



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE, SCHOOL–COMMUNITY LINKAGES, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOL PROGRAM

Royen A. Lagat and Gaudy C. Ortizo

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### Abstract

This study examined the relationship between physical infrastructure, school–community linkages, and the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program in the Division of Malita, Davao Occidental. Using a descriptive–correlational research design, data were gathered from 302 teachers and school heads across 67 public elementary schools through a validated survey questionnaire. Results revealed that both physical infrastructure and school–community linkages were rated at a high level, while the overall implementation of the CFS Program was also highly evident in terms of participation, health and well-being, safe and protective spaces, and community support. Pearson correlation analysis showed significant positive relationships between both independent variables and CFS implementation. Regression analysis further indicated that physical infrastructure and school–community linkages jointly predicted a substantial proportion of the variance in program implementation, with school–community linkages emerging as the stronger predictor. Based on the findings, an enhancement plan was proposed to strengthen facilities, promote inclusive education, and deepen school–community collaboration to ensure the sustainability of child-friendly practices.

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### Introduction:-

#### The Problem and its Setting:-

The UNICEF Global Evaluation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program highlights every child's right to quality basic education within safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. However, poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate facilities continue to limit CFS implementation in many countries, including Pakistan, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and India (UNESCO, 2016). In the Philippines, the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS), supported by UNICEF and the Department of Education, promotes child-centered practices (UNICEF Philippines, 2019; DepEd, 2012). Despite these efforts, challenges persist in providing adequate infrastructure and strengthening school–community partnerships, while parental involvement in planning and decision-making remains minimal (Orkodashvili, 2013; Jocson et al., 2023; Bernardo & Calleja, 2005). Recent assessment results indicate these gaps. The 2024 National Achievement Test showed that over 80% of Grade 6 pupils in Davao Occidental were "Nearly Proficient" or below, with only 17.57% rated "Proficient" (DepEd–Division of Davao Occidental, 2024a). Likewise, the 2023–2024 Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Assessment (ELLNA) revealed 67% of Grade 3 pupils were below proficiency (DepEd–BEA, 2024b), and the 2024

FLEMMS reported that only 79% of individuals aged 10–64 possess basic literacy and numeracy skills (PSA, 2024). In this context, the study focuses on physical infrastructure and school–community linkages as key factors influencing the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program in Malita District, Davao Occidental. It aims to provide evidence-based insights to enhance CFS implementation, improve learning environments, and support better educational outcomes locally.

## **Literature Review:-**

### **Physical Infrastructure:-**

Globally, school infrastructure is a key factor in promoting effective teaching and learning. Well-designed, accessible facilities enhance learning outcomes by creating child-centered and safe environments (Barrett et al., 2019). The quality of classrooms, sanitation, and playgrounds directly affects student performance, attendance, and retention, while poor infrastructure leads to lower achievement and higher dropout rates (Nyongesa & Waweru, 2015; Musila, 2015; Murungi & Mutembei, 2019). This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and safe learning environments. In the Philippines, gaps in infrastructure continue to hinder child-friendly learning. Many schools face shortages in electricity, water, sanitation, and ICT access, particularly in rural areas where calamities and weak maintenance further compromise safety and usability (Navarro, 2022). Infrastructure development has been shown to improve enrollment, engagement, and retention in underserved communities (Villapaz et al., 2025). Global studies also emphasize design features such as ventilation, lighting, and classroom layout as critical to student well-being and learning outcomes (Barrett et al., 2019; UNESCO IIEP, 2021). Adequate and well-maintained infrastructure is therefore essential for effective CFS implementation in resource-limited contexts like Davao Occidental.

### **School-Community Linkages:-**

Strong school-community partnerships are central to the CFS framework, promoting holistic child development (UNICEF, 2019). Community engagement, including active Boards of Management and parental participation in decision-making, positively impacts school governance and learning outcomes (Nicholas et al., 2022). Participation fosters inclusivity, gender sensitivity, and cultural responsiveness, while weak coordination or lack of training hinders collaboration (Fitriani, 2019; Doe, 2022; Rangkuti & Maksum, 2019; Nyatuka, 2015). Strengthening partnerships among families, schools, and local governments is critical to realizing the CFS vision.

### **Implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program:-**

The Child-Friendly School System (CFSS), supported by UNICEF and adopted by the Philippine Department of Education, aims to create safe, inclusive, gender-sensitive, and participatory schools (UNICEF, 2019; DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012). It integrates protective policies, inclusive teaching, and stakeholder collaboration to promote both academic achievement and child well-being. Studies show varying levels of implementation in the Philippines: while many schools meet basic safety and participation standards, challenges remain in sustaining inclusive practices and engaging marginalized communities (Ramos, 2018; Reyes & Garcia, 2020). Similar trends are observed internationally, with CFS adoption improving engagement but requiring ongoing community and policy support (Chou & Kuo, 2021).

