

MANAGING CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOL PROGRAMS THROUGH INNOVATIVE PRINCIPALS LEADERSHIP: EVIDENCE FROM SD NEGERI BEJI 1

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the innovative leadership strategies of school principals in managing the Child-Friendly School (CFS) program at SD Negeri Beji 1. The study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The research subjects included the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, parents, school committee members, and supervisors, who were selected purposively. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source, technique, and time triangulation, as well as member checking. The findings reveal that the principal's innovative leadership strategies were implemented through the integration of management functions, including participatory and needs-based planning, collaborative organizing, program implementation oriented toward child-friendly principles, and continuous supervision. Innovative leadership was found to be a key factor in creating a safe, comfortable, and supportive learning environment that fosters students' holistic development. This study contributes to the development of an innovative leadership model based on school management within the context of Child-Friendly Schools.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Education is a fundamental right of every citizen and plays a crucial role in improving the quality of human resources and national development. Beyond serving as a medium for knowledge transfer, education also functions as a strategic instrument for shaping students' character, morality, and personality. Therefore, educational institutions are not only expected to produce academically competent graduates but also to create a safe, comfortable, and supportive learning environment that fosters optimal child development (Ernawati, 2021; Sudira, 2017).

However, in practice, efforts to establish a child-friendly learning environment still face various challenges. Incidents of violence against children, including those occurring within educational settings, continue to be reported and have significant impacts on students' psychological well-being and learning processes. This condition indicates that schools have not fully become safe and violence-free spaces, highlighting the need for systematic efforts to create educational environments that prioritize children's rights and well-being (Nurjanah et al., 2022; Santosa et al., 2021).

In response to these challenges, the development of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) has emerged as an important strategy to create safe, inclusive, and supportive educational environments. The concept of Child-Friendly Schools emphasizes the fulfillment of children's rights, including protection from violence and discrimination, as well as opportunities for active participation in the learning process. Its implementation aims to support students' physical, psychological, and social development in a comprehensive manner (Nurjanah et al., 2022; Santosa et al., 2021).

The implementation of the CFS program requires effective school management through core management functions, namely planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling. These functions are interconnected processes that contribute to achieving educational goals effectively and efficiently (Ernawati, 2021; Sudira, 2017). In this context, the school principal plays a strategic role as a leader who not only performs administrative duties but also acts as a change agent capable of fostering innovation in school management (Vidiastuti & Purwanto, 2021; Wahjusaputri et al., 2024).

Innovative leadership refers to a leader's ability to foster a creative, adaptive, and responsive environment through the development of new ideas and continuous improvement. Innovative leaders are not merely decision-makers but also change agents who build collaboration and cultivate an organizational culture that supports innovation (Imran et al., 2024; Sudarsono et al., 2022). In educational settings, innovative strategies are reflected in the development of programs and learning methods that align with students' needs and evolving societal demands (Noviansyah & Sudira, 2020; Hidayati & Wagiran, 2020).

Previous studies have shown that educational programs based on experiential learning and active student participation can significantly improve learning quality and student engagement (Ernawati, 2021). Moreover, a safe and violence-free learning environment contributes to students' psychological well-being and character development (Santosa et al., 2021; Nurjanah et al., 2022). However, studies that specifically integrate innovative leadership strategies with management functions in the implementation of Child-Friendly School programs remain limited.

SD Negeri Beji 1 is one of the schools that has demonstrated a strong commitment to creating a child-friendly learning environment through various innovative policies and practices. The school implements programs that support safety, comfort, and holistic student development. This achievement is closely related to the principal's ability to develop innovative leadership strategies and establish collaboration with various stakeholders.

Based on the above considerations, this study offers novelty by examining the integration of innovative leadership strategies and school management functions in managing Child-Friendly School programs. This study aims to analyze the innovative leadership strategies of school principals in managing the Child-Friendly School program at SD Negeri Beji 1. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational leadership studies and practically to assist schools in creating safe, comfortable, and student-centered learning environments.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design through a case study strategy. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the principal's innovative leadership strategies in managing the Child-Friendly School (CFS) program at SD Negeri Beji 1. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore phenomena naturally through the interpretation of participants' experiences and perspectives.

The study was conducted at SD Negeri Beji 1, located in East Ungaran District, Semarang Regency, Central Java. The research was carried out throughout 2025. The research subjects were selected purposively and included the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, parents/guardians, school committee members, and school supervisors. The selection of participants was based on their involvement in the implementation of the Child-Friendly School program.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were used to obtain information related to the principal's innovative leadership strategies, observations were conducted to directly examine the implementation of the program within the school environment, and documentation was used to complement and validate the collected data.

The research instruments consisted of interview guidelines, observation protocols, and document analysis formats. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, directly involved in data collection and interpretation.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and categorizing data based on the research focus, data display was presented in narrative and thematic tables, and conclusions were drawn through the interpretation of patterns and relationships among the data.

