

## Implementing Child-Friendly School Policy in Bullying Prevention and Intervention: A Case Study of a Rural Primary School in East Lombok, Indonesia

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**Abstract**—Bullying in primary schools threatens children's safety and well-being, and Indonesia reports a high proportion of bullied students. Although the Child-Friendly School (CFS) policy and the regulation on the Prevention and Handling of Violence in Education Units (PPKSP) are in place, little is known about why these policies often fail to function in rural primary schools. This study aimed to analyze the implementation of CFS policy in bullying prevention and intervention at a rural public primary school in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving the principal, teachers, members of the Violence Prevention and Handling Team (TPPK), the school committee, parents or caregivers, and students in grades IV–VI. Data were collected in July 2026 through interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and document analysis, and were analyzed thematically. The findings show that CFS implementation operated along two separate tracks. The formal track, comprising the CFS declaration, the team decree, and the code of conduct, was maintained only for external assessment, whereas bullying cases were handled through a kinship-based track that defused inter-family conflict without victim recovery, perpetrator guidance, or case recording. Verbal and relational bullying were not recognized as bullying, case handling depended on individual teachers, and children from migrant-worker families were not reached by the family participation component. This study contributes by explaining the failure of CFS implementation through the concept of decoupling between formal compliance and child protection practice. Future multisite, mixed-methods research should test this pattern in broader contexts.

**Keywords**—child-friendly school; bullying; policy decoupling; kinship-based settlement; rural primary school

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### I. Introduction

Bullying is one of the most common forms of violence that children experience at school. It is characterized by intentional aggressive acts that are repeated over time and occur within an imbalanced power relationship between perpetrator and victim (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). An analysis of school-based student health surveys across 83 countries showed that approximately 30.5% of school-aged adolescents had been bullied in the previous month, with prevalence remaining high in low- and middle-income countries (Biswas et al., 2020). Its consequences extend well beyond physical injury or momentary embarrassment. Meta-analytic evidence links bullying victimization in childhood and adolescence to depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and other health problems (Moore et al., 2017), and clinical reviews emphasize its long-term effects on child health into adulthood (Armitage, 2021). Because most bullying takes place at school, educational institutions bear the primary responsibility for preventing and addressing it.

In Indonesia, the problem warrants particular attention. PISA 2018 data placed Indonesia among the countries with the highest proportion of bullied students, with approximately 41% of 15-year-old students reporting being bullied at least a few times a month (OECD, 2019). Among younger children, research on Indonesian children aged 8 to 12 found that those who were frequently bullied reported lower subjective well-being than their peers (Borualogo & Casas, 2021), whereas positive family and school climates served as protective factors (Borualogo et al., 2025). The government has responded through two main regulatory frameworks. The first is Regulation of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection No. 8 of 2014 on the Child-Friendly School (CFS; *Sekolah Ramah Anak*) Policy (Kementerian Pemberdayaan

Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak [KemenPPPA], 2014). The second is Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 46 of 2023 on the Prevention and Handling of Violence in Education Units (PPKSP), which requires every school to establish a Violence Prevention and Handling Team (TPPK) (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi [Kemendikbudristek], 2023).

International evidence indicates that school-based anti-bullying programs are generally effective. Recent meta-analyses report reductions of approximately 19–20% in bullying perpetration and 15–16% in victimization following intervention (Gaffney et al., 2019, 2021). However, the existence of a policy does not automatically produce change. A systematic review of anti-bullying policies found mixed results and showed that policy effectiveness depends heavily on the extent to which policies are actually implemented at the school level (Hall, 2017). The public policy literature refers to this phenomenon as the policy–implementation gap, that is, the distance between formulated policy goals and what happens in practice (Hudson et al., 2019; Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Research on CFS in Indonesia continues to grow but still has several limitations. Existing studies have focused largely on urban schools or secondary education, such as research on anti-bullying CFS programs in junior high schools in Semarang (Miftahudin et al., 2023) and on the challenges of implementing the CFS model in Surakarta (Liestyasari et al., 2023). A national evaluation of CFS policy likewise shows that program effectiveness remains uneven and faces various implementation challenges (Aziz et al., 2025). Meanwhile, a study in Cambodia demonstrated that cultural context and primary school conditions strongly shape how teachers translate child-friendly school policy into practice (King, 2020). The case study closest to the present research was conducted at a public primary school in Rembang, Central Java, and examined CFS policy implementation in general, including child protection and a positive learning environment (Pujoko et al., 2025). However, that study did not make bullying its primary focus and was situated in Java. Taken together, these findings suggest that results from urban schools cannot simply be generalized to rural primary schools with different resources, social structures, and local cultures.

There is therefore a knowledge gap regarding how CFS policy is actually implemented to prevent and address bullying in rural primary schools in eastern Indonesia, particularly since the enactment of the PPKSP regulation. East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, is a relevant context because it combines an agrarian society, strong communal and religious ties, and the resource constraints commonly found in rural education.

The novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, it examines CFS specifically from the perspective of bullying prevention and intervention rather than as a general school program. Second, it reads CFS implementation alongside the PPKSP regulation and the role of the TPPK, thereby connecting two policy frameworks that have tended to be studied separately. Third, it is situated in a rural primary school in eastern Indonesia, a context that remains underrepresented in the literature. Accordingly, the study was guided by four research questions: (RQ1) How are the bullying-related components of CFS policy implemented in the school? (RQ2) How are prevention efforts carried out, and to what extent do they reach different forms of bullying? (RQ3) How are bullying cases handled? (RQ4) What factors enable and constrain CFS implementation in the rural primary school context? Theoretically, the study enriches research on child protection policy implementation in primary education. Practically, its findings are expected to inform schools, education offices, teacher education institutions, and local stakeholders in strengthening the implementation of CFS and PPKSP. The main contribution of this study is thus to explain why a CFS policy that exists formally may fail to function in practice, using the concept of decoupling from institutional theory to interpret the disconnect between administrative compliance and child protection in a rural primary school.

## II. Literature Review

### *A. Child-Friendly School Policy and Its Implementation Challenges*

The child-friendly school concept is rooted in the Child-Friendly Schools framework promoted by UNICEF as a rights-based school model, that is, a school that is safe, inclusive, healthy, protective, and involves the participation of children and the community (UNICEF, 2009). In Indonesia, the concept was institutionalized through KemenPPPA Regulation No. 8 of 2014, which defines CFS as an education unit capable of guaranteeing, fulfilling, and respecting children's rights and protecting children from violence, discrimination, and other mistreatment (KemenPPPA, 2014). The regulation sets out six CFS components: (1) CFS policy; (2) educators and education staff trained in children's rights; (3) a child-friendly learning process; (4) child-friendly facilities and infrastructure; (5) child participation; and (6) the participation of parents, community organizations, the business sector, other stakeholders, and alumni.

Empirical studies in Indonesia confirm that these six components are interrelated in practice. A qualitative study of eight junior high schools in Semarang, for example, grouped the concepts of anti-bullying CFS programs into six dimensions consistent with the regulation, ranging from the policy dimension to parent and

community participation (Miftahudin et al., 2023). However, CFS implementation in the field is far from uniform. A study in Surakarta identified various challenges in applying the CFS model (Liestyasari et al., 2023), and an evaluation of CFS policy in Indonesia showed that its effectiveness remains limited by various implementation constraints (Aziz et al., 2025). Experiences in other countries reveal a similar pattern. In Cambodia, primary school teachers adopted only part of the pedagogy mandated by the child-friendly schools policy because their practices were shaped by local culture and classroom conditions (King, 2020).

From a policy studies perspective, such gaps between policy formulation and practice are not unique. Viennet and Pont (2017) proposed an education policy implementation framework emphasizing four dimensions: smart policy design, inclusive stakeholder engagement, a conducive context, and a coherent implementation strategy. Hudson et al. (2019) added that implementation failure often stems from overly optimistic expectations, fragmented governance, and weak collaboration among actors. This framework is relevant for examining CFS implementation because its success depends on the interaction between national regulations, school capacity, and support from the surrounding environment.

### *B. Bullying in Primary Schools: Concept, Consequences, and Intervention Approaches*

Bullying can be physical (hitting, pushing, damaging belongings), verbal (mocking, demeaning nicknames, threats), relational (exclusion, spreading rumors), or cyber-based. Recent literature views bullying as a group phenomenon. Perpetrators are often motivated by the desire to gain social status among peers, while the reactions of bystanders help determine whether bullying continues or stops (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Salmivalli et al., 2021). This group process is already evident in primary school. A longitudinal social network analysis of students aged 8 to 12 showed that bullying relationships and friendships shape each other; for example, children tend to bully the victims of their friends (Rambaran et al., 2020). This understanding matters because interventions that focus only on perpetrators and victims tend to overlook the group dynamics that sustain bullying.

The consequences of bullying for primary school children are far-reaching. In addition to its association with mental health problems (Moore et al., 2017; Armitage, 2021), bullying lowers children's subjective well-being, as found among Indonesian children (Borualogo & Casas, 2021). Conversely, environmental factors can be protective. Peer and parental support are associated with a lower risk of victimization (Biswas et al., 2020), family characteristics are related to children's roles in bullying (Nocentini et al., 2019), and a positive school climate, encompassing safety, warm relationships, and an orderly institutional environment, contributes to a range of positive student outcomes (Wang & Degol, 2016).

At the intervention level, meta-analyses show that school-based programs effectively reduce bullying, especially programs that adopt a whole-school approach involving school policy, teachers, students, and parents simultaneously (Gaffney et al., 2019, 2021). Teachers play a central role in this approach. A meta-analysis of anti-bullying programs found that programs that train teachers positively affect teachers' attitudes, self-efficacy, and knowledge, while also increasing how often teachers intervene when bullying occurs (van Versveld et al., 2019). These findings indicate that bullying prevention requires a coordinated system rather than stand-alone activities.

