



Adaptive Models of Child-Friendly School Management: Integrating Policy, Teacher Competence, and Leadership Communication

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Article History:

Received: Feb 19, 2026

Revised: Mar 28, 2026

Accepted: Apr 08, 2026

Online First: Apr 28, 2026

Keywords:

Child-Friendly School Policy,
Principal Communication,
School Environment Management,
Teacher Competence.

Kata Kunci:

Kompetensi Guru,
Komunikasi Kepala Sekolah,
Manajemen Lingkungan Sekolah,
Sekolah Ramah Anak.

How to cite:

Herliana, P., Suriansyah, A., Sulistiyana, S., & Aslamiah, A. (2026). Development of a Word Quest Big Book Based on the Picture and Picture Model to Significantly Improve Narrative Writing Skills. *Edunesia : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 7(2), 1276-1295.

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Abstract: This study examines management strategies for child-friendly school environments, focusing on policy, teacher competence, and principal communication in fostering inclusive culture. Using a qualitative multi-site design, the research was conducted in two secondary schools in Kotabaru District, South Kalimantan. Data were collected through interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, then analyzed inductively using the Miles and Huberman model, supported by NVivo 14. Data trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and theories, as well as systematic documentation. Findings show that SMP Negeri 1 applied structured, policy-based strategies, including anti-bullying regulations, teacher training, and external collaboration, whereas SMP Negeri 7 emphasized religious character, environmental care, and creative adaptation to limited facilities. Teacher competence improved through project-based learning and inclusive pedagogy, while principals used transparent, participatory communication with teachers, parents, and communities. The study proposes an adaptive multidimensional framework integrating policy, culture, and leadership communication for sustainable child-friendly school governance and inclusive educational improvement across diverse institutional and social contexts in Indonesia.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi manajemen sekolah ramah anak dengan fokus pada kebijakan, kompetensi guru, dan komunikasi kepala sekolah dalam membangun budaya inklusif. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif multi-situs pada dua sekolah menengah di Kabupaten Kotabaru, Kalimantan Selatan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara induktif menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman dengan dukungan NVivo 14. Keabsahan data dijamin melalui triangulasi sumber, metode, dan teori serta dokumentasi sistematis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SMP Negeri 1 menerapkan strategi berbasis kebijakan yang terstruktur seperti regulasi anti-bullying, pelatihan guru, dan kolaborasi eksternal, sedangkan SMP Negeri 7 menekankan pembentukan karakter religius, kepedulian lingkungan, serta adaptasi kreatif terhadap keterbatasan fasilitas. Kompetensi guru diperkuat melalui pembelajaran berbasis proyek dan pedagogi inklusif, sementara kepala sekolah menerapkan komunikasi transparan dan partisipatif dengan guru, orang tua, dan masyarakat. Penelitian ini mengusulkan kerangka multidimensional adaptif yang mengintegrasikan kebijakan, budaya, dan komunikasi kepemimpinan sebagai model berkelanjutan tata kelola sekolah ramah anak.

A. Introduction

In contemporary educational discourse, the quality of schooling is increasingly measured not only by curriculum delivery and teacher competence, but also by the extent to which schools create safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for children. International frameworks on child-friendly education emphasize that schools should promote inclusion, dignity, participation, and well-being, while ensuring that learning spaces are physically safe and psychologically protective for every learner (UNICEF, 2021; OECD, 2023). UNICEF describes the child-friendly school model as one that promotes inclusiveness, gender sensitivity, tolerance, personal empowerment, and the protection of children's rights, while OECD also underscores that a safe and supportive school environment is closely associated with students' achievement, motivation, and well-being (OECD, 2023). In this sense, child-friendly schooling has become a global educational priority because schools are expected to function not merely as academic institutions, but as developmental ecosystems that shape children's social, emotional, and moral growth (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015). This urgency is especially relevant in an era when school climate, student voice, and inclusive leadership are increasingly recognized as central to educational quality (Yumnah et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, the importance of child-friendly education is reinforced by national policy. The legal foundation for School-Friendly Children is grounded in Ministerial Regulation No. 8 of 2014, and recent government frameworks continue to emphasize the need for schools to involve parents, communities, and students in creating safe educational environments (Kementerian PPPA, 2022). However, the persistence of bullying, violence, discrimination, and other forms of harm in educational settings shows that policy commitment has not always translated into consistent implementation (Azizah et al., 2024). Reports and recent studies indicate that students remain vulnerable to unsafe school conditions, reflecting gaps in teacher capacity, leadership practices, and resource distribution (Bagea et al., 2025). These conditions suggest that the challenge is not merely regulatory, but also managerial and cultural, requiring schools to translate policy into daily practices through leadership, teacher competence, and participatory governance (Jayanti et al., 2021).

