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Navigating the Implementation of the Child Friendly School Environment (CFSE) Policy and Its Implication to Students' Performance

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ABSTRACT

This assessed the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) policy and established its relationship to students' academic performance in secondary schools in Flora District, Schools Division of Apayao. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, it explored the status, challenges, and coping strategies in implementing CFSE, as well as how these factors correlate to students' performance. The quantitative aspect employed descriptive-correlational methods to determine relationships between teachers' profiles, CFSE policy implementation status, and students' general average for School Year 2023–2024. Meanwhile, the qualitative part examined challenges encountered and coping mechanisms used by educators. Findings revealed that CFSE policy implementation was generally rated as “Implemented” to “Fully Implemented” across its domains, including children's participation, health and well-being, safe spaces, enrollment and completion, academic success, teacher morale, and community support. However, a critical gap was noted in teacher training as all respondents reported no CFSE-related training. Statistical analyses indicated significant differences in CFSE perceptions across some teacher profile variables and a notable relationship between CFSE implementation and student performance. Challenges identified included lack of training, resource limitations, and inconsistent stakeholder support. In response, educators employed coping strategies such as peer collaboration, community partnerships, and adaptive leadership practices. The study concludes with proposed enhancements to strengthen CFSE policy implementation and recommends continuous professional development, improved infrastructure, and broader stakeholder engagement to foster more inclusive and supportive learning environments.

KEY WORDS: challenges, child-friendly school environment (CFSE), coping mechanism, mixed-method research, student performance

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of a Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) has garnered global attention as an essential framework for improving the quality of education and fostering holistic development among students. Initiated by UNICEF in the early 2000s, the CFSE framework emphasizes creating safe, inclusive, and effective learning environments that promote the well-being and rights of children. Numerous studies across various countries have demonstrated the positive impact of CFSE policies on student outcomes. For instance, research conducted in diverse educational contexts, including Finland, Japan, and Canada, highlights that schools adhering to CFSE principles often see improvements in students' academic performance, attendance rates, and overall school satisfaction.

The notion of a Child-Friendly School (CFS) revolves around promoting the active engagement of parents, the community, and learners, emphasizing the rights of all children regardless of differences. In a CFS, the learning environment is designed to be conducive, with friendly staff members ensuring that the health and safety needs of children are adequately addressed (Nyatuka, 2023). The concept of CFS, introduced by UNICEF in 1999, responds to the global imperative to enhance the quality of education within the framework of child rights philosophy, highlighting education's pivotal role in fostering child development (Fitriani & Istaryatiningti, 2020).

UNICEF's conceptualization of a Child-Friendly School recognizes and actively promotes the fulfillment of children's basic rights. This entails providing a secure, clean, healthy, and protective environment that respects and upholds child rights (Fauziati, 2016). The evolution of the child-friendly school concept extends to its role as an evaluation system for assessing school effectiveness. This system provides a comprehensive overview of a school's educational landscape, evaluating its needs and recommending improvements essential for the teaching and learning process (Abenes & Caballes, 2019). In essence, the Child-Friendly School ensures a supportive and inclusive environment for the holistic development of all children.

In the Philippines, the implementation of CFSE policies has been a significant focus of educational reforms aimed at enhancing student learning experiences and outcomes. The national government, in collaboration with various educational stakeholders, has launched initiatives to integrate CFSE principles into the education system. Policies promoting safe and inclusive school environments, teacher professional development, and active parental involvement have been central to these efforts.

The Department of Education (DepEd) implemented the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) through DepEd Order No. 73 in 2006. Over nearly two decades, DepEd, in partnership with UNICEF Philippines, has introduced CFSS initiatives in elementary and public schools nationwide (Abubakar, 2022).

In addition, according to the DepEd, a Child-friendly School is not solely focused on formal education; it's a place that prioritizes children's rights beyond just the right to education. It ensures their health, provides opportunities for play, protects them from harm, encourages their freedom of expression, and involves them in decision-making. Alongside these rights, children are taught to respect others, value diversity, promote equality, and resolve conflicts peacefully. Moreover, such schools create conducive learning environments that foster holistic growth, impart lifelong skills, and cultivate responsible citizenship ("DepEd child-friendly

school," 2021).

The rationale for conducting a study on CFSE in the Division of Apayao stems from the importance of continuously assessing and improving educational practices to ensure optimal learning experiences for students. Despite the satisfactory rating in the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) over the past two years, ongoing evaluation is crucial to identify areas for enhancement and sustain positive outcomes. By conducting a study focused on CFSE, educational stakeholders in the Division of Apayao can gain insights into the effectiveness of current practices, identify challenges, and explore opportunities for further improvement.