### **Concept of Child-Friendly School:-**

The Child-Friendly School (CFS) approach, developed by UNICEF, promotes safe, inclusive, and participatory learning environments that prioritize the rights and well-being of children (UNICEF, 2019). This framework emphasizes child-centered pedagogy, quality teaching, and equitable access, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 for inclusive and equitable education (Bessell, 2017; Seitz et al., 2018). Implementation of CFS has been shown to enhance student engagement, school safety, and psychosocial well-being (Burnett et al., 2019; Bekalo et al., 2020). Schools following the CFS model are expected to uphold five key principles. First, inclusiveness ensures that all children, regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background, have access to education without discrimination (Odusanya, 2019). Second, child-centeredness requires that teaching and school practices prioritize children's rights, needs, and holistic development, actively engaging them in learning and decision-making processes. Third, health and protection involve providing safe, hygienic, and supportive environments, enforcing policies against abuse, bullying, and corporal punishment, and ensuring access to health and counseling services (Byrnes, 2016). Fourth, effectiveness emphasizes delivering learning through cooperative, active, and developmentally appropriate methods, supported by adequate resources and teacher capacity (James & Pollard, 2017). Finally, gender responsiveness guarantees equal educational opportunities for boys and girls, with curricula, teaching, and school facilities promoting gender sensitivity. Overall, the CFS framework offers a holistic approach

to creating learning environments that foster children's physical, social, emotional, and academic development, providing a foundation for examining the specific domains of this study.

#### **Implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program:-**

The Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program is guided by seven core goals: promoting children's participation, enhancing health and well-being, ensuring safe and protective spaces, supporting enrollment and completion, improving academic achievement, uplifting teachers' morale, and mobilizing community support for education. These goals form the foundation for evaluating the extent of CFS implementation, which emphasizes a holistic, child-centered, and inclusive learning environment.

#### **Enhancing Children's Health and Well-Being:-**

Health and well-being are central to CFS, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional care. Gupta and Sharma (2017) highlighted that unsafe environmental conditions, such as poor sanitation, negatively affect attendance, particularly for girls. Child-friendly schools address these challenges through regular health monitoring, dental and medical check-ups, and the maintenance of health records (Pepito, 2021). Well-being includes not only health but also happiness, life satisfaction, and the ability to manage stress (Davis, 2019; PISA, 2018; OECD, 2017). Schools that prioritize these aspects create environments conducive to learning and holistic development.

#### **Safe and Protective Spaces:-**

Safe and protective environments ensure children can learn without fear of harm. Studies in Kenya and other contexts emphasize that inadequate infrastructure, poor sanitation, and limited resources hinder CFS implementation (Mwangi & Orodho, 2018; McMichael et al., 2019; Ojuok et al., 2020). Proper classroom layout, ventilation, furniture arrangement, and gender-specific sanitation facilities enhance safety and facilitate collaborative learning (Pepito, 2021; Adukia, 2017). Overcrowding, however, remains a challenge, affecting students' focus and engagement (May, 2019).

#### **Enrollment and Completion:-**

Child-friendly schools ensure all children have the opportunity to enroll and complete their education. Strategies include maintaining comprehensive master lists, coordinating with local councils for out-of-school children, and engaging communities to promote access (Pepito, 2021; Gbolie & Kaemu, 2017; Fitriani, 2020). Early enrollment drives and outreach activities, such as Brigada Eskwela, help inform parents and children, though challenges persist in remote areas.

#### **Academic Achievement and Success:-**

CFS implementation supports academic achievement through child-centered pedagogy, adequate learning materials, and inclusive practices. Studies indicate a strong positive correlation between CFS practices and student performance, engagement, and reduced grade repetition (Pepito, 2021; Çobanoğlu et al., 2018; Mampao & Arazo, 2022; Abubakar, 2022). While textbooks remain essential tools, teacher quality and classroom support are critical for effective learning (Mathur, 2018; Hale, 2016).

#### **Teacher Morale and Motivation:-**

Teacher morale directly impacts the quality of CFS implementation. Opportunities for professional development, access to working spaces, and participation in lesson study sessions enhance motivation (Pepito, 2021; Queens University of Charlotte, 2019). Pupil-teacher ratios also influence teaching effectiveness and student outcomes, with overcrowded classrooms posing challenges (Nyiwa, Maithya, & Mungai, 2017).

#### **Community Support for Education:-**

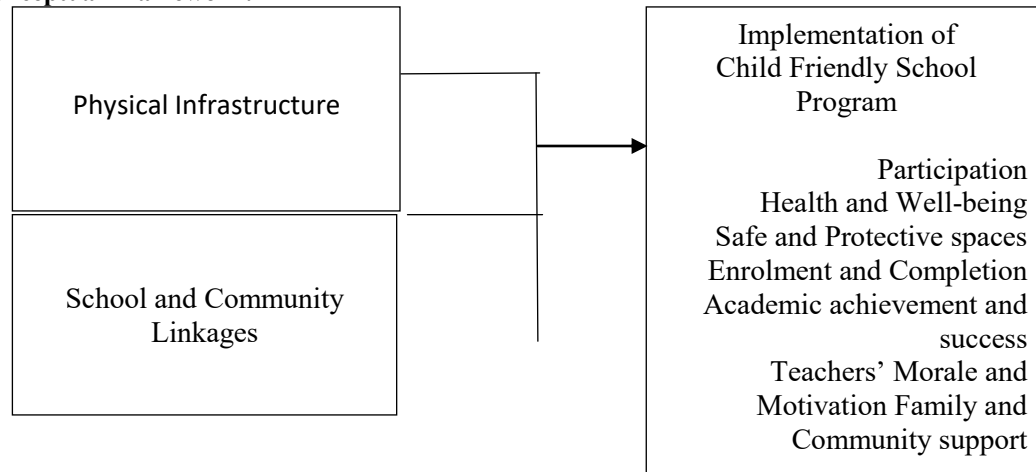
Active community involvement strengthens CFS outcomes. Parental engagement, literacy programs, and partnership initiatives improve student attendance, behavior, and achievement (Pepito, 2021; NEA, 2019; Pelt, 2018; NCES). Programs like Brigada Eskwela demonstrate the positive impact of school-community collaboration on child welfare and learning outcomes (Reyes & Garcia, 2020).