Recent studies have contributed important insights into child-friendly school implementation, but they have generally approached the issue in a fragmented manner. Some studies focus on policy implementation and institutional compliance (Yasin et al., 2023; Musdalifah et al., 2024), including analyses of school-level governance and leadership roles. Other studies highlight how child-friendly initiatives are shaped by local culture, religious values, and community participation (Metroyadi et al., 2022; Indraswati et al., 2020). A separate stream of research emphasizes student outcomes and teacher competence, showing that inclusive environments and project-based learning approaches can strengthen student achievement and teacher capacity (Fahmi & Wahyu, 2024; Ningrum et al., 2023). Together, these studies confirm that child-friendly schooling is inherently

multidimensional; however, they tend to examine only one dimension at a time, whether policy, culture, leadership, or pedagogy.

This creates a critical gap in the literature. Existing research has not sufficiently explained how policy implementation, teacher competence, and principal communication work together as an integrated governance system to sustain child-friendly school culture across different institutional contexts. In many studies, policy is discussed separately from pedagogy, and leadership is treated independently from communication practices and school culture. As a result, the literature offers valuable insights but lacks a unified explanation of how schools operationalize child-friendly principles into sustainable daily practices. This gap is particularly significant in diverse contexts where institutional resources, cultural values, and leadership orientations vary widely, requiring adaptive and integrative approaches.

Responding to this gap, this study introduces a multidimensional adaptive framework that integrates structural policy, teacher competence, and principal communication as complementary pathways in child-friendly school governance. Unlike previous studies that analyze these components separately, the present research positions them as interconnected forces that shape inclusive culture and sustainable implementation. The novelty of this study lies in its holistic and context-adaptive perspective, offering a unified governance model that bridges structural, pedagogical, and communicative dimensions. This contribution extends the discourse on child-friendly education beyond fragmented approaches and provides both theoretical advancement in educational administration and practical guidance for implementation.

Based on this positioning, the study addresses three research questions: (1) How are child-friendly policies implemented across contrasting school contexts?. (2) How is teacher competence developed to support inclusive environments?. (3) How do principal communication strategies sustain child-friendly school culture?. Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the integration of policy, teacher competence, and leadership communication in fostering inclusive school environments. The study contributes theoretically by proposing an adaptive multidimensional governance model and practically by providing strategic insights for policymakers, school leaders, and educators in developing sustainable child-friendly education systems.

B. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore child-friendly school management strategies, enabling an in-depth understanding of complex educational phenomena without external manipulation. The research was conducted in two secondary schools in Kotabaru District, South Kalimantan, representing contrasting contexts: one with adequate infrastructure but limited teacher competence, and another with minimal facilities but strong cultural and religious values.

Participants consisted of principals, teachers, staff, and students directly involved in child-friendly practices. A total of 17 participants were selected through snowball sampling

to capture diverse perspectives across leadership, teaching, and student support roles. The study was conducted over six months (August 2025–January 2026) to ensure prolonged engagement and contextual depth. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Education, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, and all participants provided informed consent.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman’s interactive model, involving data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing at both single-site and cross-site levels, supported by NVivo 14 for thematic coding, visualization, and triangulation. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and theories, as well as audit trails and member checking.

