Assessing the implementation of the child-friendly school system and its relationship to learner well-being in SOCCSKSARGEN

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined the level of implementation of the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) in the three city divisions of SOCCSKSARGEN and its relationship with learners' well-being. This study aimed to determine whether the CFSS contributes to positive emotional and educational experiences among learners.

Research methodology: Using a descriptive-correlational design, the study gathered data from 237 respondents, including teachers, child protection coordinators, guidance counselors, and SSLG advisers from selected large, medium, and small schools in General Santos City, Koronadal City, and Tacurong City. The data collection instruments were based on DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2015, and a validated learner well-being scale. The statistical tools used included the mean and Pearson's r.

Results: The findings revealed a high level of CFSS implementation across schools, with the highest teacher morale and academic success ratings. Learners' well-being was also rated moderately across five domains: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. A strong positive correlation (r = 0.6058, p < 0.05) was found between CFSS implementation and learner well-being.

Conclusions: Stronger CFSS implementation is linked to better learner well-being, highlighting the importance of supportive and inclusive school environments.

Limitations: The findings are limited to selected public secondary schools in SOCCSKSARGEN and rely on self-reported data, which may reflect subjective perceptions of the respondents. Broader generalizations beyond this region should be approached with caution.

Contribution: This study provides empirical support for the CFSS as a critical approach to promoting student well-being and positive school outcomes. It also highlights the importance of sustained involvement of stakeholders.

Keywords: *Child-Friendly School System, Inclusive Learning, Learner Well-Being, Public Education, School Environment, SOCCSKSARGEN.*

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1. Introduction

A school that places children at the center of its purpose is grounded in the belief that safety, respect, and meaningful participation are essential learning elements (Andiyanto & Hariri, 2022). In this environment, learners are guided to master academic content and are supported in their emotional, social, and psychological growth. Learning becomes more than a formal process; it becomes an

experience shaped by care, fairness, and dignity. Despite these ideals, many schools face realities that place children at risk of abuse. Reports of bullying, verbal and physical abuse, and neglect continue to emerge in various settings (Miller, 2023). Learners are often left unheard, and disciplinary policies are applied unevenly. In some cases, facilities remain inadequate to meet children's basic needs, compromising their safety and protection. These conditions point to a disconnect between policy and practice, suggesting that the standards set for child-centered education are not always met within actual school settings. To respond to these concerns, the Department of Education introduced the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) through DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2015. This framework is designed to support schools in creating inclusive and supportive environments where learners feel safe, healthy, and engaged (Page, Anderson, & Charteris, 2023). However, its full implementation remains uneven. Limited training, insufficient monitoring, and inconsistent school capacity have hindered its long-term application. Without regular assessments, it is unclear whether these practices genuinely improve learners' experiences.

In Region XII, particularly in the city divisions of General Santos, Koronadal, and Tacurong, the adoption of CFSS practices varies. While some schools meet the expected standards, others experience setbacks caused by limited personnel, overcrowded classrooms, or a lack of support systems (Robosa, Paras, Perante, Alvez, & Tus, 2021). To date, there has been no comprehensive examination of how these schools implement CFSS principles and how this influences learners' sense of safety, belonging, and well-being. This study addresses this need. It examines how selected public secondary schools in SOCCSKSARGEN implement the Child-Friendly School System and how these practices relate to the well-being of learners. This research focuses on teachers and key school personnel who directly manage school programs and support students. Specifically, it seeks to determine the extent of CFSS implementation, assess learners' well-being in terms of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness, and examine whether a significant relationship exists between them.

1.1 Research Objectives
This study was conducted to determine how selected public schools in the city divisions of General Santos, Koronadal, and Tacurong implemented the Child-Friendly School System and how this related to the well-being of their learners. It aimed to provide a grounded understanding of school practices and their connection to the day-to-day experiences of students within these three divisions in the SOCCSKSARGEN region. Specifically, it answered the following questions regarding the extent of CFSS implementation across key areas, the condition of learners' well-being, and the relationship between these two variables:

What is the extent of implementation of the schools' Child-Friendly School System in SOCCSKSARGEN, in terms of:
a) Participation of Learners in Schools and Communities
b) Children's health and well-being
c) Safety and protective spaces
d) Enrolment and Completion
e) Academic achievement and success
f) Teachers' morale and motivation; and
g) Mobilization of community support in education

What is the extent of the learners' well-being in SOCCSKSARGEN in terms of:
a) Engagement;
b) Perseverance;
c) Optimism;
d) Connectedness; and
e) Happiness?