### *C. Linking Child-Friendly School Implementation to Bullying Prevention and Intervention*

When compared with the bullying intervention literature, the six CFS components essentially constitute a whole-school framework. The policy component provides written rules and commitments. The trained educators component relates directly to teachers' ability to recognize and respond to bullying. The child-friendly learning component creates space for character education, social-emotional skills, and positive discipline in place of physical punishment. The facilities component relates to the supervision of bullying hotspots. The child participation component aligns with strategies that empower peers and bystanders, while parent and community participation extends prevention into the home environment. The PPKSP regulation then complements this framework with a more operational intervention mechanism through the TPPK, covering the receipt of reports, examination, the formulation of recommendations, and victim recovery (Kemendikbudristek, 2023).

Although this conceptual link is fairly clear, in-depth research on how CFS components are implemented to prevent and address bullying in rural primary schools remains limited. Most Indonesian studies are evaluative or set in urban areas and thus capture little of the processes, negotiations, and adaptations that occur when national policy meets the realities of small village schools. This study addresses that gap using the conceptual framework in Fig. 1, which links the policy basis, the implementation of the six CFS components, prevention and intervention practices, and the contextual factors that shape them. Analytically, the framework integrates three lenses. The first is Viennet and Pont's (2017) education policy implementation framework, used to examine how policy design, stakeholder engagement, context, and implementation strategy interact at the school level. The second is a multilevel view of bullying that situates the child within a web of relationships with peers,

teachers, family, and community (Biswas et al., 2020; Nocentini et al., 2019; Salmivalli et al., 2021; Wang & Degol, 2016). The third is the concept of decoupling from institutional theory, namely the tendency of organizations to adopt formal structures to gain legitimacy while separating them from their core activities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). More recent scholarship distinguishes policy–practice decoupling from means–ends decoupling and shows that accountability pressures can intensify both (Bromley & Powell, 2012). These three lenses served as sensitizing frameworks for deductive coding, while leaving room for new themes to emerge from the data.

Viennet and Pont's (2017) framework was chosen for three reasons. First, it was developed specifically for education policy and is therefore better suited to the object of this study than general public policy implementation models. Second, it views implementation as an interactive process involving multiple actors and shaped by context, rather than as the mere execution of top-down instructions. This view fits the nature of CFS, which requires the participation of teachers, students, parents, and the community. Third, its context dimension allows for a systematic reading of the influence of rural conditions, local culture, and resource constraints. The multilevel lens is needed because policy implementation frameworks do not specifically explain bullying dynamics among children. The concept of decoupling was chosen because it can explain situations in which a policy exists formally but is not enacted, a possibility that is poorly captured by implementation frameworks that assume policies will be enacted with varying degrees of quality.

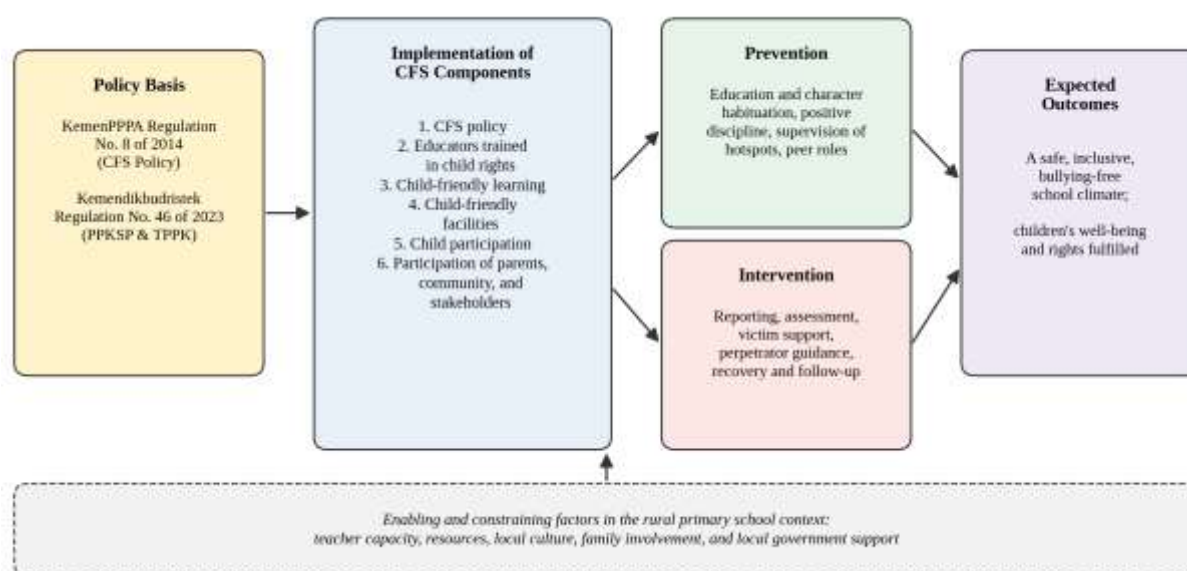


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the study (developed by the authors based on KemenPPPA, 2014; Kemendikbudristek, 2023; Viennet & Pont, 2017). The decoupling lens (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and the multilevel view of bullying (Salmivalli et al., 2021)

### III. Methods

#### A. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single case study design. A case study design was chosen because the study sought to answer “how” and “why” questions about a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). The unit of analysis was the process of implementing CFS policy in relation to bullying prevention and intervention at one public primary school. This approach enabled the researchers to trace practices, meanings, and interactions among actors in depth rather than merely measuring program attainment.

