



An Analysis of the Impact of Child-Friendly School Culture Implementation on Students' Collaboration Skills at West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

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Article Info

Article History

Received: November 12, 2025

Revised: November 22, 2025

Accepted: December 22, 2025

Published: December 31, 2025

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Abstract

Schools are increasingly expected to create learning environments that support not only academic achievement but also students' social and collaborative skills. This study analyzes the impact of implementing the Child-Friendly School (CFS) culture on elementary students' collaboration skills at SDN 5 Cakranegara, Mataram City, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The study employed a qualitative case-study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, students, and parents. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that implementing the CFS culture positively impacts students' collaboration skills by fostering an inclusive, safe, and participatory school environment. Routine activities, positive discipline practices, differentiated instruction, inclusive play settings, and parental involvement enhance students' cooperation, communication, empathy, and mutual respect. However, several challenges remain, including limitations in school facilities and the persistence of competitive learning norms. In conclusion, the implementation of a Child-Friendly School culture effectively supports the development of students' collaboration skills and social-emotional competencies. This study implies that child-friendly education should be strengthened through continuous evaluation, collaborative learning strategies, and sustainable school-parent partnerships to maintain inclusive and collaborative learning environments in elementary schools.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.65622/ije.v1i3.163>

Keywords: Child-Friendly School; School Culture; Student Collaboration.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, schools have increasingly been expected not only to deliver academic instruction but also to provide environments that support students' holistic development, including their psychosocial and social well-being (Bortes & Giota, 2024). Global and national studies indicate that school environments play a critical role in shaping students' social interactions, emotional security, and collaborative behaviors (Bortes & Giota, 2024). Schools that promote inclusive values and positive relationships tend to foster healthier social climates among students (Derossi et al., 2025). In Indonesia, this paradigm shift aligns with educational reforms emphasizing children's rights, well-being, and participation within the school setting (Senge et al., 2025). Consequently, school culture has become a key factor in supporting students' social development and collaborative learning.

A child-friendly school culture refers to a system of values, norms, and practices that ensure children's rights to learn, develop, play, and participate in a safe and respectful

environment free from discrimination and violence (Jannah et al., 2025). This culture encompasses physical, social, and pedagogical dimensions, including a safe learning environment (Röhr et al., 2025), respectful relationships, and teaching approaches that value student voice and participation (Cook-sather, 2020). Within such a context, students are more likely to feel secure, respected, and included, which enhances their willingness to interact and collaborate with peers (Saroyan, 2021). A child-friendly culture, therefore, provides a strong foundation for meaningful collaboration by fostering trust, creativity, and a sense of belonging among students, particularly at the primary school level (Jannah et al., 2025).

Despite formal commitments to the Child-Friendly School program, many schools continue to face challenges in translating these principles into everyday practice. Empirical studies reveal that student participation and collaboration remain limited, with classroom dynamics often emphasizing competition rather than cooperation (Pesout & Nietfeld, 2020). Such conditions may hinder the

Citation:

Udayani, N. W. A., Sasmita, V., Farhana, B. C. D., & Sumardi, L. (2025). An analysis of the impact of child-friendly school culture implementation on students' collaboration skills at West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Innovation*, 1(3), 40–46. <https://doi.org/10.65622/ije.v1i3.163>

development of essential social-emotional competencies, including empathy, teamwork, and mutual respect (Martinez & Gomez, 2024). In regions such as Nusa Tenggara Barat, these challenges are compounded by limited facilities, weak school management capacity, and minimal parental and community involvement (Qodir & Choerudin, 2024). Although previous research confirms that well-facilitated collaboration enhances problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Ramadhan, 2025), studies examining the direct influence of child-friendly school culture on student collaboration at the primary level remain limited.

