

Challenges And Opportunities Of Jambi's Local Wisdom-Based Child-Friendly Schools In Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) guarantees every child's right to education and protection, with schools serving as a primary venue for fulfilling this right. The concept of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) embodies this right, particularly when contextualised through local socio-cultural values. In the culturally diverse province of Jambi, Indonesia, the integration of local wisdom within CFS initiatives serves as a medium for cultural preservation and character education from an early age. This study aims to explore practical strategies for enhancing institutional readiness in implementing CFS, drawing on local wisdom, and to identify the challenges and opportunities associated with its application in Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions across Jambi Province. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving school principals and teachers across 12 selected ECE institutions. The findings reveal that while most institutions have initiated culturally based innovations, significant improvements are still needed in institutional readiness, particularly in policy development, teacher competencies, and the provision of safe and inclusive learning environments. Furthermore, the integration of local wisdom into CFS has shown strong potential to reinforce children's character development, provided adequate facilities, institutional policies, teacher capacity building, and collaborative stakeholder involvement support it. These results suggest that a culturally grounded approach to child-friendly education can serve as a strategic model for sustainable, inclusive early childhood development.

Keywords: Child-Friendly Schools; Local Wisdom

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INTRODUCTION

Proper education humanises individuals by developing their fundamental potential to bravely and independently confront problems without feeling intimidated, while also enabling them to actualise their full potential. Every child has the right to receive an education with legal protection under applicable regulations, without discrimination (1). The concept of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) is one of the government's efforts to ensure the fulfilment of children's rights within educational institutions. A CFS is a formal, non-formal, or informal educational institution that supports children's participation in planning, policymaking, learning, supervision, and complaint mechanisms related to the fulfilment and protection of children's rights in education. It represents a concrete effort to guarantee, fulfil, and respect children's rights, while also protecting them from violence, discrimination, and other forms of mistreatment (2).

Efforts to ensure the fulfilment of children's rights have been regulated globally through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which Indonesia ratified via Presidential Decree No. 36 of 1990. National regulations such as the Minister of Women Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation No. 8 of 2014 on Child-Friendly School Policy, and Regulation No. 12 of 2011 on Child-Friendly Cities (Article 11), also reflect Indonesia's commitment to this cause (3; 4). These regulations are constitutionally supported by the 1945 Constitution, particularly Article 28C, and further elaborated upon in Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, Article 9, Paragraph 1.

Early childhood education (ECE) represents a foundational phase in developing children's character, values, and behaviour. It is a crucial time to foster each child's potential (5). The involvement of the surrounding environment and its influence during early childhood is vital; insufficient stimulation at this stage can hinder optimal development (6).

Therefore, implementing a CFS is essential to create a safe, inclusive learning environment that upholds children's rights. This requires the involvement of all government sectors and school environments to ensure that CFS is effectively facilitated in accordance with the developmental characteristics of early childhood learners (7). The concept of CFS emphasises that all school components, including ECE institutions, must ensure a child's holistic development without discrimination or violence (8).

In Indonesia, the implementation of child-friendly schools aligns with the mandate of the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 82 of 2015. However, the challenges in implementing this concept cannot be separated from the local socio-cultural context. This aligns with the Contextual Teaching and Learning theory, which emphasises the importance of connecting classroom learning with the real-life environment of the child, including their culture. Abraham Maslow's humanistic theory also suggests that child-friendly schools help establish environments that support the need for self-actualisation (9). Constructivist theory further strengthens this perspective by highlighting local wisdom as a constructive medium in learning and value development, rooted in local culture. Furthermore, the availability and quality of early education services have been associated with higher chances of developmental competence and a lower risk of mental health problems in children (10). Thus, local wisdom has a significant impact on the implementation of child-friendly education, particularly at the early childhood level.

Local wisdom can be understood as a body of knowledge, beliefs, and customary practices deemed valuable and worthy of preservation, formed through past cultural heritage (11; 12). It encompasses the local environment, traditions, regional strengths, and potentials, and can be developed into a set of educational rules or learning materials to achieve desirable educational goals (13). The province of Jambi is rich in local wisdom, featuring values such as *adat bersendi syara'*, *syara' bersendi Kitabullah*, a spirit of cooperation (*gotong royong*), deep respect for teachers and elders, and conflict resolution through consensus. These values are particularly relevant for character building and the development of child-friendly schools.