Moreover, given the evolving nature of education and the diverse needs of students, it is essential to regularly review and adopt educational policies and practices to meet emerging challenges. The urgency to conduct the study lies in the commitment to providing the best possible learning environments for children in the Division of Apayao, ensuring that they receive holistic support for their development and well-being. Through rigorous research and analysis, the Division can refine its strategies, strengthen its implementation of CFSS initiatives, and ultimately foster a more inclusive and child-centered approach to education.

In summary, the study on CFSE in the Division of Apayao not only provides insights into current practices and identifies areas for improvement but also lays the groundwork for the development of school improvement plans. By prioritizing the creation of these plans based on the study's findings, educational stakeholders can ensure that efforts to enhance child-friendly schooling practices are strategic, targeted, and sustainable, ultimately benefiting all children in the region.

Statement of the Problem

This study assessed the status, challenges and coping strategies in the implementation of the CFSE policy and its relationship to the school and students' performance among Secondary Schools in Flora District, Schools Division of Apayao. Specifically, it addressed the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of: age, sex, plantilla position, years in teaching, highest educational attainment, area of specialization, and number of CFSE seminars/ trainings attended
2. What is the status of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) policy as assessed by the school heads and teachers in terms of the following components: a) children's participation in school and community, b) children's health and well-being c) safe and protective spaces for children, d) enrollment and competition, e) children's academic achievement and success, f) teachers' morale and motivation, and g) community support for education
3. What is the student's academic performance for School Year 2023-2024?
4. Is there a significant difference in the perception of the status in the implementation of CFSE when respondents are grouped according to profile variables?
5. Is there an association between the status in the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) policy with that of the students' performance?
6. What are the challenges encountered by the respondents in implementing the Child-Friendly School Environment

(CFSE) policy and its implications to the implementation status, strategies and student performance?

7. What are the coping strategies employed by the respondents based on their profile and preferences to address the challenges in the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) policy?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed research approach involving quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative method described the profile of the respondents, including their demographic characteristics such as age, sex, position/rank, years in teaching or as school head, highest education attainment, and the training attended on CFSE. Additionally, the descriptive aspect assessed respondents' perception of the status of CFSE in the different domains, students, and school performances. The correlational aspect was used to determine the degree of relationship between the status and challenges in implementing the CFSE policy and school and student performance. For the qualitative aspect, a thematic analysis was used to explore the respondents' challenges and coping strategies in the implementation of the CFSE policy.

Locale of the Study

The study was carried out in Flora District, Division of Apayao. Flora, a third-class municipality, is one of the seven towns in the province of Apayao, in the Cordillera Administrative Region of the Philippines. According to the 2020 Census, Flora has a population of 17,944. The Flora district operates under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education (DepEd), specifically managed by the schools Division Office of Apayao. The district includes five public secondary school levels within the municipality.

Respondents and Sampling Procedure

The respondents of the study were the secondary teachers and school heads of Flora District, Schools Division of Apayao. In getting the total number of respondents, a complete enumeration sampling was utilized.

Research Instrument

The main instrument used in the study was the Child-Friendly School Survey, an instrument drawn from the Department of Education under DepEd Order No. 73 in 2006 to assess the child-friendliness of schools. The survey questionnaire contained the following parts: Part I elicited the socio-demographic variables regarding the school heads and teacher participants. Part 2 was the Status of the Implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment in terms of the seven (7) domains: a) Participation in school and community, b) Health and well-being, c) Safe and protective spaces for children, d) Enrollment and completion, e) Children's academic achievement and success, f) Teachers' morale and motivation, and g) Community support for education. For the Students Performance, the general weighted average of the students for the school year 2023-2024, was provided by the school advisers, records officers or person in-charge. The open-ended questions were provided for their responses on the Challenges encountered as well as the Coping Strategies applied in the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment policy.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher first secured approval from the Schools Division Superintendent. Then, the researcher requested permission from the school administrators to conduct the study within their institutions.

After receiving approval from the school heads, the researcher engaged with the individuals involved in data collection. Informed consent was obtained from these participants to ensure voluntary participation or compliance with ethical research standards. The researcher personally administered the survey questionnaire to the respondents within their respective schools to ensure complete retrieval of the responses. The researcher ensured data privacy by safeguarding its anonymity and confidentiality and regulating data access, security, and disposal.

