



ETCOR Educational Research Center Inc.
SEC Reg. No. 2024020137294-00
 Sta. Ana, Pampanga, Philippines



Website: <https://etcor.org>



iJOINED ETCOR
P - ISSN 2984-7567
E - ISSN 2945-3577



The Exigency
P - ISSN 2984-7842
E - ISSN 1908-3181

Child-Friendly Schools System Implementation in the Geographically Challenged Public Schools: Its Effect to the Learners' Participation and Scholastic Performance

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Received: 21 April 2025

Revised: 22 May 2025

Accepted: 24 May 2025

Available Online: 26 May 2025

Volume IV (2025), Issue 2, P-ISSN – 2984-7567; E-ISSN - 2945-3577

<https://doi.org/10.63498/etcor334>

Abstract

Aim: This study investigated the implementation of the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) in geographically challenged public schools and examined its influence on learner participation and academic performance.

Methodology: A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design was used. The study involved 429 respondents from the Lambayong III District in Sultan Kudarat, consisting of 174 students, 174 parents, and 81 teachers. Respondents were selected through proportional and systematic sampling. Data were gathered using a validated DepEd CFSS checklist, covering domains such as child participation, health and safety, academic success, teacher support, and community involvement. Statistical tools employed included mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Results: Findings revealed a high level of CFSS implementation in the studied schools. Significant positive correlations were found between CFSS practices and both learner participation and academic performance.

Conclusion: The study concludes that effective implementation of CFSS contributes to improved learner engagement and academic outcomes, even in geographically challenged settings. It recommends strengthening CFSS components and applying targeted interventions to support inclusive and equitable education in remote areas.

Keywords: *Child-Friendly School System (CFSS), Inclusive Education, Rural Schools, Student Outcomes, School Safety, Systematic Sampling, Educational Equity, Sultan Kudarat, Quantitative Research, Philippines Education Policy*

INTRODUCTION

A child-friendly school is not merely a formal educational institution; it is one that actively respects and upholds children's rights, including their right to quality education. A growing body of scientific evidence highlights the importance of creating safe, inclusive, and protective learning environments free from physical and emotional hazards (UNICEF, 2009; World Health Organization & United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [WHO & UNESCO], 2021). Such environments are essential not only for academic achievement but also for the holistic development and well-being of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Child-friendly schools emphasize children's rights to express their opinions, engage in play, be free from violence, stay healthy, and participate in decisions affecting them. These schools instill values such as respect for diversity, equality, and nonviolent conflict resolution, creating conditions that support holistic development.

The Child-Friendly School System (CFSS), developed by UNICEF and adopted by various educational systems globally, including the Philippines, provides a framework for creating inclusive, learner-centered environments. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) institutionalized CFSS through DepEd Memorandum No. 139, s. 2012, titled "*Adoption of the National Framework on the Child-Friendly School System*". This policy mandates all public schools to create child-centered learning environments that prioritize safety, equity, and meaningful student participation.

CFSS focuses on several key dimensions: child participation, health and safety, academic success, teacher capacity, and community engagement. In geographically challenged areas such as Lambayong III District in Sultan



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Kudarat, the implementation of CFSS becomes particularly important. These schools often face obstacles such as limited resources, difficult terrain, and socio-economic disparities. Despite these challenges, some schools strive to implement CFSS principles to improve learner participation and academic outcomes.

This study evaluated how CFSS was implemented in selected public schools in Lambayong III District and assessed its impact on student engagement and academic performance. The findings aim to contribute empirical evidence to support educational planning and policy-making, particularly in geographically isolated and underserved areas.

Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to examine the implementation of the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) in geographically challenged public schools and to assess its relationship with learner participation and academic performance. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of CFSS implementation in selected public schools in Lambayong III District?
2. What is the level of learner participation in these schools?
3. What is the level of academic performance of learners in these schools?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the level of CFSS implementation and learner participation?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the level of CFSS implementation and learners' academic performance?
6. What recommendations may be drawn from the findings to enhance CFSS implementation in geographically challenged schools?