A thoughtful strategy is necessary to implement child-friendly schools at the ECE level, as this stage is crucial for a child's transition to elementary and subsequent education (14). Child-friendly education at this stage offers significant benefits: it enables children to address future-oriented challenges, fosters connections between families and communities, helps students develop strong personal character, and creates inclusive spaces for learning, creativity, and social interaction. These conditions foster mutual respect, a sense of security, and promote positive behavioural development (15). As such, local wisdom-based values must be instilled in children during early childhood to shape their identities and prepare them for the future.

Despite its importance, the planning of child-friendly schools still lacks integration of local wisdom. To address this, a culturally grounded approach is required, one that integrates local values and traditions into everyday school activities. This integration can foster a more humanistic, inclusive learning environment that better protects children's rights. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the implementation of child-friendly schools, including the opportunities and challenges encountered when integrating local wisdom, within early childhood education institutions in Jambi Province.

METHODS

This investigation employed a qualitative approach utilising a case study design, primarily aiming for an in-depth understanding of the phenomena through the lived experiences of field informants (16)

Study design and setting

The study was conducted in Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions in Jambi Province that had initiated the integration of local wisdom into their Child-Friendly School (CFS) concept, across four representative regencies/cities: Jambi City, Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency, Sungai Penuh City, and Muaro Bungo Regency.

Population, samples and sampling

A total of twelve ECE institutions participated, represented by thirty-six primary informants (the principal and two teachers from each institution). Purposive sampling was the selection technique used to select research sites, capturing the diversity of regional and cultural practices.

Instruments and criteria

The researchers functioned as the primary **human instruments**, supported by interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation formats. The main selection criterion was the institution's initiation of CFS implementation based on local wisdom.

Procedure and data collection

Data were systematically gathered through a combination of in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis (including RPPH and school programs). The procedure began with initial field observations regarding the implementation of CFS.

Statistical analysis

Data processing followed the established Miles and Huberman (17) model (data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification), with validity ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the Ethics Committee of the University of Jambi approved the protocol. All participants provided informed consent, and their participation was voluntary. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, ensuring that all responses and data were handled with utmost discretion and privacy.

RESULTS

This research was conducted in 12 Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions across four regencies/cities in Jambi Province: Jambi City, Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency, Sungai Penuh City, and Muaro Bungo Regency. The data collection took place between September 12 and October 15, 2025. These regions represent diverse socio-cultural contexts, which reflect the rich local wisdom unique to each area. Informants consisted of school principals and two teachers from each institution, selected due to their direct involvement in planning and implementing child-friendly learning activities. The regional diversity provides a comprehensive picture of the challenges and opportunities involved in implementing Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) in ECE institutions.

DISCUSSION

1. Identification of Effective Strategies in Implementing CFS Based on Local Wisdom **a. Jambi City**

As the capital and administrative centre of Jambi Province, Jambi City reflects the urban characteristics of governance and education. The three ECE institutions studied in this region, in general, had implemented child-friendly school practices in accordance with guidelines issued by the education authorities. This is evident from the alignment of school policies and environments with the national indicators for CFS (8).

Local culture serves as a foundation for school activities and plays an essential role in fostering character values. One institution implemented a nature-based learning model, which directly involved children with their surroundings. Activities included outdoor learning, educational visits to heritage sites such as the Siginjai

Museum and Muaro Jambi Temple, and participation in cultural events on national or local holidays. Examples include children participating in anniversary parades for their province or city, wearing traditional clothing, competing in traditional games, and performing regional songs and dances.

However, observations revealed that many teachers in Jambi City lacked a deep understanding of the CFS concept. This was attributed to limited access to structured and continuous training from the government. There is a need for professional development programs to equip teachers with the ability to design learning aligned with child-friendly principles and local wisdom. Although school facilities were generally adequate, maintenance issues posed challenges. Some resources were available, but they were either incomplete or damaged due to insufficient support for facility upkeep.