Statistical Treatment

The following statistical treatments were employed: a) Descriptive statistics, which comprised frequency counts and percentage distributions, were utilized to describe the profile of the respondents, b) The Weighted mean was used to describe the status of implementing the CFSE and students' performance. c) 3. An ANOVA and T-test were used to determine if there is a significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of the status of implementing CFSE when they are grouped according to profile variables, and d) Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to measure the relationship between the status of implementing the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) policy and students' performance.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1) Profile of the Respondents

For the profile of the respondents, in terms of age, most respondents fall within the 31–40 years old bracket. The average age is 35.13 years, indicating that the majority are in their early to mid-career stages. Regarding sex, the majority of respondents are female, making up 62.67 percent, consistent with the trend of a female-dominated teaching workforce. In terms of Plantilla position, most respondents are Teacher III, accounting for 36.00 percent, and Teacher I, comprising 29.33 percent. Fewer hold higher-ranking positions such as Master Teacher at 12.00 percent or Principal at 4.00 percent. This indicates a workforce predominantly composed of classroom-level educators, with limited representation in leadership roles. As to teaching experience, the average teaching tenure is 10.27 years, suggesting a moderately experienced workforce. In terms of educational attainment, 42.67 percent of respondents hold a bachelor's degree, while 30.67 percent have completed a master's degree. Another 16.00 percent are pursuing master's-level studies, and only 6.67 percent have attained a doctoral degree. This reflects ongoing efforts in professional development, although a significant proportion of respondents remain at the undergraduate level.

With regard to specialization, the majority focus on Science, representing 32.00 percent, followed by English at 22.67 percent and Math at 21.33 percent. Fewer respondents specialize in Social Science at 10.67 percent, Filipino at 8.00 percent, and MAPEH at 2.67 percent. A critical finding is that 100 percent of the respondents reported having no training on the CFSE policy. This highlights a significant gap in professional development and preparation for implementing the policy effectively. The absence of training may hinder the successful application of the CFSE framework, potentially affecting its ability to improve students' academic performance and foster a conducive school environment. In summary, while the respondents are predominantly experienced, mid-career, and specialized in core academic subjects, their lack of training on CFSE underscores an urgent need for capacity-building initiatives. Addressing this gap through targeted programs, workshops, and seminars could significantly enhance the

effectiveness of CFSE policy implementation in schools.

2) Extent of Implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) Policy

Table 1 presents the summary of assessments on the extent of implementation of the CFSE policy across various factors. The results reveal that three factors are rated as "Fully Implemented," emphasizing the school's strengths in these areas.

Children's Participation in School and Community (composite mean = 3.27) reflects the successful involvement of students in decision-making, governance, and community engagement, aligning with findings by Peterson (2019), who highlights the importance of participatory democracy in fostering leadership and engagement among students.

Also, the description of "Fully Implemented," reflects the overall success of the school in encouraging student participation in both school and community activities. However, while there is opportunity to enhance the mechanisms to gather student feedback, the results highlight the school's strong commitment to create a child-friendly and participatory environment.

Children's Academic Achievement and Success receives a composite mean = 3.45 indicating that the school has prioritized effective teaching strategies and academic monitoring. This supports Cchiaro's (2022) assertion that a clear vision and mission, coupled with strong instructional practices, significantly contribute to academic success. The findings rated as fully implemented also underscore the school's strong commitment to creating a supportive academic environment while revealing areas requiring further attention. A well-articulated vision and mission, as emphasized by Cchiaro (2022), provide a clear direction for aligning school initiatives with educational goals, ensuring cohesive efforts toward academic excellence. Familiarity with child-centered principles, noted by Nyatuka (2023), is vital for addressing students' holistic needs and fostering a nurturing environment that enhances their potential. The composite mean of 3.51 reflects the school's significant progress in implementing initiatives that promote academic success, highlighting its dedication to fostering a child-friendly environment. However, the findings emphasize the importance of addressing the availability of learning materials to ensure that all students, regardless of socio-economic status, have equitable access to the resources necessary for academic growth. By addressing these gaps and sustaining its existing efforts, the school can further enhance its support for students' academic achievement and success.

