# COULD CHILDREN'S GROUPS PARTICIPATE IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT? A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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**Abstract**

Child participation has become an essential trend in Indonesia after ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Indonesia is also committed to providing a platform for children to voice their contribution to local and international development. This study aims to analyze the development of communication of children's participation in development in Indonesia by conducting a comparative study to see children's participation in an international context. The systematic review method was chosen in this study. From 1822 articles, 21 articles that describe children's participation were selected for further analysis. The study's findings are that children's participation can be realized massively in all aspects of children's lives, such as religion, art, sports, and post-conflict situations. Children's participation in Indonesia has reached the stage of involving children but not yet at the maximum level of participation, namely the participation of children by children. Children's participation also has the highest level. Namely, children and adults can share decisions to produce collaboration in development.

**Keywords:** Children Group, Participatory Communication, Social Development, Systematic Review.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1989, the United Nations issued the Convention on the Rights of the Child and established obligations for ratifying governments to make implementation measures. The Convention on the Rights of the Child categorizes children's rights into four groups of fundamental rights: survival rights, development rights, protection rights, and participation rights (Rizki et al., 2015). The Government of the Republic of Indonesia ratified the convention through Presidential Decree No. 36 of 1990 and then passed Child Protection Law No. 23 of 2002. By confirming the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Indonesia agreed that all children's rights

are human rights of equal importance and that Indonesia will make every effort to ensure that all rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Since ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the government has begun to develop various strategies to create policies and programs that aim to realize children's rights. One is the Regulation of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia No. 11 of 2011 on Child-Friendly City Development Policy. There are 40 districts and 34 cities in Indonesia that have been declared one of the districts and friendly.

Child Participation is the involvement of children in the process of making decisions and enjoying changes that relate to their lives either directly or indirectly, which is carried out with the consent and willingness of all children based on awareness and understanding by age and level of thinking maturity (Thoomaszen, 2017). In other words, it can be formulated as the involvement of a person not yet 18 years old in the decision-making process about everything related to them and carried out with awareness, understanding, and mutual willingness so that the child can enjoy the results or benefit from the decision.
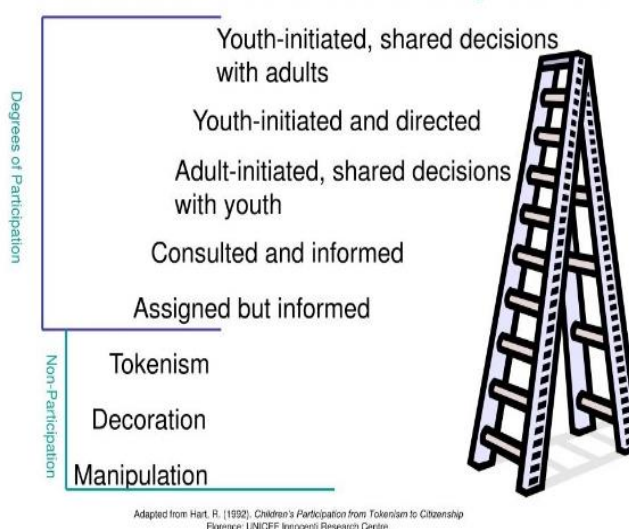


**Figure 1: Ladder of Child Participation**

Hart (2008) developed a participation ladder of eight rungs to frame children's participation. Rungs 1-3 represent a state where children are considered non-participating. The next rungs show the degree of participation of children with higher and different levels of participation (Can & İnalhan, 2017). A visualization of the participation ladder model developed by Roger A. Hart can be seen in the following figure.

Indonesian research studies have been adaptive enough to use the concept of participatory communication but are still in the stage of participation that is not yet comprehensive in all aspects of life. This type of participatory communication is supported by developing a participatory paradigm. This research wants to look further into children's participatory communication, which means international studies so that it can provide recommendations for

the application of children's participation in Indonesia. This article aims to provide an overview of some of the participatory methods focusing on children's participation that have been used so far and look more in-depth using the SMCR model (Source, Message, Channel, Receiver) to analyze from the perspective of the communication process. Furthermore, the level of child participation will be understood more profoundly using the Child Participation Model.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a systematic review method. In general, systematic reviews include quantitative techniques (meta-analysis) and qualitative techniques (meta-synthesis) but must be distinguished from unsystematic reviews (traditional reviews). Quantitative and qualitative systematic reviews have sequential and systematic stages, as in research methodology. (Messer et al., 2018). This research combines both techniques, namely meta-analysis, which determines the sample and population of articles and then analyzes them with a synthesis process developed in tabular form (see Table 1).

