ranging from the rules, punishments or sanctions, infrastructure, teachers' attitudes, and students' characters. Before the school decided to organize a child-friendly school policy, many teachers still did terrible things to their students, but after implementing the child-friendly school policy, they became more friendly. They no longer treated students terribly because they already understood relation to child-friendly schools and children's rights. Y and F state this. According to SHS-X alumni (FA and AR), the teachers were friendly; some were firm. After the implementation of the CFS, the teachers became more patient. They felt comfortable studying at SHS-X because there was no discrimination from teachers or other students.

The SHS-X teacher (R) said that before the implementation of CFS, not only were teachers' attitudes not good toward students, but bullying among students was still occurring. After CFS was implemented, there was no such thing anymore. They emphasized serving and educating students, not just teaching. Sh said that there was a change in teaching and educational patterns. The focus was on teachers in the past, but now, it is more on students.

The role of teachers in schools is to create an appropriate learning environment without violence and harassment and to maintain the child's dignity (Abdullahi et al., 2017). The challenges and implications of CFS on the fulfillment of children's rights are still constrained by the bureaucratic structure (Putri & Akmal, 2019), while in terms of communication, resources, and dispositions, it has been going well.

Another change is that punishments that lead to corporal punishment are no longer enforced after the implementation of the child-friendly school policy. In the interview, W said that punishment for children who make mistakes is more of a coaching to improve their mindset and behavior. They are asked to sing the Indonesia Raya anthem or memorize a short Al Qur'an surah (Muslim student only), which aims to deter children.

The changes that occurred and were felt by all school residents after implementing the CFS policy were that no more teachers committed acts of violence or other unkind actions against students. Teachers become more friendly and patient. There is no more bullying. Social inequalities between students and seniority between brothers and sisters do not occur. The installation of banners and signs regarding CFS, CFS rules/rules, and character or profiles of Pancasila students around the school is expected to remind that SHS-X is a child-friendly school.

The indicators for child-friendly schools, ranging from policies, environmental conditions, building conditions, facilities and infrastructure, adequate school facilities, child-friendly curriculum, the role of parents, community, and alumni, to involving students in decision-making have been fulfilled by SHS-X. Fitriani et al. (2021) show that if the thirteen characteristics of CFS have been implemented well, the school has realized the CFS model under the context of education in Indonesia and the UNICEF concept. The same thing was conveyed by Kurniawan et al. (2020).

The school already has an anti-violence policy for students in the form of a written commitment in the form of an internal school decree (Implementing Team and CFS Development Team). It involves all school members and is prepared simultaneously to prevent acts of violence in the school. Commitments to anti-violence policies are also made in signposts or banners containing policies, rules, and regulations posted around the ceremonial grounds. The teacher has implemented the policy.

SHS-X already has a school health unit (in Indonesia – UKS) room with a bed, a first aid kit, height and weight measuring instruments, and eye and ear acuity measurement tools. It also has a toilet that meets the requirements, a clean and healthy life, and a healthy canteen. A certified nurse guards the UKS room. If something urgent happens to students, they can immediately get first aid. The school also cooperates with the Puskesmas to implement a healthy school poli-

cy. The community health centers visit every two years, collecting new students' data to carry out health screening checks, dental and eye examinations, and fostering healthy schools.

In addition, SHS-X also cooperates with the Red Cross. The policy includes giving elephantiasis medicine once a year and blood donation every three months. The school also conducts healthy school development for students: how to wash hands properly, wash hands after using the bathroom, and wash hands before and after eating. Other adequate supporting facilities for healthy schools include toilets, hand-washing facilities with running water, and healthy canteens. Healthy living behavior has been entrenched in SHS-X students.

To realize a child-friendly school, SHS-X already has a building that is in good condition, does not collapse immediately when a disaster occurs, has a safe access point, all school residents also recognize the emergency evacuation route, has stairs according to the provisions, and has a covered stair support, has a vent corner where students appreciate themselves, and the school is not under a high power grid.

The school's location is strategic. The building is far from the highway and has a sewerage system that does not pollute the environment. It provides a happy corner for students or a place to express themselves and play, for example, an art room, pavilion, garden, and school wall magazine. The facilities that are not yet available are ramps because SHS-X is not entirely a school for people with disabilities. It needs attention so that SHS-X facilitates and includes services as a form of CFS.