Teachers' Morale and Motivation (composite mean = 3.50) underscores the school's commitment to teacher well-being and professional development, reflecting research by Garcia and Weiss (2019), which emphasizes that continuous learning opportunities enhance teacher engagement and effectiveness. This indicator categorized as "Fully Implemented," reflects that the school has established an environment that prioritizes the well-being, professional growth, and collaboration of its teachers. This focus on morale and motivation demonstrates the school's commitment to fostering a supportive atmosphere for educators, which ultimately contributes to the success of the child-friendly school environment. Research emphasizes the significant impact of teacher training and professional development on improving teachers' capabilities and enhancing student outcomes. Continuous professional development ensures that teachers remain updated with the latest teaching strategies and can adapt to evolving educational demands (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Ikram et al. (2020) found that professional training

significantly improves student academic performance, while Boudersa (2016) highlights the role of training in fostering innovation and effective teaching practices.

Conversely, four factors are rated as "Implemented," indicating areas where progress has been made but further improvements are required.

Along children's health and well-being, the average score of 3.08, classified as "Implemented," shows that the school has made significant progress in supporting students' health and well-being, but there are still some areas that need improvement. Focusing on nutrition programs, dental health services, and access to clean water and sanitation will create a more supportive environment for learners.

As to the assessment of the Child Friendly School Environment policy concerning safe and protective spaces for children, the composite mean of 3.10, categorized as "Implemented," reflects that the school has made commendable progress in creating safe and protective spaces for children but still has work to do. Enhancing classroom conditions, optimizing learning materials, and bolstering emergency preparedness are critical areas for improvement. Despite these challenges, the school is on the right track toward fostering a secure and supportive environment. Continued efforts to address these gaps will further enhance the child-friendly environment and ensure all aspects of safety and protection are fully implemented.

As to the status of the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) policy in terms of Enrollment and Competition, the composite mean of 3.09, categorized as "Implemented," reflects the school's notable progress in promoting enrollment and managing attendance. However, there is room for improvement in refining and expanding these initiatives to ensure every child in the community benefits from a child-friendly educational environment. Continued focus on strengthening partnerships, engaging parents, and addressing attendance challenges can further enhance the school's efforts to provide inclusive and accessible education for all.

Strong leadership from the principal also plays a pivotal role in boosting teacher morale. Quispe et al. (2023) emphasize that effective instructional supervision and support contribute to improved teacher performance. Additionally, fostering collaboration among teachers is recognized as a critical factor in enhancing professional growth and creating a positive school culture (Jpiersol, 2023). Overall, the school's prioritization of teachers' professional development, well-being, and collaboration aligns with best practices and reinforces the broader goals of the Child-Friendly School Environment policy.

In terms of Community Support for Education, that data show the Child Friendly School Environment policy is being put into action, particularly in terms of community support for education. The data indicates that many factors are rated as "Fully Implemented," highlighting the school's success in building strong ties with the community. According to Murray et al. (2019), active PTAs are crucial for improving school performance and developing responsible citizens. Llego (2022) also stresses the importance of parental involvement in creating supportive learning environments that enhance students' academic success. The composite mean of 3.41, classified as "Fully Implemented," reflects the school's effectiveness in engaging the community to support education. By fostering partnerships with parents, local institutions, and external stakeholders, the school demonstrates its commitment to a holistic approach in creating a child-friendly environment. Improving

literacy programs and gathering community resources could strengthen these efforts, helping both learners and their families.

Community Support for Education (composite mean = 3.20) reflects the school's collaborative efforts with parents and stakeholders, though further initiatives in literacy programs and resource mobilization could enhance these partnerships, as noted by Lynch (2023).

The overall composite mean of 3.24, interpreted as "Implemented," indicates that the school has largely adhered to the CFSE policy, fostering a child-friendly environment. However, it also underscores the need for targeted improvements in specific components, particularly in health services, infrastructure, and community engagement, to achieve a higher level of effectiveness. These enhancements will not only elevate the implementation of the CFSE policy but also contribute to a more holistic, inclusive, and supportive educational environment for all stakeholders.

Table 1. Summary Assessments on the Extent of Implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) Policy

FACTORS	Composite Mean	Descriptive Value
1. Children's Participation In School And Community	3.27	Fully Implemented
2. Children's Health and Well-Being	3.08	Implemented
3. Safe and Protective Spaces for Children	3.10	Implemented
4. Enrollment and Competition	3.09	Implemented
5. Children's Academic Achievement and Success	3.45	Fully Implemented
6. Teachers' Morale and Motivation	3.5	Fully Implemented
7. Community Support for Education	3.20	Implemented
OVER ALL COMPOSITE MEAN	3.24	Implemented

3) Student's Academic Performance for School Year 2023-2024

For the students' academic performance for the School Year 2023-

2024, in the Grade 11, most students (37.92%) achieved a grade between 90-100, categorized as Outstanding, followed by 34.55% who scored between 85-89, which is considered Very Satisfactory. Similarly, in Grade 12, the highest percentage of students (34.08%) achieved Outstanding grades, while 32.17% earned Very Satisfactory marks. The average academic performance for Grade 11 was 87.55, reflecting a Very Satisfactory level, and for Grade 12, the average was 86.58, also categorized as Very Satisfactory. These results indicate that both grades performed well, with a large proportion of students falling within the Very Satisfactory and Outstanding ranges. The minimal number of students who failed indicates an overall strong academic performance across both grades.