The selection of research sites was based on a contrastive-case logic to highlight adaptive pathways in child-friendly school management, comparing policy-driven approaches with culturally grounded practices. To provide a clearer overview of the research participants and their roles across both sites, the profile of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Code	Position	Years of Experience	School Context
PN	Teacher	12 years	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru
MR	Teacher	10 years	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru
MH	Teacher	15 years	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru
NS	Teacher	9 years	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru
GT	Teacher	11 years	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru
DF	Teacher	8 years	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru
YL	(Counselor/BK)	13 years	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru
RD	Principal	28 years	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru
PR	Teacher	10 years	SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru
IH	Teacher	12 years	SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru
NH	Teacher	10 years	SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru
SR	Teacher	17 years	SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru
NZ	Principal	19 years	SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru

As shown in Table 1, participants represent a diverse range of roles, including principals, teachers, and counseling staff, with varying years of experience across the two school contexts. This diversity strengthens the depth of analysis by incorporating multiple perspectives on the implementation of child-friendly school practices. To illustrate the overall research design and procedural flow, the stages of the study are presented in Figure 1.

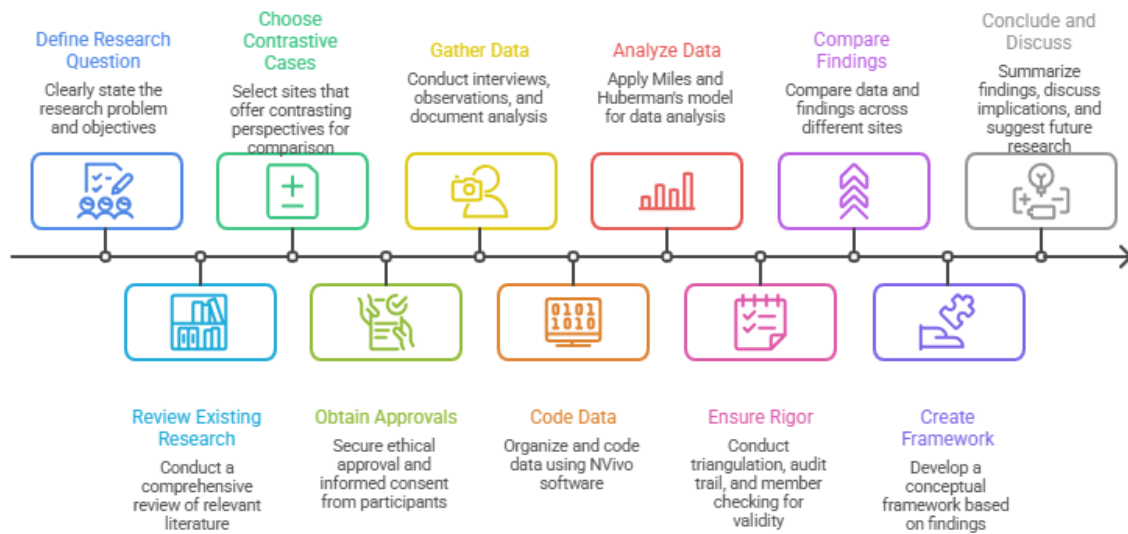


Figure 1. Research Process

Figure 1 illustrates the overall research process, highlighting a systematic progression from data preparation, data coding, and data analysis to the interpretation and visualization of findings. To enhance analytical rigor, NVivo 14 software was employed to support thematic coding, visualization, and triangulation. NVivo facilitated the systematic organization of large qualitative datasets, including interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents. Through coding queries, word clouds, and project maps, the software enabled the identification of recurring themes and relationships among variables (Saldaña, 2021; Wahid et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the validity and reliability of the findings were ensured through methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, peer debriefing, and confirmability checks. These strategies strengthened the trustworthiness of the study, ensuring that the conclusions drawn were credible, dependable, and transferable to similar educational contexts.

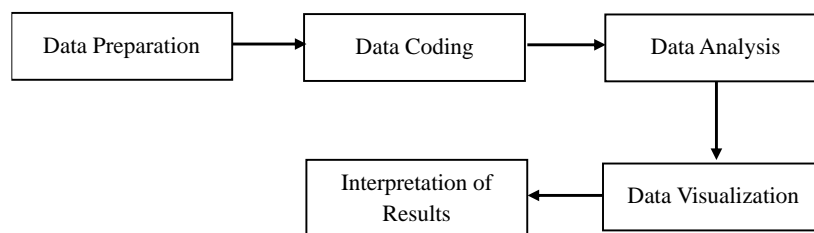


Figure 2. Analysis Data Process with NVivo 14

C. Result

Child-Friendly School Management Strategies

Both schools implemented child-friendly management strategies with distinct emphases. At SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, the approach was structured and policy-driven,

focusing on formal regulations, teacher training, and collaboration with external stakeholders. Teachers emphasized fairness, non-discrimination, and differentiated learning, supported by workshops and professional development.