#### **Relationship between Physical Infrastructure, Community Linkages, and CFS Implementation:-**

Quality physical infrastructure and strong school-community linkages are essential for effective CFS implementation. Adequate classrooms, sanitation facilities, and safe spaces support health, participation, and learning (Barrett et al., 2019; Musila, 2015; Ronday, 2021). Community engagement fosters shared responsibility

and resource mobilization, enhancing school responsiveness and sustainability (Nicholas et al., 2022; Fitriani, 2019; Ambarsari, 2019; Pepito & Comighud, 2020). Conversely, barriers such as overcrowding, insufficient facilities, and limited teacher training impede program success (Kitheka, 2015; Kanamba, 2014; Hunahunan & Ranario, 2018). Overall, the synergy between well-maintained infrastructure and active community participation is crucial for creating safe, inclusive, and effective child-friendly schools, ultimately improving student well-being, engagement, and academic outcomes.

**Conceptual Framework:**



The dependent variables of this study include participation, health and well-being, safe and protective spaces, enrollment and completion, academic achievement and success, teachers' morale and motivation, and family and community support. These variables reflect the extent to which schools provide a child-friendly environment that fosters quality education and holistic learner development. The independent variables are school infrastructure and school–community linkages. Adequate and functional school facilities create safe, engaging, and supportive learning environments, promoting attendance, retention, and improved academic performance. Simultaneously, strong partnerships between schools and communities encourage shared accountability, resource mobilization, and psychosocial support for learners. Together, these factors influence the dependent variables, ensuring learners thrive academically and socially. Based on the study results, an enhancement program will be proposed to address identified gaps, strengthen the implementation of child-friendly school practices, and provide a structured guide for improving school facilities, deepening community partnerships, and sustaining best practices. The program will also outline a framework for continuous monitoring and evaluation to maintain responsiveness to learners' needs.

**Statement of the Problem:-**

This study aimed to determine the extent of implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program in the Division of Malita, Davao Occidental, focusing on infrastructure and school–community linkages as key dimensions influencing CFS implementation. The study also examined the relationships among these variables and their collective impact on program effectiveness. Findings will inform the development of an enhancement program to ensure the sustainability and continuous improvement of child-friendly practices.

**Specifically, the study sought to answer the following sub-problems:**

1. What is the extent of physical infrastructure in the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program?
2. What is the extent of school-community linkages in the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program?
3. What is the extent of implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program in terms of:
4. Participation
5. Health and Well-being
6. Safe and Protective Spaces
7. Enrollment and Completion
8. Academic Achievement and Success
9. Teachers' Morale and Motivation
10. Family and Community Support

11. Is there a significant relationship between physical infrastructure and the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program?
12. Is there a significant relationship between school-community linkages and the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program?
13. Is there a significant effect between the physical infrastructure, school-community linkages, and implementation of the child-friendly school program?
14. Based on the results, what enhancement program can be developed to improve CFS implementation?

**Based on the statement of the problem, the following null hypotheses were formulated:**

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between physical infrastructure and the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program.

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between school–community linkages and the implementation of the CFS Program.

**Ho3:** Physical infrastructure and school–community linkages have no significant combined effect on the implementation of the CFS Program.

**Scope and Delimitation:-**

This study focused on public elementary schools in the Division of Malita, Davao Occidental, where the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) is implemented. The respondents included teachers and school heads from a total of 67 schools distributed across four districts and 32 barangays: Malita North with 16 schools, Malita East with 10 schools, Malita South with 14 schools, and Malita West with 27 schools.

The study examined two independent variables: physical infrastructure and school–community linkages, and their influence on the dependent variable: the level of CFS implementation, measured in terms of participation, safe and protective spaces, academic support, and community engagement. Data were collected using an adapted, pilot-tested questionnaire validated for reliability.

**Significance of the Study:-**

The study provides benefits to multiple stakeholders:

**Students.**It Supports holistic development, participation, and quality learning.

**Teachers.**It guides the adoption of learner-centered, age-appropriate teaching strategies.

**Parents.**This clarifies roles through PTA and School Governing Council involvement.

**School Heads and Administrators.** Offers insights for improving school environments and student outcomes.

**Policy Makers and Supervisors.** Informs policy formulation, program development, and supervision strategies.

**Community and Business Sector.** Highlights opportunities for infrastructure support, scholarships, and resources through CSR initiatives.

**Researchers.** Serves as a reference for future studies on child-friendly schools.

**Global Education Stakeholders.** Contributes to international efforts in advancing child-centered education and access.