4) Comparison in the Assessment of the Respondents on the Extent of Implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) When Grouped According to Profile Variables

Table 2 presents the comparison of respondents' assessments on the extent of implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) policy when grouped according to profile variables. Significant differences were observed in multiple CFSE components, highlighting the influence of respondents' demographic and professional backgrounds on their perceptions. Age showed significant differences in all components ($p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.01$), indicating that perceptions vary across age groups. Sex was significant in areas such as Children's Health and Well-Being, Safe and Protective Spaces for Children, Enrollment and Competition, and Children's Academic Achievement and Success ($p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.01$), suggesting gender influences these components. Differences by Plantilla Position were significant in Children's Participation in School and Community, Children's Health and Well-Being, Safe and Protective Spaces for Children, and Children's Academic Achievement and Success ($p < 0.01$), highlighting variations based on job roles.

Similarly, years in teaching showed significant differences across all components except Teachers' Morale and Motivation ($p = 0.126$), suggesting experience impacts perceptions. For Highest Educational Attainment, significant differences were found in Safe and Protective Spaces for Children, Enrollment and Competition, and Children's Academic Achievement and Success ($p < 0.05$). Finally, Area of Specialization revealed significant differences in Children's Health and Well-Being and Enrollment and Competition ($p < 0.01$). These findings underscore the influence of demographic and professional variables on the perception of CFSE policy implementation.

Table 2. Comparison In the Assessment of The Respondents on The Extent of Implementation of The Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) When Grouped According to Profile Variables

Profile Variables		Childs participation in School Community	Childs health and well being	Safe and protective spaces for children	Enrollment and competition	Children's High Academic Achievement and success	Teachers' morale and Motivation	Community support for education
A. Age	F- value	2.126*	3.432**	1.883*	2.141*	5.266**	3.763**	2.232*
	P-Value	0.045	0.000	0.031	0.038	0.000	0.000	0.016
B. Sex	F- value	1.695	2.650**	1.926*	7.253**	3.264**	1.456	0.676
	P-Value	0.116	0.003	0.026	0.000	0.001	0.171	0.788

C. Plantilla Position	F- value	4.316**	2.174*	5.214**	1.761	3.164**	0.999	1.694
	P-Value	0.000	0.015	0.000	0.093	0.001	0.458	0.081
D. Years in Teaching	F- value	2.574*	5.448**	2.345**	7.995**	4.684**	1.581	2.435**
	P-Value	0.017	0.000	0.006	0.000	0.000	0.126	0.009
E. Highest Educational Attainment	F- value	1.471	0.802	2.011*	2.572*	2.039*	1.891	1.211
	P-Value	0.185	0.684	0.019	0.013	0.032	0.057	0.292
F. Area of specialization	F- value	0.855	5.656**	0.753	3.517**	1.794	1.672	1.303
	P-Value	0.558	0.000	0.768	0.001	0.065	0.101	0.233
*Significant at .05 level of significance								
**Highly Significant at .01 level of significance								

5) Association Between the Extent of Implementation of The Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) Policy and The Academic Performance of Students

Table 3 presents the association between the extent of implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) Policy and the Academic Performance of Students.

Among the seven factors, only Children's Health and Well-Being exhibits a statistically significant positive correlation with academic performance (Pearson correlation = 0.188, $p = 0.011$). This finding indicates that improvements in health and well-being initiatives, such as regular health check-ups, proper nutrition, and access to clean water, positively influence students' academic success. Based on this result, the null hypothesis is rejected for this component, affirming that children's health and well-being significantly impacts academic outcomes. This coincides with research by Michael et al. (2015), who emphasize that a healthy student is more likely to attend school consistently and perform well academically.

The other factors—Children's Participation in School and Community ($r = -0.025$, $p = 0.834$), Safe and Protective Spaces for Children ($r = -0.043$, $p = 0.711$), Enrollment and Competition ($r = -0.004$, $p = 0.970$), Children's Academic Achievement and Success ($r = -0.038$, $p = 0.749$), Teachers' Morale and Motivation ($r = -0.064$, $p = 0.584$), and Community Support for Education ($r = 0.191$, $p = 0.101$)—show no significant correlation with academic performance as reflected by the p -value higher than 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis is accepted for these components, indicating no measurable association with academic outcomes. This suggests that while these factors are important components of a child-friendly school environment, their direct measurable impact on students' academic performance is not statistically significant.