The study was conducted in four stages. The pre-fieldwork stage comprised a literature review, instrument development and validation, and obtaining research permits. The fieldwork stage in July 2026 involved interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and document collection. The analysis stage was carried out concurrently with data collection and continued after all data had been gathered. The final stage comprised member checking, report writing, and article preparation. In terms of reflexivity, the researchers recognized that their background as primary teacher education academics in East Lombok facilitated their understanding of the local language and culture but could also influence interpretation. This potential bias was managed through reflective notes and discussions between the authors at every stage of analysis.

## B. Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at a public primary school in a sub-district of East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, hereafter referred to as School X to protect the confidentiality of the institution and participants. The school is located in a rural area where most parents work in agriculture and the informal sector. School X was selected purposively based on three criteria: it is a public primary school in a rural area, it has run a CFS program, and it has established a TPPK as mandated by Kemendikbudristek Regulation No. 46 of 2023. Based on these criteria, School X was considered an information-rich case for answering the research questions.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling and expanded through snowball sampling when informants referred to others knowledgeable about particular cases. The inclusion criteria for adult informants were direct involvement in school activities for at least one year or involvement in resolving a bullying case, together with willingness to provide written consent. For students, the inclusion criteria were being enrolled in grades IV to VI, obtaining written permission from a parent or guardian, and giving verbal assent. Students who were undergoing case handling as victims were excluded from the focus groups to avoid the risk of re-traumatization. The research protocol received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. In addition, written permission was obtained from the East Lombok Education Office and the school principal, and all participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. The number of participants was not fixed in advance but was determined by data saturation, that is, the point at which additional interviews no longer yielded new themes (Guest et al., 2020). A total of 10 participants took part, in the categories presented in Table 1 (PR = 1, T = 3, TM = 1, SC = 1, PC = 2, S = 2). Two student focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, each involving one student from different grade levels (IV–VI), to accommodate developmental and gender diversity among respondents.

Table 1. Participant Profile

| Code | N | Participant Category            | Data Collection Technique and Information Focus                             |
|------|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PR   | 1 | Principal                       | In-depth interview; policy, CFS documents, and case-related decision-making |
| T    | 3 | Classroom and subject teachers  | Interview and observation; understanding of bullying and handling practices |
| TM   | 1 | CFS/TPPK team members           | Interview and document analysis; team duties and handling procedures        |
| SC   | 1 | School committee representative | Interview; committee and community involvement                              |
| PC   | 2 | Parents or caregivers           | Interview; experiences of case deliberation and parenting                   |
| S    | 2 | Students in grades IV–VI        | FGD; experiences of bullying and knowledge of how to report                 |

The study was conducted after obtaining permission from the principal and the research unit of the authors' institution. Because the study involved children and a sensitive topic, written permission from a parent or guardian and verbal assent were obtained for every student participant, and students undergoing case handling as victims were excluded from the focus groups (see Section III.B). All participants were informed of the study's aims, procedures, their right to withdraw, and the guarantee of confidentiality. Participants' identities were replaced with codes. The researchers also prepared a referral protocol: if any indication of ongoing bullying or violence emerged during data collection, it would be reported to the school's TPPK for prompt follow-up in accordance with the procedure.

## C. Data Collection Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the key instrument, supported in this study by four auxiliary instruments. The first was a semi-structured interview guide for the principal, teachers, TPPK members, the school committee, and parents. The second was a focus group discussion (FGD) guide for students, designed with simple language and child-friendly techniques such as short story scenarios about school situations. The third was an observation sheet for recording teacher–student interactions, enforcement of the code of conduct, and conditions in bullying hotspots such as the schoolyard, canteen, and toilets. The fourth was a document analysis guide for reviewing school policy documents, the TPPK decree, the code of conduct, case records, and CFS-related work plans.

The instruments were developed from the six CFS components (KemenPPPA, 2014) and the stages of violence handling in the PPKSP regulation (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), as summarized in the instrument blueprint in Table 2. Content validity was examined through expert judgment by two experts in primary education and child protection, followed by a limited pilot at another school with similar characteristics to ensure

clarity of language and question sequence. Interviews and FGDs were conducted face to face on the school premises, in Indonesian interspersed with Sasak when necessary, and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Student FGDs were facilitated in simple language, accompanied by a teacher who was not the participants' homeroom teacher, and did not ask students to recount personal experiences as victims in order to avoid emotional distress.