“A teacher must never discriminate between one student and another. In the learning process, assessment cannot be standardized because each child has different abilities. This is where the teacher’s role is crucial to adjust approaches and evaluations according to each student’s capacity.” (Teacher MS, SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, Translated).

“From a pedagogical perspective, teachers must design instruction that is inclusive and non-discriminatory, especially since students now come from diverse backgrounds. Beyond pedagogy, teachers must also serve as role models. Socially, they should build communication without verbal violence, because the line between joking and bullying is very thin. Professionally, teachers must master the subject matter so that it can be easily understood by students.” (Teacher PR, SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, Translated).

At SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru, strategies were culturally and religiously oriented. Despite limited infrastructure, the school emphasized religious character building, environmental care, and selective use of digital technology.

“In our school, we integrate religious values into every aspect of learning and daily activities. This helps students not only to achieve academically but also to develop strong moral character. Discipline and responsibility are emphasized, so that children learn to respect rules and each other, while also practicing tolerance and cooperation.” (Teacher PR, SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru, Translated)

This orientation was complemented by environmental programs that encouraged students to actively participate in maintaining cleanliness, conserving resources, and promoting ecological awareness. A teacher further noted:

“We encourage students to take part in maintaining cleanliness and caring for the environment. Programs such as waste management and conservation projects are designed to involve students actively. Parents and community members also participate, making the school a shared space where everyone contributes to creating a safe and child-friendly environment.” (Teacher SW, SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru, Translated)

Environmental programs such as waste management and conservation projects reinforced student participation, while available technology was used creatively to enhance collaboration. This dual emphasis on tradition and innovation reflected adaptability to local realities. SMP Negeri 1 relied on structured policies, external collaboration, and professional development, while SMP Negeri 7 emphasized cultural values, religious character, and environmental stewardship. Both approaches proved effective in their contexts, illustrating that child-friendly school management is flexible and must be adapted to institutional resources, community values, and leadership orientations.

Teacher Competence Development

At SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, competence development was structured and policy-driven. The focus was on project-based learning, reflective practice, and inclusive pedagogy. As one teacher explained:

“A teacher must never treat students unequally. In learning and assessment, we cannot apply the same standard to all students because each child has different abilities. The teacher’s role is to adjust approaches and evaluations according to each student’s capacity.” (Teacher NS, SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, Translated).

Professional development was reinforced through workshops, peer reflection, and collaboration with external experts. Teachers also emphasized socio-emotional skills, modeling respectful communication and avoiding discriminatory practices. One teacher noted:

“Teachers must design inclusive instruction that does not discriminate against students, especially since they now come from diverse backgrounds. Beyond pedagogy, teachers must serve as role models. Socially, they should build communication without verbal violence, because the line between joking and bullying is very thin. Professionally, teachers must master the subject matter so that it can be easily understood by students.” (Teacher PR, SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, Translated).

At SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru, competence development was shaped by cultural and religious orientation. Teachers integrated religious values into lessons, fostering discipline, responsibility, and moral character. As one teacher described:

“We integrate religious values into every lesson and daily activity. This helps students not only achieve academically but also develop strong moral character. Discipline and responsibility are emphasized, so children learn to respect rules, practice tolerance, and cooperate with one another.” (Teacher NH, SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru).

Despite infrastructural limitations, teachers at SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru demonstrated creativity and adaptability in their instructional practices. The integration of digital technology, though constrained by limited resources, was used strategically to enhance learning and foster collaboration. Teachers employed available tools to support interactive learning, demonstrating resilience and innovation in the face of challenges. This adaptability reflects the broader institutional ethos of combining tradition with modernity, ensuring that students are prepared for future demands while remaining rooted in cultural and religious values. A teacher further explained:

“We encourage students to actively participate in maintaining cleanliness and caring for the environment. Programs such as waste management and conservation projects are designed to involve students directly. Parents and community members also join, making the school a

shared space where everyone contributes to creating a safe and child-friendly environment."(Teacher IH, SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru, Translated).