Hypothesis

1. The implementation of CFSS in Lambayong III schools has no effect on student participation.
2. The application of CFSS in Lambayong III schools does not affect academic achievement.
3. Educators, students, and parents have similar views on CFSS and its impact on academic achievement

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design to investigate the implementation of the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) in selected public schools within the Lambayong III District of Sultan Kudarat. The descriptive component was used to measure the levels of CFSS implementation, learner participation, and academic performance. The correlational aspect aimed to examine the statistical relationships between CFSS implementation and the two outcome variables: learner participation and academic performance. This design was appropriate for establishing the extent and nature of these relationships based on numerical data collected from multiple stakeholders.

Population and Sampling

The population included students, parents, and teachers from public schools in geographically challenged areas of the Lambayong III District. A total of 429 respondents participated in the study, consisting of 174 students, 174 parents, and 81 teachers. Proportional and systematic sampling techniques were used to ensure fair representation of each group across the selected schools. The sample size was determined to achieve sufficient statistical power and generalizability within the context of the district.

Instrument

Data were gathered using a standardized checklist developed and validated by the Department of Education, aligned with the national framework on CFSS. The instrument assessed key CFSS components including child participation, health and safety, academic success, teacher support, and community involvement. The checklist used a Likert-type scale to quantify the extent of implementation, while additional questions captured indicators of learner participation and academic performance based on school records and stakeholder perceptions.



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Data Collection

The instrument was administered in person, with assistance provided where necessary to ensure accurate responses.

Statistical Treatment

The implementation of the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) was evaluated using mean and standard deviation, as suggested by Collins (2022). These statistical methods provided an objective assessment of subjective perceptions, enabling meaningful comparisons.

Additionally, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was employed to measure the degree and direction of the relationship between two variables in the CFSS framework. This statistical measure, ranging from -1 to 1, helped assess the linear correlation between factors influencing school friendliness and student outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from relevant school authorities. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

1. Level of Implementation of the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS). The analysis of data collected from 81 teachers, 174 parents, and 174 pupils across seven schools revealed that the overall implementation of CFSS in the Lambayong III District was rated "High" to "Very High" across most indicators.

Using the DepEd-adopted checklist, mean scores for various CFSS components were computed. The findings show the following implementation levels:

CFSS Component	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Learner Participation	4.28	Very High
Health and Nutrition	3.92	High
School Safety and Protection	4.11	High
Promotion and Academic Support	4.00	High
Teacher Support and Motivation	3.87	High
Community Engagement	3.95	High

These results indicate that child-centered practices, school safety, and community involvement are consistently manifested in the schools studied. The highest mean was recorded in learner participation ($M = 4.28$), suggesting that student voices and agency are strongly encouraged in classrooms and school programs.

2. Correlation Between CFSS Implementation and Student Outcomes

The study used Pearson's r to examine the relationship between the level of CFSS implementation and key student outcomes, including attendance, academic performance, and engagement.

Variable Pair	Pearson's r	Strength	Direction
CFSS Implementation & Student Attendance	0.61	Moderate	Positive
CFSS Implementation & Academic Performance	0.67	Strong	Positive
CFSS Implementation & Student Engagement	0.72	Strong	Positive



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These correlations demonstrate that as CFSS implementation improves, student outcomes tend to increase. The strongest correlation was found between CFSS implementation and student engagement ($r = 0.72$), suggesting that a child-friendly environment significantly enhances learners' motivation and participation in school activities.

3. Differences Among Schools. While all schools demonstrated high implementation levels, larger schools such as Pimbayanan Elementary School and Zeneben Integrated School exhibited slightly higher average scores. These schools benefit from more resources and staff, allowing more comprehensive application of CFSS practices. On the other hand, smaller schools like Baumol Elementary School showed relatively lower but still "High" scores. This suggests that school size and resource availability may influence the depth of CFSS implementation.

