

# PROMOTING CHILD-FRIENDLY EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A COMMUNITY SERVICE PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract** - *Child-friendly education is an important program that provides children from various socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds with safe, comfortable, and nonviolent learning activities at the family, school, and community. This community service-based article aims to describe (1) the fundamental reasons for revitalizing child-friendly education and (2) the critical principles and elements that allow children to develop their potential in the digital age fully. This program used a dialogic approach to deliver the topic under discussion, involving twenty participants, including parents and teenagers, in Mlese, Klaten Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. The dialogic interaction takes the form of (1) presenting material related to child-friendly education in the digital age, (2) investigating problems in small groups based solely on subtopics, and (3) openly discussing solutions to such problems. The results of data analysis from this interactive dialogue affirmed that human-to-human oral interactions enable problem-solving. Children can develop essential values of honesty, dignity, respect, and safety when key ideas and components of child-friendly education are incorporated into their school, schools and community-based platforms.*

Keywords: *child-friendly education, learning environments, neighborhood units, nonviolent learning.*

**Abstrak** - *Pendidikan ramah anak merupakan program penting yang memberikan anak-anak dari berbagai latar belakang sosio-kultural dan etnis rasa aman, nyaman, dan tanpa kekerasan ketika mengikuti kegiatan pembelajaran di keluarga, sekolah, dan masyarakat. Artikel berbasis pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan (1) alasan mendasar revitalisasi pendidikan ramah anak dan (2) prinsip serta elemen kritis yang memungkinkan anak-anak mengembangkan potensinya di era digital secara penuh. Program ini menggunakan pendekatan dialogis untuk menyampaikan topik yang sedang dibahas, melibatkan dua puluh peserta, termasuk orang tua dan remaja, di Mlese, Kabupaten Klaten, Provinsi Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Interaksi dialogis ini berisikan (1) kegiatan menyajikan materi terkait pendidikan ramah anak di era digital, (2) menginvestigasi permasalahan dalam kelompok kecil berdasarkan subtopik, dan (3) mendiskusikan solusi terhadap permasalahan secara terbuka. Hasil analisis data dari dialog interaktif ini menunjukkan bahwa interaksi lisan antarmanusia memungkinkan pemecahan masalah. Anak-anak dapat mengembangkan nilai-nilai penting yakni kejujuran, martabat, rasa hormat, dan keamanan ketika ide-ide kunci dan komponen pendidikan ramah anak dimasukkan ke dalam platform berbasis sekolah, rumah dan masyarakat.*

Kata kunci: *lingkungan pembelajaran, pembelajaran tanpa kekerasan, pendidikan ramah anak RT.*



## A. INTRODUCTION

Child-friendly education refers to programs emphasizing the strengths of the family, community, and school environment to provide children with a sense of security and comfort, such as local parks that positively facilitate children's social activities (Loebach & Gilliland, 2019). Based on the UNICEF convention on children's rights (Fitriani et al., 2021) and ("UNICEF's Child-friendly Cities Initiative," 2019), children all over the world must be protected from abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation of their rights, as well as the right to participate in the wide-ranging community, family, and school activities. This is essential in preparing children to take on responsibilities later in life that may require adaptability to major changes (Barnett et al., 2018).

Child-friendly education aims to ensure and fulfill children's rights (Banko-Bal & Guler-Yildiz, 2021) in all aspects of life in a planned and responsible way. The main principle is non-discrimination, protecting their interests, the right to life, and respect for their sustainability. Article 4 of Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection states that children have the right to live, grow, develop, and participate following their dignity and worth. According to Law Number 20 of 2013, education is a deliberate and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process in which children actively develop their potential as they have religious or spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, and noble character (Zulfiati et al., 2021), and the basic skills they require for society, nation, and state.

The driving force of child-friendly education is the development of children's interests, talents, and abilities, supported by a safe and comfortable family environment, community, and school that can foster creativity, innovation, communication, and collaboration. Additionally, child-friendly education leads to a tolerant attitude, protection of others, collaboration, and love of peace. Such core values are an integral part of the principles of character education, which have aided in keeping children's education on track.