The findings suggest that teacher competence development in both schools was multi-dimensional, encompassing technical, socio-emotional, and cultural aspects. At SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, the emphasis was on structured professional development and inclusive pedagogy, while at SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru, the focus was on moral education, environmental awareness, and technological adaptation. Both approaches contributed to the creation of child-friendly environments, albeit through different pathways.

The two schools illustrate different pathways in developing teacher competence. SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru relied on structured, policy-driven strategies supported by external collaboration and professional training, reflecting stronger institutional resources. In contrast, SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru emphasized moral education, environmental care, and creative adaptation to limited facilities, showing how values and community participation can compensate for infrastructural constraints. Together, these findings highlight that teacher competence development is multi-dimensional technical, socio-emotional, and cultural and must be tailored to institutional context and community expectations.

Principal Communication Strategies

At SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, principal communication was implemented through four complementary styles. Top-down communication was evident in the dissemination of formal policies such as anti-bullying regulations and inclusive learning guidelines, ensuring clarity and consistency across the institution. Bottom-up communication occurred during coordination meetings, where teachers and staff were encouraged to voice concerns and provide input before decisions were finalized. Horizontal communication was fostered through collaboration among teachers, staff, and committees, creating a supportive environment for implementing child-friendly practices. Finally, lateral communication extended to external stakeholders, including psychologists, the Women and Child Protection Agency, and parents, reinforcing accountability and shared responsibility. As one teacher noted:

"Our principal always communicates openly and fairly. In meetings, he listens to teachers' concerns and ensures that decisions are made collectively. This makes us feel respected and strengthens our commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment."(Teacher GT, SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, Translated).

Role modeling was central: the principal consistently demonstrated respectful, non-violent communication, setting a standard for teachers and students. As the principal himself explained:

“As a leader, I must be a role model. I avoid harsh words and always try to communicate respectfully, because students and teachers will follow what they see. If we want a child-friendly school, communication must reflect respect and inclusivity in every interaction.”(Mr. RD Principal SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru, Translated).

At SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru, communication strategies reflected cultural and religious values. Top-down communication was used to reinforce discipline and religious habituation, ensuring alignment with the school’s vision. Bottom-up communication was evident in participatory meetings, where teachers and even students were invited to express their opinions. Horizontal communication occurred through collaboration among teachers, vice principals, and committees, strengthening internal cohesion. Lateral communication extended to parents, religious leaders, and community stakeholders, embedding child-friendly values within the broader social context. One teacher stated:

“Our principal often involves parents and community leaders in discussions about school programs. This makes us feel that the responsibility for creating a child-friendly environment is shared, not only by the school but also by the wider community.”(Teacher SW, SMP negeri 7 Kotabaru, Translated).

The emphasis on dialogical communication also ensured that students’ voices were heard, aligning with national guidelines that prioritize respect for children’s perspectives. As she explained:

“In our meetings, I encourage teachers and even students to express their opinions. This way, policies are not only implemented but also understood and accepted. Dialogue helps us build discipline and responsibility together.”(Mrs. NZ Principal SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru, Translated).

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Table 2. Cross-site Findings on Child-Friendly School Management, Teacher Competence Development, and Principal Communication Strategies

Focus Area	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru	SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru	Cross-Site Findings
Child-Friendly School Management Strategies	Physical: Relatively complete facilities (flexible classrooms,	Physical: Limited facilities (6 classrooms, computer	Both schools foster child-friendly environments through