Table 2. Blueprint of Data Collection Instruments

| Research Focus                    | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                    | Data Sources             | Techniques                                |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Implementation of CFS components  | Anti-bullying policy and code of conduct; teacher training on children's rights; child-friendly learning; facilities; child participation; parent and community participation | PR, T, TM, SC, documents | Interview, observation, document analysis |
| Prevention strategies             | Anti-bullying awareness and education; character habituation; positive discipline; supervision of hotspots; peer roles                                                        | PR, T, S, PC             | Interview, FGD, observation               |
| Intervention mechanisms           | Reporting channels; case assessment; victim support; perpetrator guidance; parental involvement; recovery and follow-up                                                       | PR, TM, T, PC, documents | Interview, document analysis              |
| Enabling and constraining factors | Teacher capacity; resources and facilities; local culture and values; family support; support from the education office and village government                                | All participants         | Interview, FGD                            |

Source: Developed from KemenPPPA (2014) and Kemendikbudristek (2023)

#### D. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), operationalized through three concurrent flows of interactive analysis: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2020). In practice, the analysis followed a hybrid deductive–inductive approach: the initial codebook in Table 3 provided sensitizing categories, the reflexive orientation of Braun and Clarke (2019) guided the generation of inductive themes, and the interactive model of Miles et al. (2020) structured the iterative cycle of condensation, display, and verification. All interview and FGD recordings were transcribed verbatim. Coding combined a deductive strategy, based on the six CFS components and the PPKSP stages, with an inductive strategy to capture themes emerging from the data, such as local practices not specified in the regulations. Similar codes were then grouped into subthemes and themes, reviewed against the entire dataset, and given clear definitions. Data management was supported by a coding matrix to trace the links between codes, subthemes, themes, and data sources. The initial coding categories that served as the starting point of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Initial (Deductive) Coding Categories and Space for Inductive Coding

| Theme                            | Initial Codes                                                                                                                                                                   | Conceptual Basis                                |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Implementation of CFS components | POL (policy and code of conduct); TRN (trained educators); CFL (child-friendly learning); FAC (facilities); CHP (child participation); PCP (parent and community participation) | KemenPPPA (2014)                                |
| Prevention strategies            | EDU (anti-bullying education); CHR (character habituation); PDS (positive discipline); SUP (supervision of hotspots); PEER (peer roles)                                         | Gaffney et al. (2021); Salmivalli et al. (2021) |
| Intervention mechanisms          | REP (reporting); ASM (assessment and clarification); VSP (victim support); PGD (perpetrator guidance); REC (recovery and follow-up)                                             | Kemendikbudristek (2023)                        |
| Contextual factors               | ENB (enabling factors); CON (constraining factors); LOC (local values and culture)                                                                                              | Viennet & Pont (2017)                           |
| Inductive themes                 | Codes emerging from the data, including KIN (kinship-based settlement), MNG (construction of the meaning of bullying), and MIG (migrant-worker families)                        | Braun & Clarke (2019)                           |

Trustworthiness was ensured by following the criteria for thematic analysis proposed by Nowell et al. (2017). Credibility was strengthened through source and method triangulation, sustained engagement in the field throughout the fieldwork period, and member checking of summarized findings with key informants.

Transferability was pursued through detailed contextual description. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through an audit trail of analytical decisions, the researchers' reflective notes, and peer debriefing among members of the research team.

## IV. Results and Discussion

### A. Research Results

The main finding of this study is that CFS policy implementation at School X operated along two separate tracks. The formal track consisted of the CFS declaration, the CFS/TPPK team decree, a commitment board, and an anti-violence code of conduct. This track was maintained for reporting and external assessment purposes but was not used in handling bullying cases. The informal track took the form of kinship-based settlement through teacher reprimands, apologies between students, and deliberation among parents. It was this informal track that was used in practice. It succeeded in ending inter-family conflict but did not result in victim recovery, perpetrator guidance, or case recording. The core problem of CFS in this context, therefore, is not the absence of policy but the decoupling of formal compliance from child protection practice. This two-track model is summarized in Fig. 2, and each finding is described below in the order of the research questions.