Child-friendly education necessitates the collaboration of numerous parties, including families, schools, and communities, which serve as the tri-center of education in Ki Hadjar Dewantara's outlook (Zulfiati et al., 2021). The family environment must support, protect, and provide children with a sense of security and comfort, which will significantly aid them in discovering their identity. The family is the first and most crucial informal learning environment for children, serving a pivotal role in protection, mutual love, empathy, self-expression, respect, and pride. Children tend to imitate, try new things, and seek recognition of their existence in their surroundings. The preservation of local children's games illuminates the synergy of pedagogical practice, local culture (King, 2020), and family-based activities enriched with social interactions.

Schools must serve as learning environments where children can feel safe and comfortable while participating in social and scientific activities. School is a formal setting where children can develop a sense of caring, democracy, and mutual respect. How a school develops students' cognitive, social, and emotional abilities significantly impacts their mental development and character. Inequality in this educational pattern will result in a generation lacking a strong and

resilient mentality and character. After family and school, society shapes children's character through cooperation, tolerance, and mutual respect, becoming an important educational place for them to grow. However, school violence and bullying (Berndtsson, 2019; Horton & Forsberg, 2019; Thornberg, 2019) against children in different settings constitute moral degradation, the most severely affected societal violations worth considering.

The implementation of child-friendly education relies entirely on modern technology's advancement, which has dramatically increased in recent years. Technology has become necessary in children's social and educational lives, particularly in school-based learning (Deepa et al., 2022). Most children have access to computers, the internet, cell phones, video games, and many other modern cutting-edge technologies. With the determining role of modern technology in children's lives, there is always the primary concern about its impact on their development, such as sedentary lifestyles and distracted participation in activities (Rocha & Nunes, 2020). Besides, the growing amount of time children spend using modern technology has raised constant worries regarding the overuse of touchscreens.

Child-friendly education in practice can improve children's protection from all types of abuses primarily directed at their rights, identities, and self-positioning development. The vibrant life of children in linked communities depends on how child-friendly education can strengthen the central positioning of sustainability principles – fostering non-discriminatory education, protecting individual rights, and creating golden learning opportunities in conducive, safe, and comfortable learning environments. Alternately, character education is a significant boost in achieving appropriate child-friendly education with its core values, such as collaboration, creativity, love of peace and harmony, and mutual respect, to name a few. From this vantage point, this article has two main goals: (a) to describe the reasons for the revitalization of child-friendly education and (b) to identify its critical elements in the digital age, allowing local communities to acknowledge fundamental principles to promote them.

## **B. METHOD**

This community service program featured dialogic interaction, with 20 participants in Mlese, Klaten Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia, comprising parents and teenagers, holding a dialogue after the speaker gave a presentation on February 22, 2020. The steps in this dialogic approach (Foster, 2009) include (1) presenting material related to child-friendly education in the digital age, (2) investigating problems in small groups based merely on subtopics, and (3) openly discussing solutions to problems related to child-friendly education such as cases of violence against children (Rubenstein & Stark, 2017), learning environments, and places to live that are not comfortable and safe for children.

Two questions have been raised when investigating this problem: Why is child-friendly education highly vital in the digital age? What critical elements are revitalized to ensure child-friendly education amid less-than-optimal attention from families, schools, and communities toward children? The questions encourage participation, attitude, interaction (Watkins, 2017), sharing of

experiences, and critical reflection on problems solved collectively in line with dialogue principles. The participants contributed solutions to problems, shared their perspectives, and further investigated child-friendly education in the digital age, which highly depends on their interaction level (Vasilyeva, 2015). In sharing moments, information pertinent to child-friendly education is aligned with the role of all parties in building a meaningful dialogue. The likelihood of establishing a discussion in forming platforms of answers to significant problems creates space and opportunity for opinion, logic, and dialogue in a more participatory and open framework.

Clavel (2019) asserted that the data examined in this interactive dialogue emerged from (1) human-to-human oral interactions, (2) verbal content, and (3) documented topical relationships in the form of words, phrases, or sentences from the participants. Moreover, context-specific features of evident data (Richmond et al., 2020) were analyzed from the perspective of children's problems in the child-friendly education framework focusing on service-learning and community engagement (Mtawa, 2019b). The former is primarily concerned with approaches that enable students to put classroom theory into real-world practice in community neighborhoods by providing public services to meet community needs (Resch & Schrittester, 2021). The latter demonstrates how students assuming social responsibility are committed to human welfare and uphold civic values to raise awareness while collaborating with external communities in promoting human development (Mtawa, 2019a).