The overall extent of CFSE implementation also shows no significant correlation with academic performance as reflected by 0.784 p -value which is higher than 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. This could imply that the aggregate implementation of the policy, while essential for fostering a holistic and supportive educational environment, may not directly influence academic outcomes in a linear or measurable way. It is also possible that other intervening variables, such as family background, socio-economic status, or external community factors, play a larger role in determining academic performance.

Table 3. Association between the status of the CFSE domains and Students' Academic Performance

Factors	Pearson Correlation	Probability Value	Remarks
1. Children's Health and Well-Being	.188*	0.011	Significant
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

6) Challenges Encountered in The Implementation of The Child-Friendly School Environment Policy

The teachers and school heads in Flora District encountered different challenges in implementing the CFSE policy. These challenges included problems with funds, inadequate infrastructure, learning resources, teachers' training, low parent participation and collaboration with local authorities, student discipline issues, and a poor classroom environment.

Funding constraints are one of the most urgent concerns of the schools as they rely heavily on donations and experience difficulty accessing financial resources to sustain the CFSE programs due to the delay in the grants or budgets provided by the government. This is evident in the responses of the following respondents:

R1: "Our school depends on donations, but they're not reliable, and we have to manage with what little we receive."

R2: "We receive minimal funding, and it's never enough to cover all our school's needs."

R13: "Budget constraints limit our ability to implement CFSE activities effectively."

R24: "Many of us don't have the technical knowledge to apply for grants successfully."

The lack of funding and financial support limits school development and policy implementation, which is considered crucial in creating inclusive learning environments. In addition, inadequate budgets significantly impact schools' effectiveness, making it difficult to sustain adequate facilities and resources for students (UNICEF (2009) and Bhandari, 2020).

Moreover, the lack of infrastructure also poses a significant barrier; as cited by the respondents, they observed and experienced overcrowded classrooms, poor sanitation facilities, and an unreliable water supply. The absence of clean restrooms discourages student attendance, while congested learning spaces negatively impact student focus and teacher effectiveness. Some statements of the respondents are elucidated below:

R1: "Our classrooms are in poor condition, and overcrowding makes it hard to focus on individual students."

R2: "Many students avoid using school restrooms because they are poorly maintained."

R4 "Sometimes we run out of water, making hygiene difficult for both students and teachers."

Abenes & Caballes (2019) emphasize that proper school infrastructure plays a crucial role in student engagement and learning outcomes. Furthermore, Ambarsari and Harun (2019) stress that well-maintained classrooms enhance student participation and well-being, a key component of the CFSE framework.

Another critical issue is the lack of learning resources, with outdated textbooks, insufficient digital tools, and a shortage of basic supplies hindering effective teaching and learning. Respondents indicated that some subjects lack the necessary instructional materials, forcing students to share books or rely on old and outdated references. These are apparent in the remarks of the following teachers and/or school heads.

R15 "We rely on old materials that are no longer aligned with the current curriculum."

R18 "We don't have enough computers or projectors to integrate technology into our lessons."

R25 "Only a few classrooms have access to digital learning resources."

R26 "We need more tablets and computers to support modern teaching methods."

R34 "Even simple materials like paper and pens are sometimes hard to provide."

R40 "Students often have to share supplies because we don't have enough."

R45 "Teachers sometimes have to buy their own materials to support lessons."

Ghavifekr and Pillai (2016) argue that access to modern educational resources and technology is essential for student engagement and knowledge retention. Similarly, Fitriani & Istaryatiningti (2020) highlight that outdated learning materials reduce instructional quality and limit students' ability to meet academic standards.

Inadequate teacher training and professional development further complicates the implementation of CFSE policies. Respondents mentioned that workshops are infrequent, repetitive, and fail to address modern teaching challenges. New teachers also struggle due to the lack of structured mentoring programs.

R21 "Many new teachers feel lost and have to learn through trial and error."

R25 "Most of us only learned about CFSE from brief discussions, not proper training."

R50 "We rarely have workshops, and when we do, the content is repetitive and doesn't address current challenges."

Research by Nyatuka (2023) and Wahungu (2017) emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development in supporting effective teaching and enhancing the quality of education. UNICEF USA (2023) further notes that well-trained teachers play a critical role in fostering child-friendly classrooms and improving student outcomes.