**Methodology:-**

This chapter presents the research design, selection of respondents, research instruments, data gathering procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

**Research Design:-**

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design and utilized the Research and Development (R&D) method in developing the Child-Friendly School Enhancement Program for Malita, Davao Occidental District Elementary Schools. A descriptive survey questionnaire was used to identify factors influencing the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, following the approach of Dovetail (2023), which emphasized its utility in collecting data to describe a population without manipulating variables. Similarly, Voxco (2021) highlighted the importance of appropriate sample selection and minimizing bias in descriptive surveys, underscoring their significance for informing educational practices and policies. The design guided the selection of respondents from the Malita District Elementary Schools to ensure comprehensive data collection.

**Selection of Respondents:-**

The respondents included teachers and principals from all public elementary schools within the Division of Malita, Davao Occidental, encompassing four districts to ensure a representative sample. Based on prior studies, such as Dhivyadeepa (2015) and Kim and Lee (2017), a sample of approximately 30% of the population was deemed adequate for meaningful analysis while remaining manageable. Stratified random sampling augmented by purposive sampling was used to capture diverse perspectives, and total enumeration ensured that all schools in the division were represented. The sampling distribution is shown below:

**Box 1:**

**Distribution of Respondents and Sample size (n=302)**

District	Population	Sample Size	Percentage
District A	286	86	25.50
District B	316	95	31.51
District C	168	50	16.60
District D	235	71	23.50
Total	1,005	302	100.00

This sample provided a full representation of demographic diversity across the districts, ensuring reliable insights into the educational community.

**Research Instruments:-**

The study utilized adapted survey questionnaires to assess physical infrastructure, school-community linkages, and CFS program implementation aligned with its seven goals. Content validity was established using the Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI), with a perfect score of 1.0 for all items, indicating strong agreement among experts on item relevance (Polit & Beck, 2006). A pilot test in neighboring schools enabled revision of unclear items, and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded 0.86, indicating high internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). SPSS software was employed for statistical analysis, ensuring data accuracy and consistency.

**Data Gathering Procedure:-**

After securing approval from the Graduate School of Notre Dame of Dadiangas University and authorization from the Schools Division Supervisor (SDS), the researcher coordinated with principals and respondents through formal letters. Site visits were conducted over one to two weeks in the schools, during which the researcher met with principals, discussed the study objectives, and facilitated questionnaire administration. Collected data were then collated, treated, and interpreted.

**Box 2:**

**Extent of Implementation of Child-Friendly School Program:-**

Scale	Description	Interpretation
4.21-5.00	Very High Extent	The indicator is of very high extent and is always manifested rated at 80% to 100%.
3.41 – 4.20	High Extent	The indicator is of high extent and is always manifested rated at 60% to 79%.
2.61 - 3.40	Moderate Extent	The indicator is of moderate extent and very often manifested rated at 40% to 59%.
1.81 – 2. 60	low Extent	The indicator is of low extent and is sometimes manifested rated 20% to 39%.
1.00 - 1. 80	Very low Extent	The indicator is of very low extent and is seldom manifested and done rated 0% to 19%.

To determine the relationships between the independent variables the physical infrastructure and school-community linkages and the dependent variable, the CFS implementation, the study employed Pearson's correlation for individual relationships and multiple regression analysis to assess their combined effect. Data were coded, validated, and analyzed using SPSS version 20.0, ensuring accuracy and completeness before applying the statistical treatments.

#### **Ethical Consideration:-**

Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from school heads and teachers, ensuring voluntary participation, and allowing withdrawal at any time. Participant confidentiality and privacy were maintained by anonymizing data and presenting results in aggregate form. The study prioritized participants' safety and well-being, respected cultural and social diversity, and reported findings transparently to avoid harm or misrepresentation.

#### **Results and Discussion:-**

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program, focusing on the relationships between physical infrastructure and school-community linkages. The results are analyzed based on the data gathered and are discussed in relation to existing literature and relevant theoretical frameworks.

#### **Extent on the Physical Infrastructure in the Implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program**

**Table 1:**  
**Extent of Physical Infrastructure:-**

Indicators	Mean	Description
Classroom	4.41	Very High Extent
Desks and chairs and other furnishings	4.30	Very High Extent
Clean Toilets	4.13	High Extent
Ramps, handrails, and accessible restrooms	4.06	High Extent
Handwashing stations	4.26	Very High Extent
Playgrounds and recreational areas	4.09	High Extent
Green spaces and play areas	4.16	High Extent
Safety features such as fire alarms, extinguishers, and clear evacuation routes	4.12	High Extent
Water	4.37	Very High Extent
Lighting and Ventilation	4.30	Very High Extent
Learning resources and technology	4.18	High Extent
Health rooms or clinic	4.15	High Extent
Cafeteria or dining area	3.77	High Extent
Community spaces for meetings and events	4.18	High Extent
Category Mean	4.18	High Extent

Table 1 presents the mean distribution of physical infrastructure indicators, showing an overall high extent of implementation (Category Mean = 4.18). The highest-rated facilities were classrooms (Mean = 4.41), water supply (Mean = 4.37), and lighting and ventilation (Mean = 4.30), all classified as "Very High Extent." Lower scores were noted for cafeterias/dining areas (Mean = 3.77) and ramps, handrails, and accessible restrooms (Mean = 4.06), indicating areas for improvement. These findings suggest that schools prioritize essential facilities that support basic learning needs, consistent with Barrett et al. (2019), who emphasized that well-designed, child-centered infrastructure enhances student outcomes, and Musila (2015), who highlighted the foundational role of school facilities in promoting participation and performance. The relatively lower ratings in inclusive facilities reflect gaps in accessibility for learners with disabilities, underscoring the need for child, disability, and gender-sensitive infrastructure in line with SDG 4. While schools in Malita are providing adequate learning environments through core infrastructure, improvements in inclusive facilities and dining areas are necessary to ensure equitable access and support learners' health and well-being. It is therefore recommended that administrators and policymakers prioritize upgrading inclusive facilities, improve dining areas to promote nutrition and well-being, and implement

continuous monitoring and evaluation to maintain standards aligned with national child-friendly guidelines and global goals, particularly SDG 4.