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Reasons for Revitalizing Child-friendly Education in the Digital Age**

Children are the nation's most valuable assets and have become the focus of scholarly attention. Every child has the fundamental right to a safe and enjoyable education that promotes human development. In contrast, hard facts about child abuse cases have engendered a sensitive issue in the digital age. Various cases of violence against children are a glimpse of the fact that they are highly vulnerable to becoming victims of gender-biased school policies, susceptible to verbal and nonverbal abuse that has the potential to harm them emotionally and socially. Every act of violence against children can potentially violate their fundamental rights in public education, families, and communities. As a result, they are in a difficult position and under pressure because they are victims of violent crimes.

Schools should carry out the noble vision of education for children by protecting, humanizing, educating, and developing their character to make them more resilient. Indicators of child-friendly education are policy lines that always support students' comfort, safety, and excellence. In other words, the task of education is to protect children from the hidden dangers of violent situations. Schools provide spaces for everyone to feel safe, comfortable, and exempt from violence. Hence, Yuniastuti & Hasibuan (2019) point out that child-friendly education necessitates a supporting system involving nature and human interactions (family, children, communities), abiotic (climate, water), and biotic (flora, fauna), allowing them to enhance the capacity, promote and preserve child-friendly education co-existence. Nevertheless, another study's findings (Rini et

al., 2018) revealed that those in charge of child-friendly education disregard the availability of the child-friendly neighborhood unit criteria in primary schools. Consequently, most students prefer to attend schools outside their immediate neighborhoods, which exposes them to significantly higher emission levels each day as they commute.

Likewise, children are then positioned to be linked to severe violations. Schools provide not only a physical environment, which has been the trend of education in the digital age, but also the social interaction that essentially promotes the development of civilization and the stimulation of social, emotional, and spiritual intelligence among children, parents, teachers, school staff, and connected communities, resulting in a child-friendly school entity. UNICEF noted that child-friendly education must prioritize tolerance, gender sensitivity, and inclusiveness to meet the educational needs of millions of students pursuing education ("UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Initiative," 2019). In practice, empowerment and integrity are the pillars of the principle that students are liberated from various forms of violence, insensitivity, and intolerance.

Children become actively involved in diverse educational activities and express themselves inside and outside the classroom. On the ground, this educational model has consistently promoted the principles of peace and harmony. Peace, cooperation, good communication, and the development of empathy, tolerance, and love should all be encouraged in the school environment. The social atmosphere should foster collaboration, participation, patience, and socio-cultural understanding. Given this top priority, nonviolence education is transformed into a shared social responsibility that prioritizes the teachings of love, peace, and kindness. Abusive communication and acts of violence, hatred, and vengeance are not allowed in children's educational environments because they negatively impact students' verbal and nonverbal development and can potentially diminish human dignity physically and mentally.

Children victims of verbal and physical violence have witnessed how human values are violated, allowing for severe conditions, such as disappointment, depression, withdrawal from social interactions, and other drastic behavioral changes. As a result, schools must break the cycle of violence against children, which includes coercion of children, corporal punishment, bullying, and beatings. Therefore, public education is expected to be proactive in providing anti-violence education services to children through practical and inspiring activities or agendas. In addition, the values of character education must be disseminated. Still, insulting words and symbols of violent expressions in the form of visualizations or caricatures must be removed, and the use of polite, persuasive, and positive language is resistant to avoid vulgar language that contains violence.

Parents, teachers, governments, and young people themselves are concerned that digital technology and social media exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression, disrupt sleep patterns, and lead to cyberbullying, violence, and harm to children's body images. Several countries are taking steps to address such issues. For example, the law prohibits South Korean children from playing online games requiring a resident registration number without parental permission, mainly between midnight and 6:00 a.m. The UK government is concerned about how social media affects children

and how much screen time is appropriate for them. Mobile phone use is prohibited in certain areas, such as playgrounds for children. On the other hand, children should be exposed to digital storytelling for early childhood education, which provides learning resources for blending pedagogical and practical frames, innovations, and adequately implemented narratives (Rahiem, 2021).