Infrastructure also plays a vital role in realizing CFS. Ratna & Torro (2019) indicates that the implementation of child-friendly schools needs to commit school residents, infrastructure resources, support activities, active participation of parents, and operation standards for complaints. Similar research was conducted by Rang-kuti and Maksum (2019). The state is responsible for providing a safe, healthy, and protective environment from violence, injury, abuse, and neglect while ensuring that the practice of discipline in schools is in students' best interests.

In order to meet students' needs, it is necessary to pay attention to the school's physical environment related to the condition of school buildings, as well as the school infrastructure that supports the CFS environment (Ambarsari & Harun, 2019). The home and family environment influences the child's overall health, development, and safety (Dubowitz, 2014), so community and

school are needed to create a child-friendly environment for the safety of students. The role of counseling in school is also needed to create CFS (Afnibar, 2017).

Relating to the student learning environment, teachers must provide opportunities for students to learn about environmental education. If we want to understand how learning environments can occur and see the results, we must pay greater attention to the role of students as active agents in environmental education (Horelli, 2006). In a child-friendly school environment, teachers and students must have close relationships with each other, and there is no discrimination (Hopwood, 2007). Students are expected to be pioneers for a healthy environment (Bresee et al., 2016) and have the potential for positive community influence, which will influence behavior in the future (Liefländer, 2015). A child-friendly environment is reflected in the relationship between children and parents and concern for children in the community where they live (Nordström, 2010). Parents can monitor students' actions at school to ensure their children's development does not deviate from the rules (Shamsuddin et al., 2014). A child-friendly school social environment is also formed by healthy communication between teachers and parents to create a safe and healthy learning environment characterized by balance, solidarity, non-violence, and concern for physical, mental, and emotional health (Chang et al., 2018).

SHS-X does not limit the use of traditional or cultural clothing in schools. To preserve culture, female teachers wear *kebaya* clothes and male teachers wear *beskap* and *blangkon* clothes every Thursday. Students are encouraged to wear traditional clothes during national holidays such as Kartini Day. The school also has a cultural studio as a place to channel the talents and creativity of students.

The character education programs instilled by the teachers for students include (1) Discipline: students must collect assignments and come to school promptly; (2) Nationalism, students must join online or offline ceremonies; (3) Religious: students do morning recitation activities, congregational prayers, *tadarus* in class every morning, and start learning with prayer; (4) Leadership: students join organizational activities such as the election of the head of the organization and are invited to public speaking; (5) Polite: students communicate with teachers in an exemplary manner; (6) Friendly: students greet when leaving school, and the teacher welcomes students to come; (7) Honest: students must not cheat during exams.

A range of teaching, learning, and pedagogical techniques are proposed that may foster morals, values, and ethics in students' minds and develop various skills and attributes necessary for success in the sciences (Chowdhury, 2016). There are many challenges in moral/ethical teaching and practice of character education in science, such as students' decreased motivation and interest in science (Kiemer et al., 2015). However, most teachers support including these aspects in the science curriculum (Kang & Glassman, 2010; Yap, 2014).

Other instilled characters are independence, cooperation, anti-corruption, mutual help, respect for others, responsibility, and tolerance. The characters instilled by the teachers have been successfully embedded in the students of SHS-X. The character that has not been maximally formed is discipline. Therefore, finding a solution to enforce this discipline is still necessary. Teachers and school residents need to pay attention to the health and safety of children while at school and provide a pleasant learning atmosphere without losing the disciplinary aspect (UNICEF, 2009; Sudirjo, 2016).