Focus Area	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru	SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru	Cross-Site Findings
	<p>laboratories, library, inclusion room); routine cleanliness policy; challenges in disability accessibility (wheelchair paths, open drains).</p> <p>Psychological: Anti-bullying policy prioritized; routine counseling by guidance teachers; differentiated learning to ensure respect for student diversity.</p> <p>Social: Teachers emphasize non-violent communication; role modeling in daily interactions; involvement of parents and school committee; student voice through OSIS.</p> <p>Cultural: Character education, diversity appreciation, non-violent parenting campaigns; external training with child psychologists and Women & Child Protection Agency.</p>	<p>lab, prayer room, UKS, library); efficient space use; cleanliness maintained through routine programs.</p> <p>Psychological: Discipline enforced persuasively; routine religious practices and tolerance strengthen emotional safety; moral support builds student confidence.</p> <p>Social: Teachers emphasize polite communication; students engaged in cleanliness and extracurriculars (rudat dance, panting music, futsal); parental involvement present but limited.</p> <p>Cultural: Strong religious culture; environmental care through cleanliness and conservation programs; teachers as discipline models; achievements in arts and local culture reinforce identity.</p>	<p>cleanliness, safety, and inclusivity. SMPN 1 excels in infrastructure and external collaboration, while SMPN 7 emphasizes efficiency, religiosity, environmental care, and local culture.</p>
Teacher Competence Development	<p>Pedagogical: Differentiated and inclusive learning; emotionally safe classrooms; respect for diversity.</p> <p>Social: Non-violent communication; teachers as role models; active in learning communities; parental involvement in non-violent parenting campaigns.</p> <p>Personality: Ethical</p>	<p>Pedagogical: Lesson plans based on deep learning, inquiry, and differentiation; focus on critical thinking and collaboration.</p> <p>Social: Polite communication; structured student communication programs via routines, extracurriculars, and character building.</p> <p>Personality: Religious</p>	<p>Teacher competence development is multi-dimensional in both schools. SMPN 1 emphasizes inclusivity, emotional safety, and external training, while SMPN 7 emphasizes moral education, structured student communication, and local innovation.</p>

Focus Area	SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru	SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru	Cross-Site Findings
	role modeling; polite communication; discipline and responsibility emphasized daily. Professional: External training with psychologists and Women & Child Protection Agency; dissemination of training outcomes internally; innovation encouraged by school policy.	values, discipline, and responsibility instilled through routine worship and tolerance; teachers as moral figures. Professional: Internal reflection and collaboration; lesson plans aligned with school vision; principal encourages innovation rooted in local culture and projects.	
Principal Communication Strategies	Top-down: Disseminates formal policies (anti-bullying, inclusive learning). Bottom-up: Encourages teacher and staff input in meetings. Horizontal: Collaboration among teachers, staff, and committees. Lateral: Engages external stakeholders (psychologists, Women & Child Protection Agency, parents).	Top-down: Reinforces discipline and religious habituation. Bottom-up: Participatory meetings with teachers and students. Horizontal: Collaboration among teachers, vice principals, and committees. Lateral: Involves parents, religious leaders, and community stakeholders.	Both principals apply top-down, bottom-up, horizontal, and lateral communication. SMPN 1 focuses on anti-bullying and external collaboration, while SMPN 7 emphasizes religiosity, discipline, and cultural legitimacy.

The cross-site findings presented in Table reveal consistent patterns across both schools in terms of child-friendly school management, teacher competence development, and principal communication strategies. These patterns are not only derived from manual coding but are also corroborated by thematic analysis using NVivo 14. The software enabled systematic coding, visualization, and triangulation of data, thereby strengthening the validity of the results. For instance, the Word Cloud highlights that the most dominant terms across all data sources were *teacher*, *child*, *school*, *communication*, and *policy*.

The cross-site analysis and NVivo thematic exploration provide a validated overview of how child-friendly school environments are managed in SMP Negeri 1 and SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru. SMPN 1 emphasizes structured policies and external collaboration, while SMPN 7 highlights religiosity, environmental care, and community participation; however, both share the goal of creating safe and inclusive learning environments. NVivo visualizations confirm that key themes center on teachers, students, communication, and policy, with teachers and principals acting as central agents who translate policy into practice.

These findings indicate that child-friendly school governance is not a fixed model but a dynamic interaction of structural, pedagogical, and communicative dimensions shaped by context. Despite different strategies, both schools demonstrate adaptive approaches toward inclusive education. Based on these results, an adaptive conceptual model is proposed, integrating management strategies, teacher competence, and principal communication to support sustainable and child-friendly school environments.