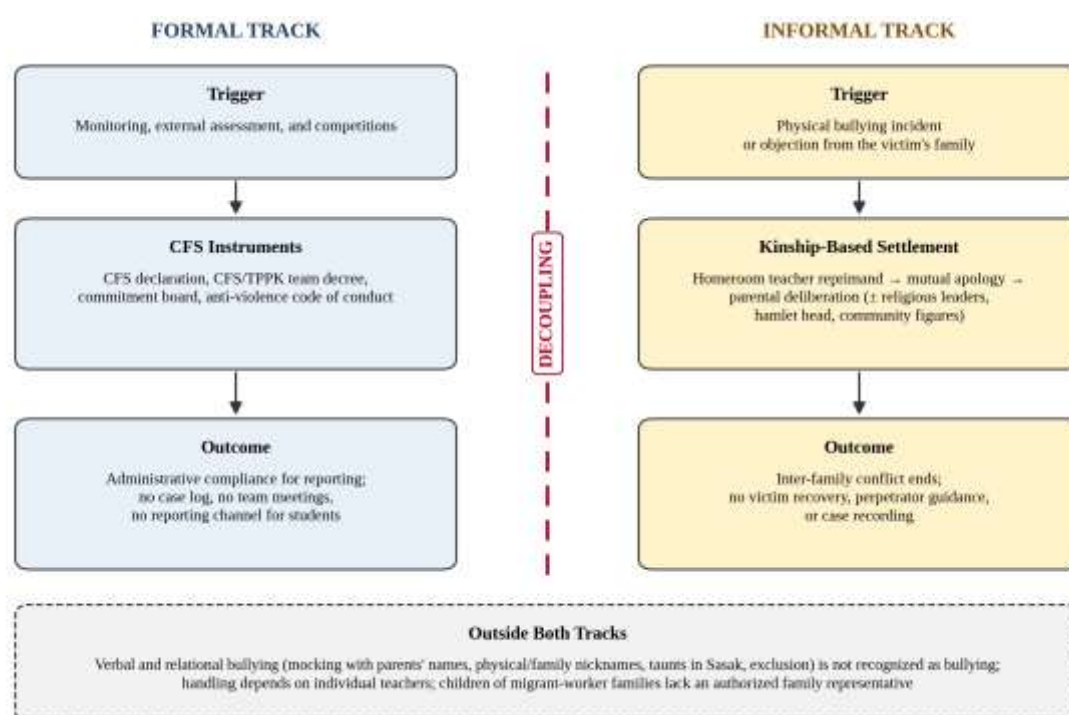


Fig. 2. Two-track model of CFS implementation in handling bullying at School X

#### 1) CFS Instruments Existed Administratively but Were Not Operational (RQ1)

Document analysis showed that School X had a CFS declaration, a CFS/TPPK team decree (one decree establishing a combined CFS/TPPK team), an anti-violence code of conduct, and a commitment board. However, these documents were generally issued shortly before monitoring visits, assessments, or competitions. This pattern was established by comparing the issue dates on the physical CFS documents (declaration, team decree, commitment board, and code of conduct, which were dated between April and June 2026) against the official monitoring schedule of the East Lombok Education Office (July 2026 assessment visit), and was corroborated by informants' accounts in interviews with the principal (PR), teachers (T), and TPPK team members (TM), who indicated that document preparation was intensified ahead of scheduled assessments. Triangulation of documents, interviews, and FGDs revealed four indicators that these instruments were not operational. First, the school had no case book or case records. Second, students did not know whom to report bullying to or how. Third, team members were unable to explain their duties. Fourth, no team meeting or evaluation had been held since the decree was issued. Teachers' knowledge of the policy was also limited to general principles, such as the prohibition of violence against children, without an understanding of prevention and intervention procedures. The implementation of each CFS component is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Implementation Matrix of CFS Components at School X

| CFS Component                          | Field Findings                                                                                                                                         | Status                  |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| CFS policy                             | Declaration, CFS/TPPK team decree, and anti-violence code of conduct exist but were issued shortly before monitoring and are not used in case handling | Formal, not operational |
| Educators trained in children's rights | Only a few teachers have attended CFS or violence prevention training; understanding is limited to general principles                                  | Limited                 |
| Child-friendly learning                | Practices vary across teachers: some use dialogue, while others impose punishments that humiliate students in front of the class                       | Inconsistent            |
| Facilities and infrastructure          | A commitment board exists, but there is no reporting channel known to students, no case book, and no counselor or guidance teacher                     | Formal, not operational |
| Child participation                    | The experiences of student victims of verbal and relational bullying are not channeled into school mechanisms                                          | Not functioning         |
| Parent and community participation     | Active through kinship-based deliberation and religious/community figures but does not reach migrant-worker families                                   | Informal, uneven        |

## 2) Verbal and Relational Bullying Were Not Recognized as Bullying (RQ2)

Prevention efforts at School X were hindered by the way members of the school community understood bullying. Teachers and parents understood bullying as limited to physical violence, such as hitting, pushing, and kicking. Verbal and relational forms were not regarded as bullying and were therefore left unaddressed. In contrast, students' accounts in the FGDs described these forms as hurtful and as affecting their sense of safety at school; these accounts were elicited through scenario-based discussion rather than by asking students to recount their own victimization. These differences in meaning are summarized in Table 5. As a result, non-physical bullying never entered any handling track, whether formal or informal. This finding indicates that the failure of prevention is rooted in differing constructions of meaning among the policy, teachers, and students, not merely in weak rule enforcement.

Table 5. Forms of Non-Physical Bullying and Differences in Their Meaning

| Forms Identified                                           | Meaning for Teachers and Parents          | Experience Reported by Students (FGD) |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Calling a peer by their parent's name as a taunt           | Regarded as ordinary joking, not bullying | Hurtful and reduces sense of safety   |
| Nicknames based on physical traits or family circumstances | Regarded as ordinary joking, not bullying | Hurtful and reduces sense of safety   |
| Taunting in the Sasak language                             | Regarded as part of everyday interaction  | Hurtful and reduces sense of safety   |
| Exclusion from play or study groups                        | Not seen as a problem                     | Hurtful and reduces sense of safety   |

The gap in meaning between adults and children was clearly visible in participants' own voices. A grade V student (S) stated, "I am often called by my father's name when I come to school. It hurts, but if I tell the teacher, I am told it is only a joke." Another student (S) said, "My friends do not want to play with me because I am small. I feel sad, but no one considers this bullying." In contrast, a teacher (T) observed, "Here, that is just how children play; the one who gets angry is the one who is wrong." These contrasting accounts underscore that verbal and relational bullying remain invisible within the adult frame of reference at School X.