### **Principles of Child-friendly Education**

Schools must be able to present themselves as a medium rather than simply a fun place for children to learn. The world of children is associated with the "play" scheme. Children are likely to engage in the process of learning and working while playing. School is a playground where healthy competition is introduced into teaching and learning. Schools must provide spaces for children's creativity, creation, and expression. The goal is to create a dialectic between the values that children are taught. The educational setting should be a place where children can learn about life. School programs should be adapted to the child's world, which means that the program should be tailored to the stages of growth and development of children. In this sense, children should not be forced to do anything, but with this program, they are naturally encouraged to explore themselves.

Whatever the activity, child-friendly education will not impede the children's growth and development, including their social, mental, and physical growth. These abilities can frequently be applied simultaneously, as in playing activities. On the other hand, active involvement can help build the character values children should have. The potential of children is encouraged and empowered by families, schools, and communities through educational programs such as TV programs, radio education programs (Barnett et al., 2018), and counseling for children of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Families, schools, and communities must, of course, implement programs that encourage children's potential to expand and develop if they are to help them realize their full potential. Building a child-friendly educational environment is challenging since families, schools, and the community must develop appropriate programs and a conducive learning atmosphere.

It is necessary to put into effect Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection and Law No. 20 of 2003 on National Education, which allow the government to draft rules under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Increasing the implementation of the Child Protection Act following the learning process involves all stakeholders in the child-friendly education world. Organizing education and learning can help students behave more responsibly. Academic achievement, ethical and noble behavior, high learning motivation, creativity, discipline, responsibility, and character as a citizen, citizen, and nation are all educated behavior.

### **Critical Elements of Child-friendly Education in the Digital Age**

The re-articulation of such insights opens up opportunities for the application of humanist education in paying attention to children's cognitive, affective, social, and metacognitive development to meet educational needs, namely the preservation of character education values in the digital era. The evidence indicates that harsh treatment, indifference, or permissiveness of parents

or other family members can lead to violence towards school children. Through TV shows, online games, and the unrestrained, routine, and unchecked dissemination of unfavorable information from social media, other violent behaviors on the surface are contributing to a culture of violence. Due to inherited traits that cause violence, the pattern of violence after violence frequently engenders rudeness, extreme aggression, rudeness, sadism, and, even worse, bad temper.

Table 1. Critical principles and elements of child-friendly education in the digital age

No	Critical Principles and Elements	Child-friendly Education Realization	Resources
1	Humanist aspects of child-friendly education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Promote nonviolent learning environments, violence against children in institutionalized care, and family-based care for children</li> <li>b. Enhance children's engagement and protection system in youth care activities</li> <li>c. Guarantee children's safety feelings in building relations with adults</li> <li>d. Evolve affective, cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-emotional domains of learning in different settings that support children or students in developing their potential</li> <li>e. Enact critical principles of children's rights as learners</li> </ul>	<p>De Bruin Cardoso et al. (2020); Sherr et al. (2017)</p> <p>Rap et al. (2019)</p> <p>Sellers et al. (2020)</p> <p>Rosqvist et al. (2021); Zarifsanaiey et al. (2022); Nakamichi et al. (2021)</p> <p>Quennerstedt (2016)</p>
2	Relating character education values to child-friendly education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Foster caring toward children, respect their rights</li> <li>b. Put forward character education through the praxis of learning</li> <li>c. Assume moral responsibility for earlier years of education, and</li> <li>d. To be fair in setting child-friendly education policies and anticipating inequality in education</li> </ul>	<p>Dyer et al. (2022); Morrison &amp; Houghton (2022)</p> <p>Hart (2022)</p> <p>Solvason et al. (2022)</p> <p>Bøyum (2014)</p>

Ruthless violence against children reflects the failure of public education, families, and communities to enforce social rules or norms. More seriously, these three pillars of education are considered weak in preventing the emergence of the seeds of violence that threaten the survival of society, namely repeated violence, lax law enforcement, control, and low social responsibility. The task of education, families, and communities is to develop and implement anti-violence education policies at the home, school, and community levels. Teachers, parents, and citizens, for example, should monitor children when they are watching videos on the media. More importantly, the likelihood of protecting children and reducing criticism toward them is what adults can do consistently. These monitoring efforts seek to support policy systems in specific communities where masculine ideological principles should be eliminated in that it unnecessarily leads to violence and gender stigma (Hogan et al., 2022). The table 1 highlights the previously discussed insights.