4. Stakeholder Perspectives

- Teachers reported improved classroom behavior and academic interest among students, attributing it to CFSS-driven practices like inclusive teaching and child protection mechanisms.
- Parents expressed strong support for CFSS, particularly its emphasis on learner safety and community engagement.
- Students showed enthusiasm for participatory learning methods, affirming that they feel more included and respected in their school environment.

The results affirm that CFSS can be effectively implemented in rural and geographically challenged areas like Lambayong III. Despite limited infrastructure, schools have achieved high compliance with CFSS standards due to strong leadership, community involvement, and policy support from the Department of Education.

This study supports Creswell's (2014) assertion that quantitative approaches are well-suited for measuring relationships between interventions and outcomes. The positive correlations between CFSS indicators and student success further validate the CFSS as a viable framework for improving basic education in under-resourced settings.

These findings align with existing literature on inclusive education and rights-based school environments, which highlight that safe, supportive, and inclusive schools lead to better educational outcomes (UNICEF, 2012; DepEd, 2020).

Table 1: Level of Implementation of Child-Friendly School System in Geographically Challenged Public Schools

Dimension	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Supporting Theory	Interpretation
1. Inclusive Educationa	4.41	Very Much Implemented	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory	Inclusive education improves participation and equity (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). Schools in geographically challenged areas provide accessible, non-discriminatory environments, addressing learners' diversity.
2. Effective Teaching and Learning	4.23	Very Much Implemented	Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky)	Quality teaching enhances active learning and learner performance (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Despite geographic challenges, teachers apply strategies that encourage understanding and participation.



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Dimension	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Supporting Theory	Interpretation
3. Health, Nutrition, and Well-being	4.14	Very Much Implemented	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Meeting basic needs boosts student readiness to learn (UNICEF, 2009). Programs on nutrition and well-being are in place even in remote schools, contributing to learners' holistic development.
4. Safe, Protective, and Gender-Sensitive Environment	4.21	Very Much Implemented	Rights-Based Approach to Education	A protective and inclusive environment promotes psychological safety and equity (Save the Children, 2004). Gender-sensitive strategies empower both boys and girls.
5. Strong School Leadership, Governance, and Community Participation	4.38	Very Much Implemented	Distributed Leadership Theory	Leadership that engages stakeholders fosters shared accountability and school success (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Community involvement remains strong in geographically challenged settings.
6. Child Protection	4.15	Very Much Implemented	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Child protection policies create safe learning environments (UNICEF, 2013). Schools demonstrate mechanisms for addressing abuse, violence, and bullying.
7. Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in Education	4.18	Very Much Implemented	Resilience Theory	Schools that embed DRRM ensure continuity of learning in crisis situations (ADPC, 2012). Even in hazard-prone areas, schools integrate preparedness and safety education.

All seven dimensions are rated "Very Much Implemented", showing that the Child-Friendly Schools System is well-integrated even in geographically challenged public schools. This supports the theoretical foundations of inclusive, safe, and rights-based education and aligns with literature highlighting the importance of holistic approaches to ensure access, equity, and quality education (UNICEF, 2009; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Save the Children, 2004).

Table 2. Schools' Performance Indicators in the Geographically-Challenged Public Schools of Lambayong.

Schools' Performance Indicators	Percentage	Verbal Description
Enrollment Rate (ER)	98%	Very Much Implemented
Participation Rate (PR)	97%	Very Much Implemented
Completion Rate (CR)	98%	Very Much Implemented

Table 2 presents: Enrollment (98%), participation (97%), and completion (98%) rates were all rated as *Very Much Implemented*.

These high percentages reflect strong student engagement and academic continuity. Effective strategies such as community involvement, collaboration with local institutions, and inclusive practices have successfully



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mitigated the impact of geographic barriers. This supports Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) and Epstein (2001), who emphasize the importance of school-community partnerships in improving learner access and retention.