Low parental participation remains a major obstacle, as many parents are either unaware of CFSE initiatives or lack the time to engage due to economic constraints. Some respondents also cited cultural barriers that discourage active parental involvement. Their responses are seen in the following:

R19 "Some parents feel uncomfortable engaging with school matters because they lack education themselves."

R29 "Many parents don't even know what CFSE is or how they can support it."

R60 "Parents are often too busy working to attend school meetings, and many don't know how they can contribute."

Studies confirm that parental engagement positively influences student success, with Martinez (2015) and Hill et al. (2016) advocating for stronger school-parent communication to enhance participation. UNESCO (2018) further emphasizes that increased parental support fosters a more conducive learning environment and improves school-community relationships.

Schools also face weak collaboration with local authorities, leading to delays in infrastructure development and insufficient advocacy for educational needs. Respondents highlighted the minimal support from local government units (LGUs) and the poor coordination between schools and DepEd. Some of the respondents' responses are shown below:

R26 "When we raise issues to local offices, the response is slow or sometimes nonexistent."

R75 "There's no strong push from officials to improve our school facilities."

R32 "We need better representation in local government discussions."

Research by Lynch (2023) and the Harvard Family Research Project (2010) underscores the importance of strong partnerships between schools and government agencies in securing resources and improving program implementation.

Student discipline issues, including absenteeism and behavioral challenges, were also reported as common concerns. Teachers find it difficult to enforce discipline consistently due to overcrowded classrooms and socio-economic factors affecting students' engagement. There are shown in their answers like:

R28 "Classroom discipline is difficult due to overcrowding and lack of resources."

R30 "Some students misbehave because they lack parental supervision."

R31 "Teachers need more support in managing disruptive behavior."

R40 "Many students come to school with personal struggles that affect their behavior."

Najam (2020) suggests that student involvement in school governance can reduce behavioral issues, while Killen & Rutland (2022) advocate for inclusive discipline policies that focus on positive reinforcement rather than punishment.

Lastly, poor classroom environments, such as inadequate ventilation, extreme heat, and external noise disturbances, further hinder student concentration and engagement. As noted by the teacher and school heads, students find difficulties in focusing due to uncomfortable learning environment. Some of their answers are found below:

R18 "Outside noise from the surroundings distracts students during lessons."

R25 "Some classrooms lack proper lighting, making it difficult to read."

R46 "The classrooms are too hot and noisy, making it hard for students to focus."

According to Barrett (2015), a well-designed classroom is significantly associated with student learning outcomes, whereas Lewinski (2015) underscore the importance and proper ventilation and well-lighted classroom in keeping student focus and productivity.

Overall, the findings emphasize the interconnectedness of the identified challenges in implementing the CFSE policy in schools. Addressing these problems through adequate funding, better infrastructure and materials, teacher training, and stronger linkages from stakeholders and the government are crucial to ascertaining the successful enforcement of the CFSE policies, resulting in a more conducive, inclusive, and supportive learning environment for students.

7) Coping Mechanisms to Address the Challenges in the Implementation of Child-friendly School Environment

The results reveal various coping strategies employed by school heads in the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) policy, particularly in contexts with limited resources. A prominent theme is Effective Resource Management, where school personnel prioritize critical needs such as textbooks, teaching materials, and classroom repairs. Teachers compensate for the lack of updated learning resources by creating customized learning activity sheets and incorporating digital tools like online videos. These coping strategies demonstrate adaptability and innovation in resource-constrained environments. This aligns with the findings of Courey et al. (2012) and Muelas and Asencio (2015), who emphasized the importance of using personalized and multimedia-based instructional strategies to support diverse learning needs. Wahungu (2017) also observed that when resources are limited, schools tend to rely on peer support and localized content to bridge instructional gaps.

Another significant coping mechanism is Strengthening Partnerships and Advocacy, wherein schools proactively engage parents, barangay officials, and other stakeholders through barangay meetings, community forums, and advocacy campaigns. This strategy fosters collaborative support and increases awareness and investment in child-friendly practices. The literature supports this approach, with Martinez (2015) and Ngare (2015) highlighting that strong school-community partnerships significantly enhance educational outcomes. Similarly, Comighud (2020) emphasized the role of community involvement in the successful implementation of educational reforms, including CFSE.