Student participation, a core element of the CFS model, was actively promoted, particularly during classroom activities involving cooperative values and cultural heritage. Folktales, traditional toys like congklak and bakiak, and no-equipment games such as cengkleng, ular naga panjang, and jarak-jarakan were integrated into the learning process. One school also hosted regular cultural performances, providing children with opportunities to explore their artistic and cultural identities.

Parental involvement was vital in supporting these initiatives. Parents were informed during meetings and engaged through parenting programs aimed at optimising child development. The surrounding community also contributed by maintaining a safe school environment and offering traditional art spaces, such as batik studios, as educational venues.

b. Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency

Located on the eastern coast of Jambi Province, bordering the South China Sea, Tanjung Jabung Barat is predominantly inhabited by Malay communities, as well as the Bugis and Banjar ethnic groups. The CFS model has been implemented in ECE institutions studied here since 2021, guided by official directives from local education authorities. School environments, rules, and policies were generally aligned with the national indicators for child-friendly schools (8).

Teacher competence and knowledge regarding CFS were relatively strong due to targeted training programs in several schools. However, these trainings had not reached all teachers, particularly newer staff members, which presents an ongoing challenge (18). Facilities were available but not optimally maintained or used, highlighting a gap between provision and effective utilisation.

Local wisdom played a vital role in shaping child-friendly learning environments. The region's maritime culture inspired educational activities such as congklak kerang (seashell board games) and kerang-catching dance, as well as seafood cooking demonstrations. These activities enhanced children's motor skills, creativity, and cultural identity while reinforcing community values such as cooperation (13)

Tanjung Jabung Barat is also a significant producer of coconuts. Teachers incorporated natural materials, such as coconut husks and shells, into art and science experiments, embracing a nature-based learning approach. Furthermore, the traditional performance known as Arakan Sahur, featuring percussion instruments, was taught in schools with support from cultural professionals, promoting musical heritage and child participation.

These findings highlight the region's strong potential in implementing CFS through the use of maritime culture, natural resources, and regional arts. However,

further capacity building for teachers and better utilisation of available resources remain necessary.

c. Sungai Penuh City

Sungai Penuh, located in the western part of Jambi Province, is known for its rich natural and cultural heritage. In the context of this study, the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) in Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions in Sungai Penuh is still in its early stages. Current practices are primarily based on general recommendations from the local government, without comprehensive and regular training for teachers or formalised written policies. This situation reveals a lack of consistency and sustainability in CFS implementation. As stated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (8), regulatory support and teacher capacity development are key factors in achieving effective child-friendly education.

Despite these limitations, some schools have begun adjusting specific CFS indicators by providing basic facilities that ensure child safety and comfort. Teachers are also beginning to observe and adapt their learning environments to child-friendly standards, providing students with opportunities for safe participation and positive early learning experiences (18).

Sungai Penuh is often referred to as "A Piece of Heaven on Earth" due to its scenic mountains, fertile volcanic soil, and abundant natural resources. This cultural identity is deeply embedded in the local community and serves as a valuable educational resource. Teachers have started introducing traditional arts, such as the Rentak Kudo dance, a traditional dance from the Kerinci region rich in social values, cooperation, and discipline. These traditional art forms not only reinforce children's cultural identity but also contribute to the development of motor skills, creativity, and early character formation (19).

Additionally, teachers are introducing outdoor learning activities, including educational visits to orange orchards, pine forests, and agricultural sites. These hands-on experiences help children learn about nature, local livelihoods, and environmental stewardship. This approach aligns with (20), who emphasised that nature-based learning fosters a child's connection to their environment and supports socio-emotional development.

Cultural and environmental learning activities, such as traditional costume parades and demonstrations on tea leaf processing, demonstrate that schools are making efforts to incorporate character education, creativity, and cultural preservation into the learning process. Thus, CFS implementation in Sungai Penuh demonstrates a locally contextualised approach, providing children with holistic development opportunities within a safe, inclusive, participatory, and culturally rich learning environment.

d. Muara Bungo Regency

Muara Bungo Regency, situated in the western part of Jambi Province and bordering directly on West Sumatra Province, has a strategic geographic position and a multicultural society comprising both indigenous residents and migrants. Based on the research findings from several ECE institutions in this region, the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) remains suboptimal. Only a few institutions possessed formal CFS policy documents, such as child protection procedures and child-friendly school regulations. In most cases, CFS practices were initiated independently by teachers without support from structured institutional systems. This indicates weak school management in ensuring the fulfilment and protection of children's rights within the educational environment. These findings align with UNICEF (18), which

emphasises that written policies are essential for the sustainability of CFS implementation in educational institutions.