## 3) Case Handling Followed a Kinship-Based Track Oriented toward Reconciliation (RQ3)

Bullying cases at School X were handled outside the procedures of the CFS/TPPK team, following a recurring pattern. First, the homeroom teacher reprimanded the perpetrator. Second, the perpetrator and victim were asked to forgive each other. Third, if the victim's family objected, the parents of both parties were summoned for deliberation. In more serious cases, the deliberation involved religious leaders, the hamlet head, or community figures. A case was considered closed once the parties had reconciled. Thereafter, there was no monitoring of the victim's condition, no behavioral guidance program for the perpetrator, and no recording.

The school chose this track for three reasons. First, it sought to preserve kinship ties between families in the village. Second, it wanted to avoid being seen as a problematic school. Third, formal procedures were considered too complicated to apply. These three reasons explain why the formal track remained available on paper yet was never activated. These reasons were reflected in participants' own words. As the principal (PR) explained, "We handle it within the family first because we are all neighbors here; if we take it to the formal procedure, two families can end up not speaking to each other for years." A teacher (T) similarly stated, "The

formal procedure is complicated and the paperwork is long. In practice, we settle it in the teachers' room so the children can go back to studying together." A parent (PC) added, "For us, if the families have agreed and shaken hands, the matter is finished. There is no need to make it bigger."

#### *4) Successful Case Handling Depended on Individual Teachers Rather Than on the System (RQ4)*

School X had no counselor or guidance and counseling teacher. Classroom teachers taught many subjects, carried additional administrative duties, and some held contract (honorer) status. Only a few teachers had attended CFS or violence prevention training. Under these conditions, teachers handled cases based on personal experience and judgment, resulting in varied practices across teachers. Some teachers took a dialogic approach with victims and perpetrators, whereas others imposed punishments that humiliated students in front of the class. Such punishments run counter to CFS principles.

#### *5) Children from Migrant-Worker Families Fell Outside the Reach of Family Participation (RQ4)*

Some students were cared for by grandparents or relatives because their parents worked as migrant workers (a group often referred to in the international literature as left-behind children; Yang et al., 2021). In cases involving these students, caregivers either did not attend when summoned by the school or attended without the authority to make decisions and then left the resolution entirely to the school. Students from these families experienced a double vulnerability. They were targeted with taunts about their parents' absence, and some became perpetrators owing to limited supervision. This finding shows that the parent participation component of CFS policy presupposes a nuclear family structure that does not match the social conditions in East Lombok.

### *B. Discussion*

The main finding of this study shows that the problem of CFS at School X is not the absence of policy but the disconnect between formal structures and practice. This pattern corresponds to the concept of decoupling in institutional theory, a condition in which organizations adopt formal structures to gain legitimacy from their external environment while separating those structures from their core activities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). CFS documents issued shortly before monitoring visits or competitions function as signals of compliance to assessors rather than as working tools. Bromley and Powell (2012) further argued that accountability pressures based on administrative indicators tend to reinforce such decoupling. This is relevant because CFS assessments that emphasize document completeness may encourage schools to meet indicators without changing their practices. The finding also offers a mechanism-based explanation for Hall's (2017) observation that the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies varies widely: a policy may exist formally yet never be activated.

The kinship-based track was chosen not because the school rejected child protection but because it made more sense within the social logic of the village. In a community with strong kinship ties, conflicts between children can easily escalate into conflicts between families, so the main priority becomes restoring relationships among adults. In terms of Viennet and Pont's (2017) framework, this shows that the context dimension shaped practice more decisively than policy design. Interestingly, kinship-based deliberation resembles restorative practices that emphasize dialogue and the repair of relationships. Systematic reviews show that restorative practices in schools are associated with improved social relationships and school climate (Katic et al., 2020; Lodi et al., 2022). The difference is that restorative practices place victim recovery and perpetrator accountability at their core, whereas the kinship-based track at School X stopped at reconciliation between families. The informal track, therefore, is not something to be abolished but a form of social capital that can be strengthened by adding victim recovery, perpetrator guidance, and case recording.

The finding that verbal and relational bullying were not recognized as bullying is consistent with research showing that primary school teachers tend to regard relational bullying, particularly social exclusion, as less serious and are less likely to intervene in it (Duy, 2013). This gap in meaning has serious consequences because bullying victimization, including its non-physical forms, is associated with mental health problems and reduced well-being in children (Armitage, 2021; Moore et al., 2017), including among Indonesian children (Borualogo & Casas, 2021). Exclusion from play and study groups also reflects bullying as a group process that is already evident in primary school (Rambaran et al., 2020; Salmivalli et al., 2021). The use of Sasak in taunts shows that bullying occurs in the children's mother tongue, so CFS awareness materials framed in formal Indonesian terms risk failing to connect with students' everyday experiences. Prevention, therefore, requires more than rule enforcement; it calls for a shared understanding of what constitutes bullying among teachers, parents, and students.