Subur et al. (2018) show that applying child-friendly schools plays a vital role in character building as school culture and equips students to actualize themselves toward religious character. Every education unit must ensure the freedom of children to respect each other, be tolerant, and work together for progress and peace (Senowarsito & Ulumuddin, 2012; Risminawati & Rofiah, 2015), have character (UNICEF, 2009; Risminawati & Rofiah, 2015), develop their interests, talents, and competencies. The Ministry of National Education develops a grand design of character education for each path, level, and type of education unit. It becomes a conceptual and operational reference for development, implementation, and assessment at every path and level of education. Character education needs to be developed and implemented in terms of the grand design through education. Character education systematically applied in primary and secondary education is a valuable bargaining power for the whole community (Brooks & Goble, 1997). A character can be interpreted as innate, heart, soul, personality, behavior, nature, character, temperament, or character (Rusilowati, 2021). Character is an important foundation for forming a prosperous and civilized society (Megawangi, 2004). The integration of character in learning can improve the character of work ethic, self-actualization, and emotional and interpersonal smartness (Rusilowati et al., 2020).

These values align with the demands of the Pancasila student profile (P3), the vision of education in Indonesia. P3 is a graduate profile that aims to show the character and competencies expected to be achieved and strengthen the noble values of Pancasila for students and stakeholders. The six dimensions of P3 include characters and competencies that need to be developed by educational units for students: faith, piety to God Almighty, and noble character; global diversity; worked together; independent; critical and creative reasoning.

It appears that the P3 dimension is related to the character items that support the dimensions and indicators of CFS implementation. So, CFS does not only focus on character development but also competency improvement. The formation of P3 and the success of CFS must be measured with instruments (Çobanoğlu et al., 2018). It can be through subject integration (Tyra, 2012; Setiawati et al., 2013).

With a child-friendly school policy, teachers' learning is also child-friendly. Based on the observation of learning one of the subjects, the teacher starts the lesson by greeting and then praying. After the teacher reviewed the previous material, the teacher continued delivering material for Elasticity and Hooke's Law. Discuss learning methods, student-centered or teacher-centered, and discussions between teachers and students. Mr. R uses an inquiry approach, provokes students with questions for discussion, provides material conceptually, and relates material to everyday life. Inquiry-based work can relate to students' curiosity and critical thinking habits (Uiterwijk-Luijk et al., 2019b). During the lesson, Mr. R uses language that is easy to understand and friendly to students. When a student asks a question, Mr. R explains again. When students were asked and could not answer, Mr. R explained patiently and was not angry. On the sidelines of learning, Mr. R reminded him to adhere to health protocols, be polite, and insert the characters set out in P3. Mr. R closed with greetings and prayers.

The students whom Mr. R mentored also felt happy to follow his learning. MA (student) argues that learning is student-centered. The teacher patiently explains again when there are students who do not understand. Each teacher has their way of teaching and is very attentive to students. CR (student) conveyed the same thing during the interview. CR liked the lesson because the teacher skillfully delivered the material, gave tasks that required high-level thinking, sent a summary of the material that was easy to understand, and held team meetings.

Emotional teachers influence emotional students to participate in learning, including inclusive students (Chen, 2016; Nagase et al., 2020). Inclusive is part of CFS. Attitude toward inclusive education is closely related to teacher efficacy in educating inclusive children (Malinen et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2014; Yada & Savolainen, 2017; Ozokcu, 2018).

With teachers teaching humanely or child-friendly, many students experience changes in behavior and learning outcomes. Students become more happy to learn, including subjects that incidentally are known as complex subjects. This also affects student learning outcomes, where it has increased every semester. Even if it decreases, it does not decrease drastically and is still above the passing grade. Teachers can explore the scope of formal educational opportunities to inform and exercise reflection, slow and careful consideration, and evaluation for building a character (Arthur & Carr, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussion results, implementing the child-friendly school policy at SHS-X has met the indicators set out in the Child-Friendly School Guidelines. The characters formed in SHS-X students include (1) nationalism, (2) religion, (3) leadership, (4) politeness, (5) honesty, (6) cooperation, and (7) anti-corruption. The characters that become the SHS-X icon are anti-corruption, collaboration, cooperation, and discipline. The character of discipline has not been fully embedded in students. Another thing that makes SHS-X superior is that the teachers' attitudes during learning are friendly, humane, and fun. With the two-way discussion method, learning becomes more interactive. Students become closer to the teacher and do not hesitate to ask questions. With teachers teaching humanely, many students experience changes in behavior and learning outcomes. Things that still need to be improved are (1) the complaint mechanism, (2) the needs to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities, and (3) complete laboratory equipment. It is hoped that SHS-X's best practices in implementing CFS can inspire other schools.

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