Table 3. Learners' Nutritional Status in the Geographically-challenged Public Schools in Lambayong III.

INDICATOR	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
Enhance children's health and well-being.	4.02	.22	High

The table 3 present the mean score of 4.02 (SD = 0.22) indicates a *High* level of implementation of health and nutrition programs.

Schools have effectively implemented feeding programs, health screenings, and hygiene practices to support learners' well-being. These efforts address health challenges common in remote areas and align with Bundy et al. (2009), who found that school-based nutrition programs significantly improve attendance and academic performance.

Table 4. Level of the Learners' Scholastic Performance in Lambayong District III Schools.

	Grade Point Average (GPA)	Remarks
Mean	86	Ensure children's high academic achievement and success.

Table 4 presents the mean GPA is 86, interpreted as *Very Satisfactory* based on DepEd standards. Students demonstrated consistent academic achievement despite limited resources. This performance reflects effective instructional delivery and is supported by strong parent-teacher collaboration. As highlighted by Bernardo (2008) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), family and community support systems are crucial in fostering academic success, especially in disadvantaged settings.



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Table 5. Relationship Between Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) Implementation and the Learners' Participation.

	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	
Interpretation						
Child-friendly						
School System	429	4.34	.28	.832	.000	High
Learners' Participation	429	4.30	.24			

.05 level of Significance (2-tailed)

Table 5 presents a very strong positive correlation was found ($r = .991$, $p < .000$) between CFSS implementation and learners' participation.

This statistically significant result suggests that the more effectively CFSS is implemented, the higher the student participation. The CFSS's emphasis on inclusivity, learner engagement, and parental involvement directly enhances attendance and involvement, consistent with findings from Save the Children (2011) and UNICEF (2012)

Table 6. Relationship Between Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) Implementation and Students' Scholastic Performance.

.05 level of Significance (2-tailed)

	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Interpretation
Child-friendly						
School System	429	4.34	.28	.991	.000	High
Scholastic Performance	429	4.52	.46			

Table 6 presents a very strong correlation ($r = .991$, $p < .000$) was also found between CFSS implementation and scholastic performance.

The data shows that CFSS implementation positively impacts academic performance. Schools that prioritize child-friendly approaches report stronger learning outcomes, supporting the research of Bernardo (2008). In geographically challenged areas, CFSS plays a pivotal role in sustaining educational quality and learner achievement.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that the Child-Friendly Schools System, when implemented effectively, serves as a powerful mechanism for promoting quality education even in geographically challenged settings. The CFSS fosters a supportive environment that boosts learners' motivation, attendance, and academic achievement. Key elements such as inclusive governance, child protection policies, and community partnerships are critical enablers of success.

Despite logistical and geographic challenges, the commitment of school stakeholders to CFSS principles has resulted in meaningful improvements in learner outcomes. Thus, CFSS is validated as an effective educational framework for enhancing both participation and scholastic performance among learners in marginalized or isolated communities.



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Recommendations

1. Sustain and Strengthen CFSS Practices: Schools should continue and further improve child-friendly strategies, especially in maintaining inclusive, gender-responsive, and safe learning environments.
2. Capacity-Building Programs: Conduct regular training for teachers and school heads focused on CFSS principles, child protection, and inclusive education strategies.
3. Stakeholder Engagement: Increase collaboration with parents, local government units, and community stakeholders to support school initiatives and address geographic barriers to education.
4. Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish a systematic monitoring mechanism to ensure consistent CFSS implementation and to identify gaps and best practices across schools.
5. Infrastructure Support: The Department of Education and partner agencies should invest in improved infrastructure (e.g., transportation, internet connectivity, and school facilities) to help schools in geographically challenged areas sustain CFSS gains.
6. Policy Integration: Incorporate CFSS evaluation indicators into school improvement plans and performance assessments to ensure institutional alignment and long-term impact.

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