The sampling method is described in Figure 2. The database centers consist of Google Scholar, Pubmed, and Scopus. In the search on children's participation, there is something unique: pediatric studies, whose research base is adopted by Pubmed, use participatory methods. The overall search used several keywords such as "children participation," "children participation conflict resolution," "children peace-building," "children participation Indonesia," "children participation conflict," "participatory children conflict," "advocacy children conflict," and "advocacy child participation" which helped to find articles related to children's participation.
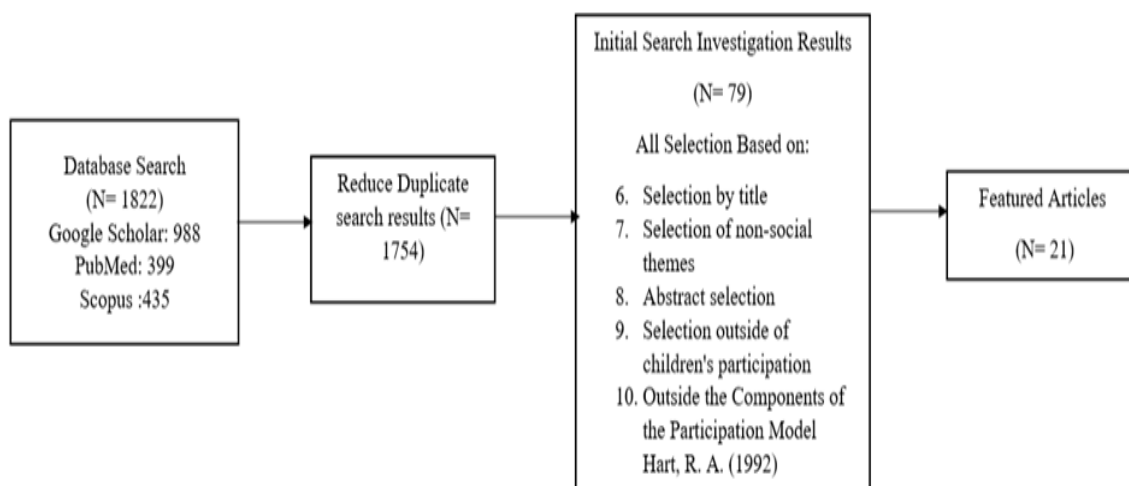


**Figure 2: Flowchart of sample search strategy**

The overall number of initial searches amounted to 1822 articles, then reduced by reducing duplicate reports to 1754. Next, we filtered the articles using several criteria based on Figure 2, which resulted in 79 articles. The researcher then further screened the articles by creating a synthesis table considering several components, and the final result was 21 inclusive articles according to the researcher in communicating children's participation.

## RESULTS

The selected literature was then analyzed using several categories such as participation methods, Qual (qualitative) or Quan (quantitative) research methods, PL (participation level), and SMCR (Source, Message, Channel, Receiver). The consideration in dividing several categories is based on the communication process; the analysis method used, and the level of participation in each phenomenon/fact analyzed in each article.

### Table 1: Characteristics of Child Participation Research

| | Reference | Participation Method | Research Methods | PL | S | M | C | R |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | (Avramidis et al., 2018) | *Classic sociometric technique with systematic observations and self-report psychometric instruments* | *Multi-method research design* | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Children's Participation | Group | Children |
| 2. | (Frödén & Tellgren, 2020) | *Interviews and video-documented and participatory observations* | *semi-structured* | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Children's Participation | Individuals | Children |
| 3. | (Baú, 2018) | *Participatory Photography* | Qual | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Youth Participation | Individuals | Children |
| 4. | (Dunn et al., 2020) | *Participatory program evaluation approach* | *Mixed-Method* | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Children's Participation | Group | Children |
| 5. | (Avent & Jayaratne, 2017) | *Focus group interview* | Qual | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Parent and Child Participation | Group | Parent and Child |
| 6. | (Berc et al., 2017) | *Survey* | Quan | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Parent and Child Participation | Group | Parents |
| 7. | (Francis et al., 2018) | *Recruitment and Enrollment* | Qual | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Parent and Child Participation | Group | Parents |
| 8. | (Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2019) | *Interviewing method* | *Mix-Method* | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Children's Participation | Group | Children |
| 9. | (Mollica, 2017) | *Interviewing method* | Qual | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Youth Participation | Group | Youth |