Regarding teacher competency, no specialised training on CFS had been conducted in Muaro Bungo. Teachers received only general guidelines, without technical assistance or follow-up training. As a result, their understanding of child-friendly teaching strategies and violence prevention measures remains limited. This affects classroom management approaches, which ideally should prioritise anti-violent and non-discriminatory principles. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture's CFS Guidelines (8), enhancing educators' capacity is crucial for creating safe, comfortable, and inclusive learning environments. Unsurprisingly, instances of verbal, physical, and psychological violence were still reported, which undermines children's sense of safety at school.

In terms of facilities, most ECE institutions in Muaro Bungo provided basic infrastructure to support child development. However, in private schools, limited budgets restricted the development and maintenance of facilities. Moreover, the introduction of local culture and wisdom to children had not been fully implemented, partly due to the population's diverse backgrounds and the lack of efforts to strengthen local cultural identity.

Nevertheless, some schools had begun incorporating culturally based learning activities, such as traditional games, regional dance performances, local song competitions, and cultural parades, during national or regional celebrations. These efforts are considered initial steps in preserving character values and local culture within the early childhood education sector. These challenges align with the findings of Rachman (21), who noted that resource disparities and the weak integration of local cultural contexts are significant obstacles to implementing CFS in rural areas of Indonesia.

The evaluation of Child-Friendly School (CFS) implementation in the regions of Jambi City, Tanjung Jabung Barat, Sungai Penuh, and Muaro Bungo indicates that all areas have taken concrete steps to adopt the six key indicators of CFS. These include the existence of school policies that support child-friendly practices, the implementation of child-centred learning processes, the availability of appropriate facilities and infrastructure, child participation, the involvement of parents and communities, and the application of child protection mechanisms within schools. However, the level of achievement among these regions varies.

Jambi City and Tanjung Jabung Barat have reached a more advanced stage of implementation, as evidenced by the availability of written school policies, relatively adequate facilities, and the creative use of local cultural elements in education. These two regions have integrated local wisdom into school practices through nature-based learning, traditional games, and regional arts. In these areas, local culture serves not only as a source of learning but also as a means to strengthen the children's character and identity.

On the other hand, the implementation of CFS in Sungai Penuh and Muaro Bungo is still in the process of strengthening both policy and teacher capacity. In many cases, the practice of child-friendly principles in these two areas is primarily driven by teacher initiatives. It has not yet been fully institutionalised through formal policies or structured programs. This results in less consistent implementation and a greater dependency on the personal commitment of individual educators.

Nevertheless, all four regions show a strong potential for promoting Child-Friendly Schools based on local wisdom. The integration of cultural elements such as

the Rentak Kudo dance, nature-based activities, cultural parades, local food demonstrations, and traditional games reflects an emerging awareness of the importance of culturally responsive education. Furthermore, the social environment in these communities, characterised by religious values, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and active community involvement, provides a strategic opportunity to strengthen the role of families and communities in protecting children's rights and well-being in educational settings.

However, several common challenges exist across all regions. Among the most significant are the lack of systematic teacher training and the limited availability of funding to support infrastructure development, particularly in private or rural schools. To address these challenges, it is essential to enhance teacher capacity through continuous professional development, reinforce institutional policies through formal documentation, and foster stronger collaboration between schools, local governments, and community stakeholders. With these supports in place, the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools grounded in local wisdom has excellent potential to become more optimal and sustainable across the four districts and cities.

2. Challenges and Opportunities of Child-Friendly Schools Based on Local Wisdom.

Based on the identification and evaluation discussed above, it can be concluded that the main opportunities for implementing Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) in Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions across Jambi Province lie in the strength of local cultural values such as cooperation (gotong royong), courtesy, and religious piety within the community. These values provide a fundamental foundation for shaping child-friendly behaviour and fostering a positive learning environment.