Extent of School-Community Linkages in the Implementation of the Child-Friendly School ProgramThe findings of this study indicate that the extent of school and community linkages in the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program was rated as very high extent (Category Mean = 4.30).

**Table 2:**  
**Extent of School-Community Linkages**

Indicators	Mean	Description
Engagement with parents, NGOs/LGUs and stakeholders.	4.18	High Extent
Partnering with social services and health agencies.	4.43	Very High Extent
Encouraging community and parental involvement in school governance and volunteering.	4.46	Very High Extent
Has programs for parents on child's positive parenting.	4.40	Very High Extent
Working with communities to support marginalized students.	4.23	Very High Extent
Partnering with groups for the education of children with disabilities and those in need.	4.20	High Extent
Inviting community members to school events.	4.16	High Extent
Incorporating local culture and traditions into the curriculum.	4.37	Very High Extent
Joint efforts to combat bullying, abuse, and exploitation.	4.35	Very High Extent
Engaging community volunteers to ensure children's safety.	4.30	Very High Extent
Encouraging student participation in projects for social responsibility.	4.30	Very High Extent
Involving local professionals as mentors to enhance learning.	4.27	Very High Extent
Establishing regular feedback channels among stakeholders.	4.26	Very High Extent
Involving the community in assessing school performance.	4.25	Very High Extent
Category Mean	4.30	Very High Extent

Table 2 indicates a strong level of collaboration between schools and community stakeholders, with an overall very high extent of implementation (Category Mean = 4.30). The highest-rated indicators included encouraging community and parental involvement in school governance (Mean = 4.46), partnering with social services and health agencies (Mean = 4.43), and providing programs for parents on positive parenting (Mean = 4.40). These results demonstrate that schools recognize the crucial role of families and external agencies in supporting holistic child development, aligning with UNICEF (2019), which emphasizes active community engagement as central to child-friendly schools, and Nicholas et al. (2022), who linked strong partnerships to improved governance, management outcomes, and parental participation.

Some indicators, however, received slightly lower ratings, such as engagement with parents, NGOs/LGUs, and stakeholders (Mean = 4.18), inviting community members to school events (Mean = 4.16), and partnerships for children with disabilities (Mean = 4.20). These suggest potential limitations in extending engagement beyond core school-parent relationships, consistent with findings by Rangkuti and Maksum (2019) and Nyatuka (2015), who noted that insufficient training, minimal awareness, and limited community support can hinder full CFS implementation. Positive findings in integrating local culture into the curriculum (Mean = 4.37) and efforts to address bullying, abuse, and exploitation (Mean = 4.35) reflect a culturally sensitive and protective approach, reinforcing the importance of inclusive and safe learning environments (Fitriani, 2019; Doe, 2022).



In conclusion, schools in Malita are effectively engaging communities to support the CFS Program, particularly in governance, safety, and education. However, gaps remain in broader stakeholder partnerships, inclusive education for children with disabilities, and community participation in events and curriculum initiatives. To strengthen these linkages, schools should expand partnerships with NGOs, local government agencies, and disability advocacy groups, implement training and orientation programs for staff and community members, and institutionalize mechanisms for student and community feedback. Developing a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy will ensure sustained, inclusive, and child-centered school-community collaboration.

**Table 3.**  
**Summary of the Level of Implementation of the Child-Friendly School**

<b>CFS Implementation Goal</b>	<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>
1. Encouraging Children's Participation in School and Community	4.45	Very Highly Implemented
2. Enhancing Children's Health and Well-Being	4.32	Very Highly Implemented
3. Guaranteeing Safe and Protective Spaces for Children	4.38	Very Highly Implemented
4. Encouraging Enrolment and Completion	4.28	Very Highly Implemented
5. Ensuring Children's High Academic Achievement and Success	4.20	Highly Implemented
6. Raising Teachers' Morale and Motivation	4.18	Highly Implemented
7. Mobilizing Community Support for Education	4.30	Very Highly Implemented
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>4.30</b>	<b>Very Highly Implemented</b>

#### **Program**

The findings in Table 3 indicate that the overall implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program across the Malita District is very highly implemented (Overall Mean = 4.30). Among the seven CFS goals, Encouraging Children's Participation in School and Community received the highest rating (M = 4.45), demonstrating active engagement of learners, teachers, and parents in school and community activities. Guaranteeing Safe and Protective Spaces for Children (M = 4.38) and Enhancing Children's Health and Well-Being (M = 4.32) also achieved very high ratings, reflecting schools' prioritization of safety, protection, health services, sanitation, and psychosocial support. Similarly, Mobilizing Community Support for Education (M = 4.30) and Encouraging Enrolment and Completion (M = 4.28) showed strong implementation, indicating effective community partnerships and efforts to improve retention.