Data validity was ensured through source, technique, and time triangulation, as well as member checking and prolonged engagement in the field. In addition, to maintain the credibility and consistency of the findings, an audit trail was conducted along with reflective practices to minimize potential bias throughout the research process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study examines the innovative leadership strategies of the school principal in managing the Child-Friendly School (CFS) program at SD Negeri Beji 1. Data were obtained through triangulation of interviews, observations, and documentation. The research informants included the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, parents, school committee members, and school supervisors. The findings are presented based on management functions: planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision.

Planning of Innovative Leadership Strategies

The findings indicate that the planning of the CFS program was carried out collaboratively through the integration of child-friendly values into the school's vision and mission. The principal involved teachers, the school committee, and parents in formulating policy directions.

This is supported by the principal's statement:

"In designing the child-friendly school program, we ensure that every step prioritizes students' needs and safety. We involve teachers, parents, and the school committee so that the program aligns with the actual conditions of the school." (WKS)

Planning was also based on identifying students' real needs, including aspects of safety, comfort, and learning. The resulting programs included greeting habits (smile, greet, and respect), the provision of literacy corners, and the establishment of a child protection team.

Teachers also emphasized the importance of a participatory planning process:

"Through joint discussions, we design simple yet impactful programs, such as making classrooms more engaging and giving students opportunities to express their opinions." (WG1)

Observational and documentary data indicate that planning was conducted through formal meetings, meeting minutes, and budget allocations supporting child-friendly activities.

Organizing the Child-Friendly School Program

The organization of the CFS program was carried out through the establishment of an implementation team with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The principal played a role in structuring the organization and ensuring the involvement of all school members.

The principal stated:

"The implementation team was formed so that all elements of the school share responsibility, not only teachers but also parents and the school committee." (WKS)

Teachers highlighted that the organizational structure facilitated coordination:

"With clear task distribution, activities become more structured. Some focus on literacy, others on daily habits, making the program run effectively." (WG1)

In addition, collaboration with external stakeholders such as health centers, public libraries, and social institutions was established. This is supported by a parent's statement:

"We feel that this program is very beneficial because the school collaborates with various parties to support children's development." (WOT)

Observations revealed the availability of supporting facilities such as reading corners, school health units, and safe playgrounds. Documentation also showed official decrees for the implementation team and activity reports.

Implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program

The implementation of the CFS program indicates that the school has integrated child-friendly principles into both instructional and non-instructional activities. Teachers applied positive discipline approaches and participatory learning methods.

A teacher stated:

"When students make mistakes, we do not punish them but engage them in discussion so they can understand their mistakes." (WG1)

Efforts to prevent bullying were also actively implemented:

"We monitor student interactions and immediately address potential bullying through counseling approaches." (WG2)

Extracurricular activities served as a means to strengthen students' character and social skills. A student expressed:

"I enjoy participating in school activities because we are taught to cooperate and not to mock our friends." (WS1)

Parents also played a role in supporting program implementation:

"We support the school by applying good communication patterns at home to align with the values taught at school." (WOT)

Observations showed a conducive and violence-free learning environment, with active literacy and extracurricular programs. Documentation indicated structured anti-bullying initiatives, literacy programs, and well-documented student activities.

Supervision of the Child-Friendly School Program

Supervision of the CFS program was conducted through continuous supervision, monitoring, and evaluation. The principal carried out supervision in a humanistic manner and provided constructive feedback.

The principal stated:

"We conduct supervision to ensure that activities are safe and comfortable for students, not to judge but to guide." (WKS)

Teachers also acknowledged the benefits of supervision:

"After supervision, we discuss improvements to make learning more child-centered." (WG1)

Supervision also involved educational staff and parents through regular evaluations. The school supervisor emphasized:

"The school has established a strong monitoring system and demonstrates continuous improvement in program implementation." (WPS)

Observations showed that monitoring was conducted not only in classrooms but also in extracurricular activities and across the school environment. Documentation revealed supervision reports, evaluation meeting minutes, and follow-up actions for program improvement.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the innovative leadership strategies of the school principal in managing the Child-Friendly School (CFS) program at SD Negeri Beji 1 have been implemented systematically through the integration of management functions, namely planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision. These findings confirm that the success of educational programs is not solely determined by formal policies but also by the principal's

ability to manage change and create innovation based on students' needs. This is in line with the perspective that effective educational leadership must integrate managerial and innovative aspects to address the complexity of contemporary educational challenges (Hidayat & Patras, 2019; Wahyuni et al., 2021).