The implementation of CFS based on local wisdom in ECE institutions across the province of Jambi shows varying levels of achievement between regions. In areas like Tanjung Jabung Barat, CFS programs have been more structured, supported by formal policies and teacher training. In contrast, regions such as Sungai Penuh and Muaro Bungo are still in the early stages of implementation, with activities often limited to general directives from local governments and lacking strong policy backing. These disparities impact the readiness of institutions to meet the standard requirements of CFS, particularly in areas such as planning, educator training, and the design of safe and inclusive learning environments.

The challenges also stem from the uneven understanding among educators regarding child protection principles and from the limited availability of infrastructure, especially in private ECE institutions or those located in rural areas. Nonetheless, the rich cultural heritage and local wisdom found in Jambi present strategic opportunities to strengthen the CFS initiative and make it more meaningful for children. Each region possesses unique cultural identities that can be integrated into the learning process ranging from nature-based games and traditional arts in Tanjung Jabung Barat, to the Rentak Kudo dance and educational excursions to natural sites in Sungai Penuh, and traditional performing arts and local games in Muaro Bungo.

Incorporating these elements of local wisdom not only makes the learning process more contextually relevant and enjoyable but also reinforces character development, emotional maturity, and children's awareness of their environment. These are fully aligned with child protection principles and culturally embedded education models.

With strong support from local governments, active community involvement, and children's natural interest in their cultural heritage, the development of Child-

Friendly Schools in Jambi holds significant potential for long-term sustainability. Key measures that need to be taken include expanding teacher training programs, reinforcing school policies with formal documentation, and increasing the involvement of parents and cultural communities in educational activities.

When schools can effectively address these challenges and leverage the strengths of local wisdom, early childhood education in Jambi can become a model for implementing Child-Friendly Schools that are not only safe and inclusive but also instill a deep sense of identity and appreciation for cultural heritage from an early age. Therefore, it is essential to develop systematic strategies through ongoing training, school policy reform rooted in local cultural values, and close collaboration among educational institutions, communities, and local governments. Conceptually, this study reaffirms that local wisdom-based approaches can serve as a primary driver of sustainable Child-Friendly School implementation, provided they are applied through well-structured, culturally grounded strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the implementation of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) based on local wisdom in Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions across Jambi Province shows varying dynamics across different regions. The main opportunities lie in the richness of local cultural values such as cooperation (*gotong royong*), politeness, and religious piety, which serve as the foundation for children's character development. These values have been incorporated into learning activities and social interactions within schools, although often in simple forms and not yet structured comprehensively.

In terms of strategy, most institutions have initiated culturally contextual innovations, such as traditional games, community-based activities, and learning through folklore. However, the findings also reveal that institutional readiness needs to be strengthened, particularly in areas related to school policies, teacher competencies, and the availability of facilities that support a safe and inclusive learning environment. The evaluation highlights that the most effective strategy for improving institutional readiness is through community and family engagement in instilling local cultural values. This approach fosters a sense of ownership toward the CFS program and helps build a participatory school culture.

Therefore, more systematic planning is needed to ensure that the implementation of CFS is not limited to short-term programs, but becomes an integral part of the school's institutional culture. Overall, the study confirms that implementing CFS based on local wisdom has significant potential for enhancing character education in ECE settings, provided it is supported by policy development, teacher capacity building, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Nonetheless, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding policy formulation, teacher competence, and infrastructure support. A planned strategy is needed that involves community participation, ongoing training, and the integration of local cultural values into school policies and practices.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE

"This study used artificial intelligence (AI) tools and methodologies in the following capacities (**CHOOSE & EDIT AS APPROPRIATE**):

Data preprocessing: AI-assisted techniques [state the technique(s)] were applied to clean, select, and transform the data, preparing the dataset for analysis.

PLUS

We confirm that the authors critically reviewed all AI-assisted processes to ensure the integrity and reliability of the results. The authors solely made the final decisions and interpretations presented in this article."

"We hereby confirm that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools or methodologies were utilised at any stage of this study, including during data collection, analysis, visualisation or manuscript preparation. All work presented in this study was conducted manually by the authors without the assistance of AI-based tools or systems".

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