### **Child-friendly Education Literacy: Local Community-based Perspectives**

The group discussion results show that the literacy level of local communities in Mlese, Klaten Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia, in terms of child-friendly education, is relatively low. Surprisingly, 5 of the 20 participants (25%) did not understand the definition and implementation of child-friendly education. The main components that highlight the low literacy level in child-friendly education include fulfilling children's fundamental rights, protecting them from various forms of violence, and creating a comfortable and safe learning environment, playground, and community livelihood. Furthermore, news about violence against children in schools, communities, and other public places is an iceberg effect of the low implementation of child-friendly education. This literacy paradox contributes to the ongoing reality that mentoring, direction, counseling, and knowledge dissemination about child-friendly education play a central role in three educational centers: family, school, and community.

The information literacy crisis is another indication of how crucial and urgent it is to promote literacy for the community by holding conceptual discussions elicited from the findings of factual information analysis to build understanding, which requires the involvement of students, scholars, and the media (Haider & Sundin, 2022). Facts about child-friendly education literacy align with how civil society life involves mediation when sharing information and knowledge, discussing local issues, debating, and finding solutions using interconnected platforms (Mihailidis, 2018). In this timely scheme, the socialization of literacy activities significantly impacts the preservation of character education values, fundamental values of peace, and harmonization. In reality, the participation of various parties is expected to strengthen the performance of civic actions, which become an integral part of the child-friendly education movement. Therefore, the time has come for media literacy (Lewis, 2021) to massively intensify action related to the dissemination of information about child-friendly education so that the noble ideals of education that respect children's rights, autonomy, and independence remain deeply ingrained in the traditions and practices of people's daily lives.



The remaining 15 participants (75%) knew that the principle and practical application of child-friendly education deal with connected communities, particularly the collective efforts to address regional needs and defend children's rights regarding the design framework for creating child-based education. The world of children's education should prioritize the noble vision of sustainability that upholds stability and desired quality, and it is crucial to have educational facilities that combine the social, spiritual, and cultural aspects. In the tri-center circle of education involving family, school, and community, adults in wide-ranging communities play formal and informal roles in educating children and providing them with packages of safe and comfortable educational activities.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Child-friendly education is one option for empowering how children in the digital age can realize feasible engagement and care for character education values. In response to the rising rate of violence against children, this educational policy scheme promotes children's long-term development in safe and comfortable learning environments. Families, schools, and communities contribute to incorporating child-friendly education because they synergize in upholding humanist aspects of education that connect to character education values in the digital age. Without these education policies, early childhood education will never preserve core values involving firm commitment and efforts from neighborhood units by which supporting systems of child-friendly education accommodate children's human rights and learning needs.

As the nation's future human capital, children are vulnerable to various forms of violence and the unavoidable consequences that will follow. They frequently become silent victims of violence due to authorities' weakest standing positions in protecting them from violent acts in families, schools, and linked communities, as well as uncondusive residences, town facilities, and suburban learning environments. They have the same fundamental rights as adults to pursue education at multiple levels of their learning years and the ability to develop their potential effectively, socially, emotionally, cognitively, and meta-cognitively. The likelihood of administering early childhood education equality is a need-it-right-now scheme that helps them achieve maximum learning development. They significantly enhance their skills and competencies to prepare for a bright future.

The findings of this community service article are subject to the application of child-friendly education that supports how emerging actions are taken seriously to combat the massively rising violence against children, violations of their rights, and sexual harassment worth effectively preventing. At the policy level, the importance of child-friendly education paves the way for local governments to construct an educational system that ensures safety, total protection, and comfort for children learning in educational settings. This policy embodiment can foster a standing position of how putting theories into practice necessitates all parties striving to eliminate the harmful effects of violations against children while promoting child-friendly education.

Socio-cultural implications confirm how child-friendly education can help maintain harmony and peace in a social setting rich in multiculturalism. Visible public education schemes promote the potential cultivation of socio-cultural values, norms, and ethics related to the quality of life in interconnected communities. In the long run, all citizens should follow such underlying principles because they are embedded in sustainable development and impacted options for implementing the overall optimization of nonviolent education, creating harmonious and peaceful people's lives.

Future researchers and others interested in the same field are encouraged to participate in community service activities that broaden the potential contributions of child-friendly education to pedagogical principles applicable to curriculum and local government educational policies. Adopting child-friendly education is evident in socio-cultural environments where all violations of children's rights require considerable actions, including law enforcement and the possibility of local community engagement to foster indigenous culture, knowledge, and values.

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