| 10. | (Shorter & Elledge, 2020) | *Survey* | Quan | The child is entrusted with a task, and an adult assist. | Researcher | Children's Participation | Group | Children |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 11. | (Agdal et al., 2019) | *The asset-based community development (ABCD)* | Qual | Children receive assistance and information | Researcher | Facilitator and Child Participation | Group | Children |
| 12. | (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2018) | *Community-based participatory research (CBPR)* | Qual | Children receive assistance and information | Researcher | Youth Participation | Group | Families, Youth, and Young People with Disabilities |
| 13. | (Becker, 2019) | *Arts-based research approach* | Qual | Children receive assistance and information | Researcher | Youth Participation | Group | Student |
| 14. | (Tobin et al., 2021) | *Community-based participatory research* | Qual | Joint decisions initiated by children and adults | Researcher | Youth Participation | Group | Parent and Child |
| 15. | (Kennedy et al., 2019) | *Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)* | Qual | The child takes the lead and initiates an action | Researcher | Children's Participation | Group | Children |
| 16. | (Azzolini et al., 2017) | *Systematic review* | Qual | The child takes the lead and initiates an action | Researcher | Youth Participation | Group | Youth |
| 17. | (Gleeson et al., 2018) | *Participatory decision-making* | Qual | Children and adults share decision-making | Researcher | Youth Participation | Group | Youth and Government |
| 18. | (Massey et al., 2017) | *Community-based participatory* | Mixed-Method | Children and adults share decision-making | Researcher | Child and Adult Participation | Group | Children |
| 19. | (Rodriguez et al., 2018) | *Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)* | Qual | Children and adults share decision-making | Researcher | Youth and Adult Participation | Group | Youth |
| 20. | (Spencer et al., 2021) | *Photovoice* | Qual | Children and adults share decision-making | Researcher | Children's Participation | Group | Children |
| 21. | (Wang et al., 2018) | *Growth mixture modeling* | Qual | Children and adults share decision-making | Researcher | Student and Teacher Participation | Group | Child and Teacher |

Table 1 shows that children's participatory communication already has a method that is the foundation for establishing participatory studies. Participatory processes are most widely used (13 articles) with various forms such as Photo Voice, Arts-based research approach, community-based participatory, and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), followed by interview methods (3 articles), and surveys (2 articles) and the remaining other forms. The research methods used are divided into qualitative (14 articles), mixed-method (3 articles), quantitative (2 articles), and other research methods.

SMCR (Source, Message, Channel, Receiver) helps researchers see the depth of the communication process of each article. In all articles, the researcher is the communicator (source). In the message category, which includes child participation (7 articles), youth participation (7 articles), and child and parent participation (3 articles), the remaining articles are the involvement of child and adult participation. The most important component of participatory communication is the channel, which is dominated by group communication (19 articles); the rest are individuals (2 articles). The form of group communication proves that participatory communication must involve more individuals to achieve the goals of the message reception process.

Researchers further used the child participation ladder (Mayne et al., 2018) to see the level of participation in the overall search of articles. There are five levels of child participation: the child is entrusted with a task and an adult assist (10 articles), the child receives assistance and information (3 articles), the child initiates a joint decision and an adult (1 article), the child takes the lead and creates an action (2 articles), and the highest level is the child and adult share decision-making (5 articles).

The recipients of the messages in the children's participation communication articles are mostly the children themselves (10 articles), young people (3 articles), parents (2 articles), children and parents (2 articles), while for families, young people, and young people with disabilities (1 article), university students (1 article), children and teachers (1 article), young people and government (1 article).