In contrast, Ensuring Children's High Academic Achievement and Success (M = 4.20) and Raising Teachers' Morale and Motivation (M = 4.18) were rated as highly implemented, suggesting that while schools deliver child-centered practices effectively, there remains a need to further enhance instructional quality, academic support, and teacher engagement. These results are consistent with Elmenski (2019), Epstein and Sheldon (2016), Burnett et al. (2019), and Bekalo et al. (2020), emphasizing the importance of democratic participation, holistic child development, and teacher capacity in sustaining child-friendly learning environments.

In conclusion, CFS Program is effectively implemented across all seven dimensions, with particularly strong adherence to participation, safety, health, and community engagement. However, continuous improvement is needed in teacher motivation and academic achievement to maintain high-quality learning experiences. To sustain and enhance CFS implementation, schools should prioritize professional development and recognition programs to strengthen teacher capacity and morale. Academic support systems, such as remedial and enrichment activities, should be expanded to ensure equitable learning outcomes. Student representation in governance should be institutionalized to foster meaningful participation. Schools should also sustain and broaden parental and community engagement, particularly with LGUs, NGOs, and local organizations, focusing on child protection, health promotion, and educational support. Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation, including systematic feedback mechanisms, should be implemented to identify areas for improvement and ensure alignment with DepEd's Child-Friendly School Framework and UNICEF's global CFS standards.

**Table 4.****Correlation between School Infrastructure and Implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program**

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Interpretation
Infrastructure and Implementation of CFS	<b>0.580</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>Moderate Positive Correlation (Significant)</b>

**Note:**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table 4 show a moderate positive and statistically significant correlation between school infrastructure and the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program ( $r = 0.580$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that schools with better physical facilities such as classrooms, sanitation, playgrounds, ventilation, and safety features tend to implement CFS principles more effectively. These findings suggest that adequate infrastructure is a critical foundation for creating safe, inclusive, and child-centered learning environments. Schools with functional and accessible facilities are better positioned to promote holistic child development, ensure participation, and uphold safety and protection, which are central to the CFS framework. This result is consistent with both local and international studies (Barrett et al., 2019; Musila, 2015; Njue, 2013; Saputri&Hasibuan, 2022), which emphasize that school infrastructure directly impacts the quality of CFS implementation, learning engagement, and student well-being.

In conclusion, school infrastructure has a significant positive influence on CFS implementation. Improvements in physical facilities enhance the school's capacity to provide safe, inclusive, and child-friendly educational environments, thereby supporting holistic student growth and participation. To strengthen the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program, it is recommended that the Department of Education and local government units prioritize infrastructure projects that improve classrooms, sanitation, ventilation, and safety facilities. CFS standards should be integrated into school planning and construction to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. Schools should actively engage communities and stakeholders in maintaining and monitoring facilities, while regular evaluation mechanisms are established to assess infrastructure quality against CFS indicators. Adequate funding should be allocated, particularly for resource-poor or geographically disadvantaged schools. Overall, functional and child-friendly infrastructure is essential for creating safe, inclusive, and engaging learning environments that support the holistic development of learners.

**Table 5.****Correlation between School and Community Linkages and Implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program**

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Interpretation
School-Community Linkages and Implementation of the Child-Friendly School Program	<b>0.632</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>Strong Positive Correlation (Significant)</b>

**Note:**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between school–community linkages and the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program ( $r = 0.632$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This indicates that schools with stronger partnerships and active collaboration with parents, local government units, and community organizations tend to achieve higher levels of CFS implementation. Such collaboration fosters shared accountability in promoting children's rights, ensuring their protection, and sustaining inclusive learning environments. These findings are consistent with those of Nicholas et al. (2022), Fitriani (2019), and Doe (2022), who emphasized that active community involvement enhances inclusivity, sustainability, and responsiveness to learners' needs. Likewise, Daryono and Hardhienata (2023) stressed that the success of CFS programs depends on active partnerships between schools, families, and local organizations.

In conclusion, strong school–community linkages are essential for the effective implementation of the CFS Program. Schools that maintain open communication and cooperative relationships with parents, barangay councils, and civic organizations are better equipped to provide safe, participatory, and child-centered learning environments. It is

therefore recommended that school heads institutionalize regular stakeholder engagement through meetings, parent education programs, and joint improvement planning. Strengthening partnerships with local government units, NGOs, and private sectors can also sustain CFS initiatives through shared resources and volunteer support. Overall, fostering strong school–community collaboration is key to ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of the Child-Friendly School Program.

**Table 5.**

**Regression Coefficients of School Infrastructure and School–Community Linkages on the Implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program**

Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>		
(Constant)	1.025	0.143	—	7.168	.000
<b>School Infrastructure</b>	0.312	0.054	.352	5.778	.000
<b>School–Community Linkages</b>	0.401	0.049	.427	7.011	.000

**Model Summary:**  $R = .668$   $R^2 = .446$   $\text{Adjusted } R^2 = .443$   $\text{Std. Error} = .33059$   $F(2, 299) = 120.552$   $p < .001$

The multiple regression analysis revealed that school infrastructure and school–community linkages significantly predict the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program,  $F(2, 299) = 120.552$ ,  $p < .001$ , with an  $R^2$  of .446. This means the two predictors jointly explain 44.6% of the variance in CFS implementation. Both factors were significant, with school–community linkages ( $\beta = .427$ ,  $p < .001$ ) exerting a slightly stronger effect than school infrastructure ( $\beta = .352$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results indicate that schools with better facilities and stronger partnerships are more effective in promoting safe, inclusive, and participatory learning environments. Infrastructure provides the foundation for safety and accessibility, while community linkages drive sustainability, participation, and responsiveness—key components of a child-friendly environment. The findings support earlier correlations showing positive relationships between infrastructure ( $r = .580$ ,  $p < .001$ ), community linkages ( $r = .632$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and CFS implementation. Similar results were reported by Barrett et al. (2019) and Musila (2015), who emphasized that adequate facilities enhance safety and inclusivity.