This research is important because student collaboration is an essential competency for future social life and the world of work, as well as an indicator of a healthy and supportive school culture. A school environment that promotes child-friendly values is expected to strengthen cooperation, participation, and student empowerment in learning activities. Therefore, this study aims to explore the implementation of child-friendly school culture at SDN 5 Cakranegara and analyze its influence on students' collaborative behaviors. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to (1) describe the child-friendly school culture at SDN 5 Cakranegara and (2) examine its effect on the level of student collaboration. The findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for educators, school leaders, and policymakers to develop more systematic and sustainable collaborative learning practices in elementary education (Colomer & Bubnys, 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Time and Place

This research was conducted at SDN 5 Cakranegara, located in Mataram City, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. The study was conducted over three months, from August to October 2025. SDN 5 Cakranegara was purposively selected as the research site because the school has formally implemented the Child-Friendly School (Sekolah Ramah Anak/SRA) program and is recognized as an urban elementary school that promotes inclusive values and collaborative learning practices. This setting provided a relevant context for examining the relationship between child-friendly school culture and student collaboration.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design. The qualitative method was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, particularly how child-friendly school culture is implemented and how it influences student collaboration in a natural school setting (Hidayatullah, Sulisyana, et al., 2025). A case study design allows for an intensive exploration of a single institution as a bounded system, enabling the researcher to capture contextual and process-oriented data. This approach aligns with Akosa et al. (2025), who emphasizes the importance of interpreting participants' experiences in real-life contexts to understand complex educational practices.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of school stakeholders directly involved in the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (SRA) program, including the principal, teachers, students, and parents (Pujoko et al., 2025). The research sample comprised one principal, three classroom teachers, and six students representing different grade levels. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique commonly applied in qualitative research to identify participants who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research focus (Binobo et al., 2025). The study examined two main variables, namely: (1) the implementation of child-friendly school culture and (2) student collaboration. Data were collected through semi-structured interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation checklists as research instruments. The tools and materials used included interview protocols, observation guidelines, document analysis forms, audio recorders, notebooks, and school documents related to the SRA program.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was conducted in four systematic stages. The first stage was preparation, which involved developing research instruments, coordinating with school authorities, and obtaining official research permission. The second stage was data collection, carried out through semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, direct observation of learning activities and school interactions, and documentation of relevant school records related to the SRA program. The third stage was data reduction and display, where interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were organized, coded, and categorized into key themes such as school culture, participation, empathy, and collaboration. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, which involved interpreting the findings and validating them through triangulation of data sources and methods to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data were analyzed thematically by coding recurring patterns and relationships related to the implementation of child-friendly school culture and its influence on student collaboration. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. The final results were presented in a descriptive narrative format, supported by direct quotations from participants to provide authentic and contextualized insights into the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Implementation of a Child-Friendly School Culture

Field observations indicate that the Child-Friendly School (CFS) culture at SDN 5 Cakranegara has been concretely implemented in school policies, daily activities, and social interaction patterns among members of the

school community. The school provides a safe, clean, and comfortable open space for students to engage in activities and interact, as evidenced by the playground and schoolyard, where students use them for free, unprompted group play (Figure 1). This physical environment reflects the school's commitment to creating an atmosphere that supports children's rights to play, express themselves, and socialize safely.



Figure 1. Play environment

The existence of a child-friendly play environment encourages students to build natural social interactions through group play activities (Rahmatin et al., 2025). Students demonstrate cooperative behavior, share roles, and actively communicate when playing with peers (Hasanah & Adawiyah, 2025). These activities strengthen students' collaborative skills as they learn to solve problems, adapt to group rules, and respect differences of opinion in real-life situations (Claire et al., 2025). Thus, the play environment serves as an important social learning tool outside the classroom.

Pedagogically, a play environment that supports child-friendly values helps strengthen a collaborative culture in schools. Schools not only facilitate academic learning in the classroom but also create social spaces that foster empathy, togetherness, and a sense of belonging

among students. These findings demonstrate that providing child-friendly physical facilities plays a strategic role in building a collaborative school culture and supporting students' sustainable social-emotional development.