## DISCUSSION

Children's participation in development must essentially result in Meaningful participation. The U.S. National Commission on Resources for Youth defines youth participation as leading to the involvement of young people to take responsibility and take action with the opportunity to plan and make decisions that can affect others, either outside or within the young person's participation. Many have looked at the study of children's participation, including Hart's Ladder of Participation model.

A data search using four interdisciplinary databases totaling 3,724 relevant research articles published between 1995 and 2015 revealed sixty-three different studies meeting the systematic review inclusion criteria, of which 36 (57.1%) reported that young people's participatory approaches contributed to positive change among adults, peers, organizations, or institutions (Kennedy et al., 2019).

Hart's typology of children's participation is presented as a metaphorical "ladder," with each ascending rung representing an increasing level of child agency, control, or power. In addition, the eight "rungs" of the ladder represent a continuum of energy that rises from non-participation (no agency) to participation (increasing levels of agency). It should be noted that Hart's use of the term "children" includes all legal minors, from preschool-aged children to adolescents. The first three rungs of Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation are where children's participation is either unheard of or a mere display.

The "manipulation" rung is participation that occurs when children and youth do not understand the issues motivating the participatory process or their role in that process. The term "decoration" participation occurs when children and young people are publicly displayed during events, performances, or other activities organized for a specific purpose. Still, they do not understand the meaning or definition of their involvement. The term "tokenism" is when participation tokenism occurs in "instances where children appear to be given a voice but have little or no choice about the subject or style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions.

In the first stage (assigned but informed), the child is entrusted with a task, and the adult assists. Given but informed participation occurs when children and young people (1) understand the purpose of the project, (2) know who is making decisions about their involvement and why, (3) have meaning (rather than a 'decorative' role), and (4) volunteer for the project once it has been explained to them.

Self-concept is essential in communication psychology and interpersonal communication to encourage children's ability to perform participatory communication acts. The self-concept formed through peer acceptance and positive relationships with increased friendships between children led to good participatory communication processes (Avramidis et al., 2018). In addition to internal factors, various external factors such as distance, conflict, and lack of facilities hinder participation, so children's involvement is only seen as decorative.

Engaging more deeply with the community to provide space is one way for children to increase their confidence in participation (Avent & Jayaratne, 2017). Participatory research in this stage mainly uses children as research objects, so it still uses quantitative, mixed-method, semi-structured, or multi-design methods.

Children receive appropriate assistance and information in the second stage (consulted and informed). Consulted and informed participation occurs when children act as "consultants" for adults in a way that has high integrity. The project is designed and run by adults, but children understand the process, and their opinions are taken seriously." Projects run with high levels of participation are supported by adult facilitators who create a learning environment where children can develop their participatory skills (Agdal et al., 2019).

This stage is believed to have enabled children to identify and even intervene in programs to meet community needs and report specific positive aspects related to health behavior, social learning, inclusion, communication participation, and advocacy (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2018).

The third stage, joint adult-child-initiated decisions, occurs when adults start participatory projects but share decision-making authority or management with children. The decision can result from the comfort level of the adults and children in interacting, not only a pleasant interaction but also the benefits that can be felt through mutual communication (Tobin et al., 2021).

The fourth stage is child-initiated and child-directed activities, where the child leads and initiates an action. Child-initiated and child-directed participation occurs when children and young people conceptualize and carry out complex projects by working cooperatively in small or large groups. While adults may observe and assist children, they do not interfere with the process or play a directing or managerial role.

## Child Participation in Various Aspects

There are several situations that can increase children's participation levels, as illustrated by several studies. These situations arise from several aspects of life where children can participate, interact, and collaborate with adults. The first aspect is seen from religious communication in the family in instilling moral-religiousness, which is associated with positive adjustment in youth, meaning that early spiritual moral cultivation is the right place for children to express their inner self; on the one hand family conflict is associated with poorer participatory communication adjustment. Extracurricular involvement moderated the relationship between morals, making damaging behavioral cohesion less likely (Shorter & Elledge, 2020). Findings (Berc et al., 2017) showed significant correlations between children's participation with family members in religious activities, perceptions of family cohesion, and satisfaction with family life.