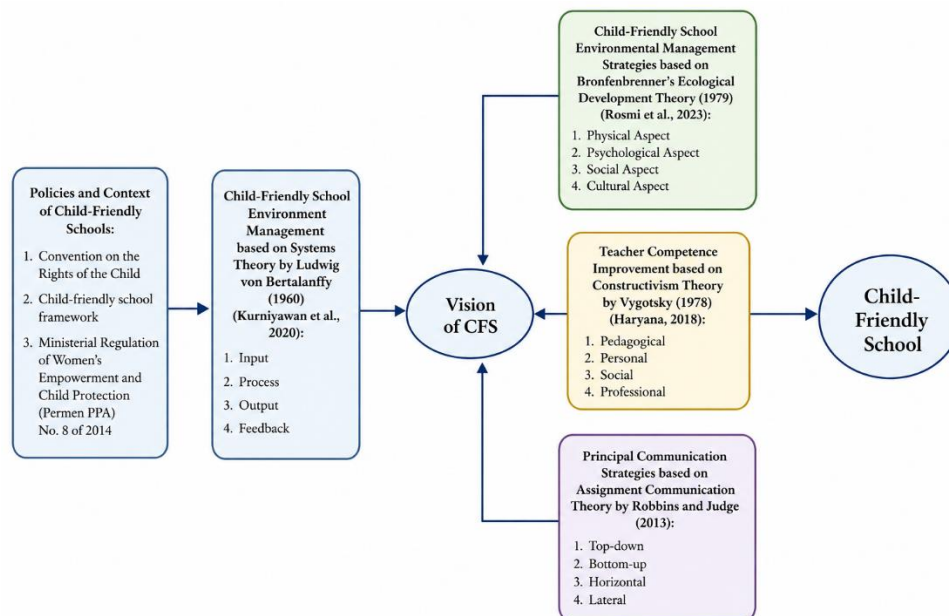


Figure 5. Conceptual Framework Diagram

D. Discussion

Child-friendly school management strategies identified in this study demonstrate that effective governance is inherently adaptive rather than uniform, shaped by institutional contexts and socio-cultural conditions. This finding aligns with global perspectives emphasizing that schools must ensure safety, inclusivity, and respect for children's rights regardless of contextual differences (UNICEF, 2015), while also remaining responsive to diverse social and cultural realities (OECD, 2020). In this regard, the study confirms that child-friendly school governance is not a single standardized model but a context-sensitive system requiring flexible policy implementation.

Empirically, the contrast between SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru and SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru reveals two complementary pathways. SMP Negeri 1 reflects a managerial and policy-driven orientation, characterized by structured regulations, infrastructural support, and external collaboration. This approach reinforces the importance of positive discipline and regulatory clarity as safeguards for children's rights (Nor & Aslamiah, 2025; Putikadyanto et al., 2024), while also supporting student motivation and achievement through anti-bullying policies and differentiated learning (Sumanti et al., 2022; Surlansyah & Abidin, 2023). In contrast, SMP Negeri 7 demonstrates a cultural-participatory pathway, where religious values, environmental awareness, and community engagement are central. This pattern reflects Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological theory, emphasizing the role of social environments in child development, and is consistent with studies highlighting the importance of cultural integration and student participation in sustaining inclusive education (Indraswati et al., 2020; Musdalifah et al., 2024).

Beyond these structural and cultural distinctions, teacher competence emerges as a multidimensional and context-sensitive factor encompassing pedagogical, social, personal, and professional domains. The findings confirm that teacher competence plays a decisive role in fostering safe, inclusive, and violence-free learning environments (Kholik et al., 2025; Masruroh et al., 2025; Nurunnisa et al., 2020). At SMP Negeri 1, competence development is strengthened through structured training, workshops, and external collaboration, reflecting a formal professional development model. Meanwhile, SMP Negeri 7 emphasizes cultural internalization, moral education, and adaptive innovation despite infrastructural limitations. This duality extends existing literature by demonstrating that effective teacher development must balance technical expertise with cultural responsiveness (Rahabav et al., 2021; Tazitabong, 2021), as well as integrate local values to strengthen character education (Aslamiah, 2020; Sumanti et al., 2022).