The Role of a Child-Friendly Environment in Shaping Student Collaboration

Based on observations and interviews (Table 1), the child-friendly physical environment at SDN 5 Cakranegara was found to play a significant role in fostering student collaboration. The school provides safe, clean, and well-maintained open spaces that allow students to engage comfortably in both learning and recreational activities. These conditions enable students to interact freely without fear or psychological pressure, thereby supporting active participation in group activities.

Accessibility of play areas was also identified as a key factor influencing collaborative behavior (Han et al., 2022). Open playgrounds and school yards were accessible to all students without discrimination, ensuring equal opportunities for interaction (Saragih & Subroto, 2023). Observations revealed that students from different grades and backgrounds frequently engaged in spontaneous group play, which encouraged inclusive participation and reduced social barriers (Monazam-tabrizi et al., 2025). Furthermore, outdoor spaces functioned as informal learning environments where students practiced role-sharing, conflict resolution, and collective decision-making during peer interactions.

In addition, the child-friendly physical environment fostered a strong sense of belonging among students. Teachers and students reported that the availability of safe and welcoming spaces increased students' emotional attachment to the school, making them more willing to collaborate, help peers, and engage in cooperative tasks. These findings indicate that the physical environment not only supports students' physical well-being but also contributes to the development of social-emotional and collaborative competencies.

Table 1. The Role of Child-Friendly Environment in Shaping Student Collaboration at SDN 5 Cakranegara

Aspect of Physical Environment	Description of Findings	Implication for Student Collaboration	Data Source
Safety and Comfort	The school provides safe, clean, and well-maintained open spaces for students' activities.	Students feel secure and confident about interacting and engaging in group activities.	Observation, teacher interviews
Accessibility of Play Areas	Open playgrounds and school yards are accessible to all students without discrimination.	Encourages inclusive participation and equal interaction among students.	Observation
Support for Social Interaction	Physical spaces allow spontaneous group play and informal peer interaction.	Facilitates communication, cooperation, and mutual respect among students.	Student interviews
Learning Beyond the Classroom	Outdoor spaces function as informal learning environments for social interaction.	Students practice role-sharing, conflict resolution, and collective decision-making.	Observation, teacher interviews
Sense of Belonging	A child-friendly physical environment fosters students' emotional attachment to the school.	Strengthens trust, empathy, and collaborative behavior among peers.	Teacher and student interviews

The findings demonstrate that a child-friendly physical environment serves as a foundational element in

shaping collaborative student behavior. Safe and comfortable spaces create a sense of security that

encourages students to communicate openly and work together. This supports the argument that collaboration flourishes when students feel emotionally safe and respected within their learning environment.

These results are consistent Zhao et al., (2024), who emphasized that child-friendly school environments promote inclusive social interactions and strengthen students' sense of belonging. Similarly, Dinh et al., (2025) highlighted that supportive school environments contribute to positive peer relationships and collaborative learning cultures. The present study extends these findings by showing that physical spaces outside the classroom function as meaningful social learning arenas where students naturally develop cooperation and empathy through everyday interactions.

Moreover, the role of outdoor spaces as informal learning environments aligns with (Dinh et al., 2025), who found that social interaction during play enhances students' communication and teamwork skills. Unlike previous studies that focus mainly on classroom-based collaboration, this research underscores the importance of integrating physical environment design into child-friendly school policies to support collaboration holistically.

Overall, the findings suggest that the provision of safe, accessible, and inclusive physical environments should be considered a strategic component of Child-Friendly School (CFS) implementation. Schools are encouraged to view physical spaces not merely as infrastructure, but as active pedagogical resources that contribute to the development of collaborative and socially responsible learners.

Inclusive Play Environment and Strengthening Student Collaborative Interactions

Based on field observations shown in Figure 2, the play area at SDN 5 Cakranegara is designed and utilized as an inclusive space that allows all students to participate without discrimination. The open, safe, and easily accessible play area is used by students to play in groups, with spontaneous interactions. Students appear to mingle across genders and grade levels, engaging in activities that require cooperation, communication, and adapting to their roles. These group play activities demonstrate collaborative interaction patterns, such as sharing play equipment, agreeing on shared rules, and helping peers who are having difficulties. Teachers confirm that students are more open to communication and demonstrate greater tolerance when interacting in the play environment than in formal learning situations.