The reliance on individual teachers can be explained by weak system capacity. Without a counselor or guidance teacher, with heavy teaching and administrative loads, and with minimal training, teachers handled cases based on personal experience. This finding is consistent with King's (2020) study of Cambodian primary schools, which showed that teachers translate child-friendly school policy according to their beliefs and

classroom conditions. The meta-analysis by van Verseveld et al. (2019) showed that training can improve teachers' knowledge, self-efficacy, and propensity to intervene. Variation in practice across teachers, including humiliating punishments, is thus better understood as a consequence of the absence of system support than solely as individual failure.

The finding on children from migrant-worker families extends our understanding of the parent participation component of CFS. CFS policy assumes that parents can be present and make decisions, whereas some children in East Lombok are raised by grandparents or relatives. Research in rural China likewise found that left-behind status interacts with bullying victimization in shaping the life satisfaction of primary school children (Yang et al., 2021). Cross-national evidence also indicates that parental support is associated with a lower risk of victimization (Biswas et al., 2020) and that family characteristics are related to children's roles in bullying (Nocentini et al., 2019). This finding suggests that CFS policy should recognize substitute caregivers as school partners and provide communication mechanisms that reach parents working away from home.

Compared with previous CFS studies in Indonesia, which have generally identified components, strategies, and implementation challenges (Aziz et al., 2025; Liestyasari et al., 2023; Miftahudin et al., 2023; Pujoko et al., 2025), this study goes further by explaining the mechanisms through which an existing policy fails to function. The finding also reinforces meta-analytic evidence that the best outcomes are achieved when prevention and intervention are integrated within a whole-school approach (Gaffney et al., 2021). At School X, such integration had not occurred because the formal and informal tracks operated independently of each other.

### *C. Contributions of the Study*

This study makes four contributions. Theoretically, it applies the concept of decoupling from institutional theory to the implementation of child protection policy in primary schools and shows that formal compliance can persist without genuine protective practice. Conceptually, it shows that the failure of bullying prevention can be rooted in differing constructions of meaning among the policy, teachers, and students. In policy terms, the findings provide a basis for two adjustments: CFS assessments that measure whether mechanisms function, such as case records, students' knowledge of how to report, and team activities, rather than merely the completeness of documents; and the recognition of substitute caregivers within the family participation component. Practically, the findings offer guidance for primary schools with similar characteristics to combine kinship-based deliberation with procedures for victim recovery, perpetrator guidance, and case recording, and for primary teacher education programs to equip prospective teachers with an understanding of verbal and relational bullying and with positive discipline skills.

### *D. Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

This study has several limitations. First, the single case study design limits statistical generalization, so the findings are most applicable to rural primary schools with similar social characteristics. In addition, the number of participants was small ( $n = 10$ ), so data saturation was reached within a limited pool of informants. Second, data were collected in July 2026, which coincided with the beginning of the new school year, so implementation dynamics across the full school year may not have been fully captured. Third, because the school tended to protect its image, some cases may not have been disclosed to the researchers, and the absence of case records meant that the number of cases could not be verified. Fourth, the findings on children from migrant-worker families derive from a limited number of cases at a single school and did not involve parents working away from home. Future research should employ multisite designs to test whether the decoupling pattern also occurs in other schools, mixed-methods designs that combine interviews with victimization surveys to measure the prevalence of non-physical bullying, and action research to develop an intervention model that integrates kinship-based deliberation with restorative principles.

## **V. Conclusion**

This study concludes that CFS policy implementation at a rural primary school in East Lombok is characterized by a decoupling of formal compliance from child protection practice. Regarding RQ1, CFS instruments existed administratively but were not operational because they were not accompanied by case records, a reporting channel known to students, or genuine teamwork. Regarding RQ2, prevention did not reach verbal and relational bullying because teachers and parents understood bullying as limited to physical violence. Regarding RQ3, cases were handled through a kinship-based track that effectively defused inter-family conflict but did not support victim recovery, provide perpetrator guidance, or record cases. Regarding RQ4, implementation was constrained by reliance on individual teachers and by an assumption of the nuclear family that failed to reach children from migrant-worker families. Based on these findings, strengthening CFS in schools with similar characteristics should focus on three areas: making existing mechanisms function, building a shared understanding of bullying among teachers, parents, and students, and integrating kinship-based

deliberation with the principle of victim recovery. Further research using multisite and mixed-methods designs is needed to examine the extent to which this pattern holds in broader contexts.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Author Contributions

M.Y. designed the study, collected the data, and wrote the original draft; B.H. developed the conceptual framework, analyzed the data, and reviewed and edited the manuscript; both authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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