Is there a significant relationship between the extent of Child-Friendly school system implementation and learners' well-being?

1.2 Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no statistically significant relationship between the extent of the Child-Friendly School System implementation and the learners' well-being.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a statistically significant relationship between the extent of the Child-Friendly School System's implementation and the learners' well-being.

This formulation allows the study to remain objective during the analysis while indicating the expected outcome based on the literature review and existing practices in child-friendly education.

2. Literature review

This section discusses various studies and published works that serve as the foundation for the present research. It focuses on the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) and the well-being of learners, both of which are central to this study. This review establishes how the CFSS is implemented in different educational contexts and relates to learners' experiences in terms of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. These discussions aim to provide a deeper understanding of the concepts and variables explored in this study.

2.1. The Child-Friendly School System

Creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive educational environment is essential for improving children's educational experiences. One approach that responds to this call is the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS), an educational framework grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) principles. The CFSS framework is built on the premise that schools should go beyond merely delivering academic content and serve as nurturing spaces where children's well-being, participation, and protection are upheld. First, a child-friendly school emphasizes inclusivity, child-centeredness, and rights-based education. UNICEF outlines the CFSS as an approach that promotes non-discriminatory practices and encourages active child participation in learning and decision making. Schools under this framework prioritize learners' voices, helping them feel valued, respected, and involved. Sakti, Endraswara, and Rohman (2024) notedSakti, Endraswara, and Rohman (2024) that learner involvement in school governance is linked to increased academic engagement and personal growth, as children develop a sense of responsibility and ownership over their educational journey.

In addition to learner participation, students' health and well-being form a fundamental dimension of CFSS. It is widely acknowledged that children's physical and emotional health significantly influences learning outcomes. For instance, Hanna (2022) demonstrated that well-nourished and emotionally supported children tend to perform better academically. Furthermore, schools that address health issues, provide mental health support, and promote hygiene practices are more likely to sustain an environment in which students feel physically and psychologically secure. Equally important is the emphasis on safe and protective school spaces. Ensuring that children are free from violence, bullying, and exploitation is a central tenet of the CFSS. According to Save the Children, schools that implement child protection policies and actively foster a respectful environment contribute to better attendance and student retention (Wing III, 2024). When learners feel safe, they are more likely to engage in learning activities without fear or anxiety.

Moreover, the CFSS framework supports the goals of universal enrollment and completion. Research has shown that child-friendly practices are particularly effective in addressing barriers to education among marginalized populations. Gaias et al. (2022) explain that when schools deliberate efforts to reach disadvantaged learners through flexible policies, financial assistance, and inclusive curricula, they can improve enrollment and reduce dropout rates. Consequently, these practices contribute to long-term educational equity in the field. Another essential aspect of the CFSS is academic achievement. While academic performance remains a traditional marker of success, child-friendly schools redefine success by focusing on holistic development. According to Walker and Graham (2021), schools with positive climates characterized by respectful teacher-student relationships and collaborative classroom settings

tend to report higher levels of academic success. This suggests that academic excellence and emotional well-being are closely linked.

Additionally, the role of teachers cannot be overlooked. The CFSS recognizes that teachers' morale and motivation are critical to delivering quality education. Kusmawan, Rahman, Anis, and Arifudin (2024) argue that teachers who feel supported, professionally developed, and meaningfully involved in school planning are more likely to be effective in their classrooms. Their commitment directly impacts the consistency of CFSS implementation, as teachers often serve as the first line of support and guidance for learners. Furthermore, the CFSS promotes the engagement of the broader community in school affairs. The active involvement of parents, local leaders, and stakeholders creates a shared responsibility to support children's education. Grover, Boberiene, and Limber (2021) note that schools with strong community ties can better meet students' diverse needs because families and communities provide resources, mentorship, and moral support. This collaboration helps bridge the gap between school and learners' social environments.

Nevertheless, despite the theoretical appeal of the CFSS, its practical implementation faces several challenges. Markom (2024) reports that many schools struggle with limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and resistance to child-centered practices. Therefore, policy support, proper monitoring, and continued capacity building are essential to ensure the sustainability of CFSS practices. In summary, the Child-Friendly School System offers a transformative approach to education, in which academic learning is harmonized with child protection, health, inclusion, and participation. Each component, from learner engagement and health promotion to teacher motivation and community partnership, is interconnected in building a supportive learning environment. While efforts toward full implementation remain a work in progress, the CFSS continues to serve as a valuable guiding principle for educational reform aimed at honoring the rights and potential of every child.