The findings in Figure 2 indicate that an inclusive play environment plays a crucial role in strengthening students' collaborative interactions. A child-friendly play space creates a safe and comfortable atmosphere, allowing students to feel free to express themselves and build social relationships naturally (Struzek et al., 2025). This condition is a key prerequisite for healthy collaboration, as students are not under excessive academic pressure or competition.



Figure 2. Student group interaction through educational games as a form of social collaboration

Socio-pedagogically, the play environment functions as an effective non-formal learning space for developing collaborative skills (Hidayatullah, Sulisyana, et al., 2025). Through collaborative play activities, students learn to manage differences, resolve conflicts peacefully, and build group consensus. This aligns with the principles of Child-Friendly Schools, which emphasize participation, inclusivity, and respect for children's rights in all school activities (Hidayatullah, et al., 2025).

Thus, an inclusive play environment not only contributes to student well-being but also serves as a strategic tool for strengthening a collaborative culture in elementary schools. These findings confirm that the provision and utilization of child-friendly play spaces should be viewed as an integral part of the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools to support students' sustainable socio-emotional and collaborative development.

Sustainability of Child-Friendly School Culture and Challenges in Strengthening Student Collaboration

Although the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) program at SDN 5 Cakranegara has demonstrated positive outcomes in strengthening student collaboration, several challenges remain in sustaining this culture over time. The findings indicate that limitations in physical facilities, relatively large class sizes (Gobena, 2013), and the persistence of competitive learning norms continue to constrain the full optimization of collaborative practices (Mason & Watts, 2013). These conditions suggest that school culture transformation requires not only normative commitment but also adequate resources and consistent implementation across all learning contexts.

In addition to structural constraints, pedagogical and cultural challenges were also identified. Some teachers are still in the process of transitioning from outcome-oriented and performance-based instructional approaches toward learning models that emphasize process, participation, and cooperation. This indicates that the internalization of child-friendly values requires time, continuous reflection. Sustained professional development to ensure that collaborative principles are consistently embedded in lesson planning, classroom interaction, and assessment practices (Goodyear, 2025).

Nevertheless, the study highlights that a child-friendly physical environment, positive pedagogical practices, and active parental involvement constitute strong social capital for sustaining a collaborative school culture (Blessel et al., 2025). Therefore, strengthening the Child-

Friendly School culture should be pursued through continuous evaluation, systematic teacher capacity building, and sustained collaboration among schools, families, and educational stakeholders. Through these efforts, student collaboration can be developed not merely as a social skill, but as an integral component of an inclusive, participatory, and sustainable learning culture in elementary education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of a Child-Friendly School (CFS) culture at SDN 5 Cakranegara plays a significant role in strengthening elementary students' collaborative behaviors. The findings show that a safe, inclusive, and child-friendly physical environment, supported by positive pedagogical practices and daily school routines, fosters students' willingness to interact, cooperate, and participate actively in group activities. Inclusive play environments function not only as recreational spaces but also as effective social learning settings where students develop communication skills, empathy, and collective problem-solving abilities. Although challenges such as limited facilities and residual competitive learning norms remain, the overall results indicate that the CFS model effectively supports students' social-emotional development and collaboration. Therefore, institutionalizing child-friendly values through continuous evaluation, teacher capacity building, and stakeholder collaboration is essential to sustaining an inclusive and collaborative school culture in elementary education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers gratefully acknowledges the Principal of SDN 5 Cakranegara for granting permission to conduct this study. Appreciation is also extended to the classroom teachers who participated as research informants and provided valuable insights into the implementation of the Child-Friendly School program. Their cooperation and support contributed significantly to the completion of this research.

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