The next aspect relates to how children deal with conflict. It was found in the case of the Salomon Islands that young people's participation in the conflict resolution process was passive (Mollica, 2017). Participation in youth-grown initiatives provides space to encourage communication between different groups and promotes peace between communities, starting with young people (Baú, 2018). The sports aspect contributes that youth participation has practical implications in that conflict mitigation through football sports programs and activities can be used by donors and the international community in similar contexts. Some organizations offer hope for peacebuilding and if adequately implemented, can contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict societies identical to the Kosovo context. The positive attitude change resulting from participation in the football sports program suggests that these joint programs can promote better ethnic relations. These programs need to be expanded to reach more people (Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2019).

Children's participation in arts and culture significantly contributes to open dialogue. Research results (Becker, 2019) suggest that music can help create researchers who challenge the space "in-between" positionality and give voice to the "researched." Music also acts as a connecting agent that encourages openness and honest dialogue and builds relationships. Participatory communication was also demonstrated by engaging girls to produce photographic works with three engaging and meaningful themes; the first outcome breaking stereotypes, where

participants identified gender norms, conflicts, and contradictions; second, Emotional Safety, or the context in which girls and young women feel confident and comfortable. Each theme is supported by quotes and photographs (Spencer et al., 2021).

## Child and Adult Collaborative Innovation

The highest rung in Hart's participation model is child-initiated participation, where joint decisions with adults occur when children, although in this case mainly young people, share authority, management, or decision-making power with adult partners and allies. Many perspectives say that children's participation is highest when adults do it. However, leadership initiative programs show that school students can interact positively with adults in solving problems. The overall results were influential in increasing participation through children's behavior (Massey et al., 2017).

The majority of children aged 12-13 have an optimistic likelihood of having low conflict through the teacher-child relationship due to the relationship and high level of participation (Wang et al., 2018). Teachers are children's best friends, allowing children to act as experts, competent conflict solvers and reflective and caring practitioners. In addition, they consider children's individual and collective rights and responsibilities when creating a rights-respecting preschool environment." (Frödén & Tellgren, 2020).

The mapping of the categorization in Table 1 shows that children's participation at the final level of the Hart model shows collaboration between children, teachers, parents, government, and the surrounding environment. Most studies show that the collaborative group of children and adults use participatory methods that fully consider children's participation not as objects but as subjects that should be considered in decision-making for development.

## Child Participatory Communication in Indonesia

Regulation of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia Number 3 of 2011 Article 1 Paragraph 2 reads:

> *"Child Participation is the involvement of children in the decision-making process about everything that relates to them and is carried out based on awareness, understanding, and mutual willingness so that children can enjoy the results or benefit from these decisions. Children need to be involved in decision-making, including in the decision-making of regional development plans to realize a city that is worthy of them".*

The above shows that children's participation is the basis and foundation that ensures that children are subjects of the same human rights so that they are not always the object of a development process. The government has established and fostered a platform for children's participation called the Children's Forum, in which all children are members. The board consists of representatives of children's groups. The Children's Forum was established to bridge children's and adults' interests.

The children's forum is a medium or institution to fulfill children's right to participation. The participation of parents in the smallest unit, namely the family, is needed in the child protection process. This can be found in Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Amendments to Law

Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection. The concept of sustainable child protection is needed in guarding child protection; this concept provides assertiveness that child protection must be optimized (Wasiati, 2020). Child participation has a particularly positive impact on development in various regions.

Surakarta City is one of the pilot cities that actively supports child participation. Several child-friendly health centers are equipped with unique waiting rooms for children, with playground equipment, nutrition parks, breastfeeding corners, pediatricians, child counseling services, and child abuse victim services.

The Kepahiang Regional Children's Forum, located in Bengkulu Province, was established based on the concerns of young community leaders in Kepahiang Regency about the lack of parental attention to children's rights, so this forum has a primary mission of minimizing cases experienced by children both by those closest to them and others. This Children's Forum contributes, among others: For the government, Kepahiang was recognized as a child-friendly city by the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection in 2019. Members of the Children's Forum train them to be pioneers in fighting for their rights and those of their peers. Members of the Children's Forum also assist children involved in acts that violate the law, both customary and other criminal acts (Rizki et al., 2015).