Needs-Based and Participatory Planning

The planning of the Child-Friendly School program at SD Negeri Beji 1 reflects the application of a participatory approach involving various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the school committee. This approach represents inclusive leadership practices, where decision-making is not top-down but based on deliberation. The involvement of multiple stakeholders in the planning process enables the program to be more relevant to the actual needs of students and the school environment. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that stakeholder participation in educational planning enhances program effectiveness and strengthens a sense of ownership toward implemented policies (Arifin, 2021; Nugroho et al., 2022).

Furthermore, needs-based planning demonstrates the principal's ability to adapt child-friendly school policies to local contexts. This approach reflects the characteristics of innovative leadership, which not only adopts policies normatively but also modifies them based on real conditions in the field (Suyitno, 2020). Therefore, participatory and needs-based planning serves as a critical foundation for the successful implementation of the CFS program.

Collaborative and Structured Organizing

The organization of the Child-Friendly School program through the establishment of an implementation team with clearly defined roles indicates the application of effective organizational management. The principal not only acts as a decision-maker but also as a coordinator who distributes responsibilities proportionally among all members of the school community. This reflects the practice of distributive leadership, which emphasizes the importance of involving all organizational members in achieving shared goals.

Previous studies have shown that clear task distribution and effective coordination can enhance work efficiency and minimize role overlap within educational organizations (Setiawan & Sudira, 2015; Siswandi & Sukoco, 2016). In addition, collaboration with external stakeholders, such as health centers and social institutions, strengthens the support system for program implementation. Such partnerships play a crucial role in improving the quality of educational services, particularly in creating safe and healthy school environments (Mulyani, 2019; Yoto & Widiyanti, 2018). Therefore, collaborative and structured organizing is a key element in the successful implementation of the CFS program.

Child-Oriented Program Implementation

The implementation of the Child-Friendly School program at SD Negeri Beji 1 demonstrates that child-friendly principles have been integrated into both instructional processes and school culture. Teachers apply participatory, dialogical, and non-violent learning approaches, reflecting a shift from authoritarian to humanistic educational paradigms. This approach not only creates a safe learning environment but also supports students' social and emotional development.

These findings are consistent with studies indicating that participatory and experiential learning approaches can enhance student engagement and improve learning quality (Sudira, 2017; Ernawati, 2021). Moreover, the application of positive discipline and anti-bullying measures indicates that the school has effectively implemented child protection principles in daily practices (Santosa et al., 2021; Nurjanah et al., 2022). The involvement of parents in supporting program implementation further strengthens the synergy between school and family, ensuring the consistent application of child-friendly values. Thus, child-oriented implementation serves as a key indicator of the success of the CFS program.

Supervision as Continuous Improvement

The supervision of the Child-Friendly School program, conducted through continuous supervision, monitoring, and evaluation, indicates that the principal applies the principle of continuous improvement in educational management. Humanistic and developmental supervision suggests that monitoring functions not only as a control mechanism but also as a means of improving instructional quality.

Research has shown that effective supervision can enhance teachers' competencies and improve the quality of the learning process (Vidiastuti & Purwanto, 2021; Sudarsono et al., 2022). Additionally, the involvement of various stakeholders in evaluation processes reflects transparency and accountability in program management. Comprehensive monitoring, both inside classrooms and across the school environment, allows for early detection of issues and prompt program improvement. This demonstrates that supervision is not merely administrative but also strategic in ensuring the sustainability of the CFS program.

Innovative Leadership as a Key Factor

Overall, the findings reveal that innovative leadership of the school principal is the primary factor in the successful management of the Child-Friendly School program. The principal effectively integrates management functions with innovative approaches that are adaptive to students' needs and the school environment. This leadership is reflected in the ability to design needs-based programs, foster collaboration, and create a safe and supportive learning environment.

These findings align with previous research indicating that innovative leadership plays a significant role in improving educational quality and students' readiness to face future challenges (Naufalin et al., 2024; Agussalim et al., 2024). Furthermore, innovative leadership contributes to the development of a positive school culture oriented toward character building. Therefore, innovative leadership is not merely a supporting factor but a driving force in the successful implementation of education programs focused on child protection and development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the innovative leadership strategies of the school principal in managing the Child-Friendly School (CFS) program at SD Negeri Beji 1 have been implemented systematically through the integration of management functions, namely planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision. Planning was conducted in a participatory and needs-based manner, organizing was carried out through clear and collaborative task distribution, program implementation was integrated into instructional practices and school culture oriented toward child-friendly principles, and supervision was conducted continuously through developmental supervision and evaluation.

The principal's innovative leadership has proven to be a key factor in fostering a safe, comfortable, and supportive learning environment that promotes students' holistic development, both academically and in terms of character building. This study offers novelty by examining the integration of innovative leadership strategies with management functions in the context of managing Child-Friendly Schools at the primary education level.

However, this study is limited by its restricted research setting and qualitative approach, which does not quantitatively measure long-term impacts. Therefore, future studies are recommended to expand the research context and employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of innovative leadership in managing Child-Friendly School programs.

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