Equally critical is the role of principal communication, which functions as the integrative mechanism aligning policy, practice, and school culture. The findings indicate that principals employed multi-directional communication patterns—top-down, bottom-up, horizontal, and lateral—to ensure coherence among stakeholders (Anggorowati et al., 2020; Dubalan, 2025; Frølich et al., 2025). This supports transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes dialogical and participatory communication as essential for organizational effectiveness (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006), and reinforces the argument that teacher involvement in decision-making enhances institutional performance (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Nuriansyah et al., 2023). Importantly, communication in both schools is not merely administrative but also relational and value-driven, ensuring that child-friendly principles are internalized in everyday interactions.

The study shows that policy implementation, teacher competence, and principal communication are interdependent in adaptive child-friendly school governance. Implementation is shaped by formal rules and local culture, competence by institutional and socio-cultural contexts, and communication by leadership alignment. These findings

highlight that effective governance requires integrated, context-adaptive, and multidimensional support.

E. Implication

The findings of this study contribute significantly to educational administration, particularly in advancing the governance of child-friendly schools by demonstrating that effective school environments must integrate physical, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions to support holistic child development. The complementary strategies observed policy-driven and infrastructure-supported approaches at SMP Negeri 1 Kotabaru alongside cultural-participatory practices at SMP Negeri 7 Kotabaru reinforce Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective on the dynamic interaction between environment and child development (Dharma, 2023). At the same time, this study enriches the literature on teacher competence (Norlatifah et al., 2024; Surlansyah & Abidin, 2023) and leadership communication (Anggorowati et al., 2020; Sulistiyana, 2025) by evidencing that multi-directional communication patterns—top-down, bottom-up, horizontal, and lateral—are contextually adaptive and interdependent (Zhang et al., 2022). Practically, the findings suggest that schools should implement child-friendly climate audits to assess inclusivity and safety (Azizah et al., 2024; Bagea et al., 2025), strengthen reflective practice programs grounded in child rights to balance technical and socio-emotional competencies (Kholik et al., 2025; Masruroh et al., 2025), and adopt participatory communication strategies to build trust among stakeholders (Dubalan, 2025; Febriantina et al., 2025). At the policy level, implications extend to the need for district education authorities to integrate communicative leadership training into principal development programs (Albuni et al., 2022; Ismawiyah et al., 2024), while national policymakers must operationalize child-friendly school guidelines (Panduan Sekolah Ramah Anak, 2020) through measurable standards such as infrastructure audits, teacher competence frameworks, and participatory governance mechanisms, supported by institutionalized school-family-community partnerships (Epstein et al., 2018). Overall, this study affirms that sustainable child-friendly school governance requires a synergistic integration of environmental design, teacher competence, and adaptive leadership communication, thereby offering a multidimensional contribution across theoretical, practical, and policy domains and reinforcing the importance of holistic and participatory approaches in achieving inclusive and sustainable education.

F. Limitation and Suggestion for Further Research

Both schools' discourse centers on teacher-student relationships within child-friendly policy frameworks. The Word Tree shows that teachers act as facilitators of inclusive learning, builders of two-way communication, and non-discriminatory actors, underscoring their key role in shaping psychological and social environments. The Project Map highlights the interconnection of themes such as child-friendly policy, anti-bullying,

character education, and safe environments, involving principals, teachers, and school committees, indicating that management is both structural and participatory.

Meanwhile, the Triangulation Map confirms consistent narratives across stakeholders, reflecting stable and shared understandings. Overall, NVivo visualizations demonstrate that child-friendly school environments are sustained not only by formal policies but also through daily practices of communication, role modeling, and active participation by teachers and principals.

G. Conclusion

This study concludes that child-friendly school management is fundamentally context-adaptive, requiring schools to align their strategies with institutional capacities, cultural values, and leadership orientations. Effective governance emerges from the integration of three interdependent dimensions environmental management, teacher competence, and principal communication which collectively sustain safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. The findings emphasize that teacher competence must extend beyond technical skills to include pedagogical, social, personal, and professional capacities, supported by reflective, culturally responsive, and inclusive practices. Moreover, principal communication plays a pivotal role as an integrative mechanism, where the adaptive use of top-down, bottom-up, horizontal, and lateral approaches ensures alignment between policy and practice through active stakeholder engagement. Ultimately, this study proposes a context-adaptive multidimensional model that unifies structural regulation, cultural participation, and communicative leadership, offering both theoretical advancement in educational administration and practical guidance for developing sustainable, inclusive, and child-centered schooling systems.

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