West Kalimantan, which is thick with the history of several ethnicities that have been in conflict, is a region that has an active Children's Forum. The presence of the West Kalimantan Children's Forum, along with several peace alliances, stimulates the emergence of collective forgiveness for past inter-ethnic conflicts, especially for the younger generation in West Kalimantan (Fernando et al., 2022, 2023; Fernando & Marta, 2019; Marta & Fernando, 2020).

However, this also seems to be challenging to implement. Children are still in the background of the development process. Children's welfare is assumed to occur when development goes well. So, children only exist in the assumption and are never put forward consciously and deliberately as an insight into development, not the subject of action. They only become development indicators, such as infant and under-five and child mortality rates, the degree of participation in education, and so on.

The concept of children themselves is also still biased. Children are seen as adults who have not 'become' or are in the process of 'becoming,' so they do not need to be considered. Children are resourceful citizens, capable of helping to build a better future for everyone (Rizki et al., 2015). Children also think the family has not maximally fulfilled children's participation rights. Parents make Many decisions unilaterally without first listening to their children's opinions (Thoomaszen, 2017). This is experienced by some areas that experience obstacles to children's participation through implementing Child-Friendly Cities.

The constraints in the Child-Friendly City in Pekanbaru are as follows: (1) Programs in Child-Friendly City are not yet famous at the level of regional work units in Pekanbaru, and institutionally the regional work units are still considered ego sectoral, so it is difficult to integrate children's issues in the preparation of education programs, and preparation in the Regional Action Plan for Child-Friendly City, (2) Implementation of inadequate institutional

capacity. (3) The absence of a budget based on children's needs, (4) not establishing partnerships between the government, the private sector, community organizations, and the community itself, including children, in realizing Pekanbaru to the City of Children who meet the requirements as stated in the Regulation of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia Number 12 of 2011 (Fithriyyah, 2017).

The Sleman District Children's Forum and several sub-district-level children's forums have legality through government decrees. However, legitimacy does not guarantee that all criteria for children's participation can be met quickly. Several factors prevent other measures from being completed: (1) The output indicators and impact indicators of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation No. 04/2011 have not been fully realized; (2) Children have not utilized the optimization forum in the realization of the budget that has been facilitated by the government to formulate and implement work programs related to the fulfillment of children's participation rights by the policy on children's participation in development; (3) Children's Forum is not a forum that involves the entire base of children's groups/organizations in Sleman Regency; and (4) not all problems that exist in children's groups/organizations in Sleman can be accommodated by the children's forum (Mujiati & Windryanto, 2017).

The study results illustrate that for 12 years, Ambon City has been developing into a child-friendly city. In 2019, Ambon City only received the Primary Award from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection with a score of 523 from an assessment score of 500-599 (Utama, 2020). In Makassar, not many programs are being carried out by the local government. This is because Makassar has only recently launched a Child-Friendly City and is still improving. The new and ongoing programs implemented by the Makassar City Government are providing free birth certificates, building flats in slum areas, and doing two villages' child-friendly city pilot projects.

The factor influencing the realization of the Child-Friendly City is commitment, not only the commitment of the regional head but also all related parties. As an issue that involves various parties, a child-friendly city also requires institutional capacity, not only the capacity of the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Agency as the leading sector of the child-friendly town but also all related regional work units. The Child-Friendly City program cannot be done quickly and requires a lot of money (Hamudy, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Research on children's participatory communication can be analyzed using the participatory action research method. Still, using other ways to make children comfortable, participating in research is possible. In communication science, children's participation can be studied in several aspects, such as conflict, health, art, and group communication. Children's involvement in participating with adults can also be done in schools, families, governments, and neighborhoods. This proves that participatory communication built by children can transform into development communication, and children's voices can contribute to the development process. Indonesian children's involvement in participation tends to still be in the stage of being

an object in fulfilling programs such as Child-Friendly Cities. Full participatory communication requires involving children in the design, implementation, and evaluation of children. Of course, all child participation activities must involve adults as collaborative partners in protecting children's rights. This research is limited to reviewing research articles within the scope of global child participatory communication. This research recommends that children's participatory communication in Indonesia can have a role and be considered covering various aspects.

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