Likewise, Nicholas et al. (2022) and Pepito and Comighud (2020) found that community partnerships improve CFS performance through shared accountability and resource mobilization. Overall, the findings affirm that the combined strength of physical and social factors underpins effective CFS implementation. Infrastructure ensures safety and accessibility, while community collaboration sustains holistic child development. To strengthen the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program, it is recommended that school administrators and local government units integrate CFS standards into all infrastructure development and maintenance projects to ensure safety, accessibility, and inclusivity. Schools should also institutionalize community partnerships within their school improvement plans to promote sustained collaboration, accountability, and shared responsibility among stakeholders. Furthermore, it is recommended that schools mobilize multi-sectoral support by engaging parents, non-government organizations, and local councils in planning and resource-sharing activities that enhance CFS outcomes. Lastly, future researchers are encouraged to examine the combined effects of infrastructure, community engagement, and psychosocial support mechanisms in various educational contexts, particularly in rural and geographically disadvantaged areas, to guide evidence-based improvements in CFS implementation. Proposed Enhancement Program for the Sustainability and Continuous Improvement of the Implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program.

#### **Rationale:-**

The findings of the study revealed that both school infrastructure and school–community linkages significantly predict the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program, explaining 44.6% of the variance in overall program effectiveness. While the general level of implementation was high, several indicators under these two domains obtained relatively lower mean scores, indicating areas that require focused enhancement. For school infrastructure, the lowest-rated indicators included cafeteria or dining facilities ( $M = 3.77$ ), ramps and accessible

restrooms (M = 4.06), and playgrounds and recreational areas (M = 4.09). These findings suggest that although classrooms and sanitation facilities are generally sufficient, inclusivity, accessibility, and recreational provisions remain underdeveloped.

For school–community linkages, lower mean scores were observed in inviting community members to school events (M = 4.16), engagement with parents and NGOs (M = 4.18), and partnerships for learners with disabilities (M = 4.20). This indicates that while linkages exist, broader and more sustained participation is needed to support long-term CFS goals. Thus, this enhancement plan integrates sustainability principles to ensure that improvements are not only responsive but also environmentally sound, socially inclusive, and economically feasible. Aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 9 includes Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, and SDG 11 includes Sustainable Cities and Communities and anchored on DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2022, Child Protection Policy and the Child-Friendly School Framework, this plan aims to promote lasting, equitable, and participatory learning environments for all learners.

**General Objective** To strengthen the implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program by enhancing sustainable school infrastructure and community linkages toward a safer, more inclusive, and environmentally responsible learning environment.

**Specific Objectives:-**

1. To improve accessibility, safety, and inclusivity of school infrastructure through sustainable design and practices.
2. To develop adequate, eco-friendly recreational and dining facilities that support learner well-being.
3. To enhance disaster risk reduction, school safety, and environmental preparedness mechanisms.
4. To foster active and sustained engagement between schools, parents, LGUs, and community stakeholders for long-term development.
5. To promote inclusive partnerships that support marginalized and differently-abled learners while advancing sustainability goals.

**Areas of Concern:-**

**School Infrastructure:-**

School infrastructure plays a vital role in ensuring that the learning environment is safe, accessible, and conducive to holistic child development. The results of the study revealed that while most schools have adequate classrooms and sanitation facilities, several aspects still require improvement to meet the inclusivity standards of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Framework. Particularly, the areas of accessibility, such as the presence of ramps, handrails, and accessible restrooms, remain limited, posing challenges for learners with physical disabilities. Likewise, play and recreational facilities are either underdeveloped or insufficient, limiting opportunities for learners to engage in physical and social development activities. The adequacy of cafeteria and dining facilities also emerged as a concern, as these spaces are essential for promoting health, nutrition, and student well-being. Moreover, some schools need to strengthen their safety and emergency systems, including preparedness measures, signage, and evacuation plans. Addressing these gaps will help create a more inclusive, safe, and child-centered learning environment that fully supports the principles of the CFS program.

**School–Community Linkages:-**

Strong school–community linkages are essential for sustaining a child-friendly environment. The study findings revealed that while schools maintain partnerships with stakeholders, there is still room to enhance collaboration and active participation from the broader community. Engagement with parents, local government units (LGUs), and non-government organizations (NGOs) remains limited and often activity-based rather than continuous. Similarly, community participation in school events can be further strengthened to foster a shared sense of responsibility for children’s welfare and education. In addition, partnerships for inclusive education and learners with special needs require expansion to ensure that all children, regardless of ability, are supported through coordinated community and institutional efforts. Enhancing these linkages will promote shared accountability, greater resource mobilization, and a more supportive environment aligned with the goals of the Child-Friendly School Program. Table 6 presents the Proposed Enhancement Plan for the sustainability and continuous improvement of the implementation of the CFS Program.