The theme of Curriculum Support and Adaptation illustrates how

schools make learning more engaging by contextualizing lessons using local stories, traditions, and community-produced materials. In the absence of standardized textbooks, teachers integrate culturally relevant content to enhance student participation and understanding. This is consistent with the work of Fitriani and Istaryatiningtias (2020), who advocated for integrating culture-based learning as part of a child-friendly school environment. Olayinka (n.d.) further highlighted that using community-centered materials fosters inclusivity and bridges the gap between home and school learning experiences.

Capacity Building for Teachers and Peers also emerged as a central coping strategy, with schools implementing peer mentoring systems, providing technical support from school heads, and conducting regular Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions and training workshops. These efforts ensure that teachers continuously develop professionally and remain updated on CFSE principles. The value of such practices is well-documented in the literature. Garcia and Weiss (2019) and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (2017) stress the importance of continuous professional development to ensure the quality of instruction and the effective implementation of educational policies. Additionally, Lundqvist et al. (2015) affirmed that peer mentoring enhances instructional quality and teacher morale, especially in settings where formal training is limited.

Another theme, Enhancing Parent-School Relationships, highlights the importance of open communication and friendly engagement in encouraging parental involvement. Respondents noted that when schools create welcoming environments and address parental concerns promptly, it builds trust and encourages collaboration. These findings are supported by Murray et al. (2019) and the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (n.d.), who found that meaningful school-home partnerships contribute significantly to student success, particularly in child-friendly education models.

Finally, Promoting a Positive Learning Environment reflects efforts to create both psychologically and physically safe spaces for learners. Teachers adopt constructive discipline strategies, focusing on positive reinforcement rather than punitive measures. Additionally, improving classroom comfort through measures such as installing electric fans shows commitment to student well-being. This supports the findings of An (2022) and Zuković & Stojadinović (2021), who emphasized the role of positive discipline in improving student behavior and classroom dynamics. Moreover, Lewinski (2015) and Barrett (2015) underscored that comfortable, well-ventilated classrooms significantly enhance learning conditions and cognitive performance.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The implementation of the CFSE policy varied across different components. Children's participation in school and community was well-integrated, with students actively involved in governance, decision-making, and community activities. The promotion of children's academic achievement and success was also evident through the use of structured learning strategies and assessment tools. Teachers' morale and motivation remained high due to the availability of professional development programs and leadership support. However, other components showed areas for improvement.

The majority of students performed at the Very Satisfactory level, with many achieving Outstanding grades, indicating a generally effective learning environment. Significant differences were observed in CFSE implementation when respondents were grouped according to factors such as age, sex, position, years of experience, and area of specialization. Among the CFSE components, only Children's Health and Well-Being showed a statistically significant positive correlation with academic performance, highlighting the critical role of student health in learning outcomes.

The major challenges include inadequate funding, limited teacher training, outdated learning materials, poor infrastructure, and low parental involvement, all of which hinder the full realization of a child-friendly learning environment. Schools employed various coping strategies such as maximizing available resources, seeking external funding, fostering community collaboration, initiating peer mentoring, and implementing remedial programs to address student learning gaps.

Recommendations

1. The Department of Education (DepEd) should mandate structured and comprehensive training programs on CFSE. These should include modules incorporated in pre-service and in-service training, with mandatory participation for newly hired teachers and school heads.
2. The DepEd should institutionalize the Proposed School Annual Improvement Plan (AIP) as a core tool for systematically implementing and sustaining the Child-Friendly School Environment (CFSE) policy.
3. Policy makers and curriculum developers should ensure that CFSE strategies include explicit academic support components, such as learner-centered teaching, differentiated instruction, and inclusive assessment practices. School planning teams should incorporate more robust indicators into monitoring and evaluation systems to track not only academic outcomes but also the behavioral, emotional, and social well-being of learners.
4. Schools should also launch advocacy campaigns and parent orientation sessions to promote greater awareness and collaboration with stakeholders.
5. Schools should prioritize budget allocations for instructional resources, and DepEd should strengthen textbook procurement and distribution mechanisms to ensure equitable access. Teachers, with support from school heads, should continue developing customized learning materials and integrating digital resources.
6. School leadership teams should institutionalize peer mentoring programs where experienced educators coach newer or less experienced teachers. Professional learning sessions must address identified gaps and promote a uniform understanding and implementation of CFSE, regardless of background.
7. DepEd and LGUs have to prioritize infrastructure upgrades—such as classroom construction, sanitation, and safety features—under the Local School Board's budget, and align these in the Annual Improvement Plan (AIP). Also, strengthening ties with local authorities through formal MOAs should be documented in the AIP to ensure shared support.

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