The plan was developed based on the low-rated indicators identified in the study, particularly under school infrastructure and school–community linkages. It outlines objectives, strategies, timelines, responsible persons, and performance indicators that promote sustainable, inclusive, and participatory approaches consistent with DepEd and SDG frameworks. Based on the results, the proposed enhancement plan focuses on strengthening both the physical environment and community linkages that significantly influence the implementation of the CFS Program. By integrating sustainable development principles, the plan ensures that school improvements are inclusive, environmentally responsible, and economically viable. Low-rated indicators such as accessibility features, playgrounds, safety systems, and community participation highlight the need for continuous improvement through green design, collaborative partnerships, and participatory governance. The implementation of these strategies will contribute to sustainable, safe, and child-centered schools, aligned with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2022), the CFS Framework, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

**Table 6. Proposed Enhancement Plan for the Implementation of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) Program**

Area of Concern	Specific Objective	Strategies/Activities	Time Frame	Persons Involved	Performance Indicators
School Infrastructure	1. To enhance accessibility and inclusivity of school facilities for learners with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct or rehabilitate ramps, handrails, and accessible restrooms using sustainable and locally sourced materials.</li> <li>Conduct accessibility audits in compliance with B.P. Blg. 344.</li> <li>Allocate maintenance budget for inclusive facilities.</li> </ul>	Q1–Q4 (Year 1–2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Q1: Planning and assessment</li> <li>Q2–Q3: Construction and implementation</li> <li>Q4: Monitoring and reporting</li> </ul>	School Head, LGU Engineering Office, DepEd Division Office, PTA	Accessible and functional ramps and restrooms; compliance reports on accessibility and sustainability standards.
	2. To improve playgrounds and recreational areas to promote holistic and sustainable child development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop safe, child-friendly, and eco-friendly playgrounds.</li> <li>Integrate green spaces, shaded areas, and recycling bins.</li> <li>Conduct regular maintenance and safety inspections.</li> </ul>	Q1–Q4 (Year 2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Q1: Design and budgeting</li> <li>Q2–Q3: Development and installation</li> <li>Q4: Evaluation and maintenance</li> </ul>	School Head, Teachers, Barangay Council, PTA, NGO Partners	Functional, sustainable playgrounds and recreational spaces; positive feedback from pupils and parents.
	3. To improve school cafeteria and dining facilities to support student health, nutrition, and sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renovate or establish clean, well-ventilated, and energy-efficient cafeteria areas.</li> <li>Implement school-based feeding and nutrition programs in partnership with LGUs.</li> <li>Promote waste segregation and reusable utensils.</li> </ul>	Q2–Q4 (Year 1–2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Q2: Planning and coordination with LGU</li> <li>Q3–Q4: Implementation and monitoring</li> </ul>	School Head, Nutrition Coordinator, LGU Health Office, PTA	Availability of clean, functional, and sustainable cafeteria; improved student nutrition and satisfaction ratings.
	4. To strengthen school safety, disaster preparedness, and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install or upgrade fire alarms, extinguishers, and evacuation routes.</li> <li>Conduct regular emergency, fire, and earthquake drills.</li> </ul>	Q1–Q4 (Annually) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Q1: Orientation and safety audit</li> <li>Q2–Q4: Regular drills and DRRM</li> </ul>	School Head, DRRM Coordinator, LGU Fire Office, Teachers	Complete safety equipment and signage; documented safety and environmental

	environmental resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a School Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Team.</li> </ul>	updates		preparedness drills.
School–Community Linkages	5. To enhance engagement with parents, LGUs, and community stakeholders toward sustainable school development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct quarterly stakeholders' consultation meetings.</li> <li>• Establish Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) for long-term collaboration.</li> <li>• Integrate community development and environmental goals in the School Improvement Plan (SIP).</li> </ul>	Q1–Q4 (Every School Year) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q1–Q4: Quarterly meetings and SIP review</li> </ul>	School Head, SGC, LGU Officials, PTA, NGO Partners	Active MOUs; documented stakeholder partnerships; sustainability initiatives incorporated in SIP.
	6. To increase participation of community members in school programs and environmental initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize inclusive community activities (e.g., literacy days, tree planting, waste management drives, CFS fairs).</li> <li>• Recognize and award active volunteers.</li> <li>• Enhance communication through parent assemblies and digital platforms.</li> </ul>	Q1–Q4 (Every School Year) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q1: Planning</li> <li>• Q2–Q4: Implementation and recognition</li> </ul>	School Head, Teachers, PTA, Barangay Officials	Increased community participation and environmental awareness; improved community satisfaction feedback.
	7. To strengthen partnerships for inclusive and sustainable education supporting marginalized learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with SPED centers, NGOs, and social services for learner support.</li> <li>• Conduct teacher training on inclusive, child-friendly, and sustainable education.</li> <li>• Integrate psychosocial, environmental, and child protection programs in school activities.</li> </ul>	Q2–Q4 (Year 1–2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q2: Partnership building</li> <li>• Q3–Q4: Training and program rollout</li> </ul>	School Head, Guidance Counselor, SPED Coordinator, DSWD, NGO Partners	Documented partnerships; implemented inclusion and sustainability programs; improved participation of marginalized learners.

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