2.2. Learners' Well-Being

The well-being of learners has gained increasing attention in educational discourse as schools have moved beyond purely academic objectives to embrace a more holistic approach to development. Learners' well-being generally refers to the overall quality of students' experiences in school, encompassing emotional, psychological, social, and sometimes physical dimensions that influence how they feel, behave, and engage in learning. According to Ibarra (2022), well-being in educational settings reflects students' sense of purpose, belonging, and happiness, which are essential for sustained motivation and performance.

One way to understand learners' well-being is through its multidimensionality. Suldo, Fefer, Mahony, and Blass (2024) argue that well-being includes emotional components such as optimism and happiness, social dimensions such as connectedness with peers and teachers, and cognitive-behavioral traits such as perseverance and engagement. Many studies have used these facets to measure students' overall disposition toward schooling. Suldo et al. (2024) highlight that students with a high level of school well-being tend to participate more actively in class, display fewer behavioral issues, and are more inclined to persist in the face of academic challenges.

Moreover, engagement, a key well-being indicator, has been associated with students' enthusiasm and involvement in school activities. As Shamionov et al. (2021) explain, engagement combines behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement, all of which are influenced by school climate. Therefore, a child-friendly school environment has the potential to significantly improve this aspect (Andiyanto & Hariri, 2022). Similarly, perseverance, another central component, refers to a learner's sustained effort toward goals despite difficulties. Allen et al. (2021) emphasize that perseverance or "grit" contributes positively to long-term academic success and is often shaped by support systems within the school.

In addition to engagement and perseverance, the role of optimism cannot be ignored. Learners who believe in their capacity to improve and maintain a hopeful outlook tend to show better academic adjustment and fewer signs of distress (Allen et al., 2021). Optimism fosters resilience, particularly

among learners facing socioeconomic or cultural challenges. In Indigenous contexts, optimism may be linked to cultural continuity and educational inclusivity.

Furthermore, connectedness, the sense of belonging to a school or peer group, has been identified as a strong predictor of school satisfaction and emotional security. Shamionov, Grigoryeva, Sozonnik, and Grinina (2021) emphasized that students' academic motivation and emotional health improve when they feel accepted and valued. Likewise, happiness, as a general measure of life satisfaction in the school setting, reflects how learners perceive their daily experiences. Leung et al. (2021) affirmed that happy students are more likely to maintain interest in learning and build positive social relationships.

The literature indicates that learners' well-being is not only a desirable outcome of education but also a condition that fosters learning. Promoting well-being among learners, particularly through systems such as the Child-Friendly School framework, can lead to more inclusive, engaging, and supportive school environments. Consequently, understanding and addressing the components of well-being remains essential for educators, policymakers, and researchers working toward equitable and meaningful education.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design within a quantitative framework, as suggested by (J. V. Baron, 2024). This design was selected to examine the extent to which child-friendly school practices were implemented in selected city divisions in SOCCSKSARGEN and how these practices related to the well-being of learners. This approach was suitable for gathering factual data from respondents and analyzing the statistical relationship between two primary variables: the CFSS and learner well-being.

The descriptive aspect of the study focused on documenting the current state of CFSS implementation in public schools and the level of well-being experienced by learners. Data were collected across several indicators, including learner participation, safety, health, academic performance, teacher motivation, and emotional and social dimensions of student well-being. This provided a comprehensive profile of school environments and learner experiences across different settings. The correlational aspect explored whether there was a significant association between the implementation of child-friendly school practices and the reported well-being of learners. Rather than implying a direct cause, this component identifies trends that may indicate how school conditions relate to students' emotional and academic experiences (J. V. Baron & Robles, 2023).

3.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the General Santos, Koronadal, and Tacurong city divisions, all located within Region XII or SOCCSKSARGEN. These cities represent key urban centers in the region, each with a mix of large, medium, and small public secondary schools operating under the Department of Education's supervision. These divisions were selected based on their diversity in terms of school size, student population, and administrative practices, which allowed for a broader understanding of how the Child-Friendly School System was implemented in different contexts.

General Santos City, known for its dense student population and vast school network, provided insights into how large schools manage and sustain child-centered practices. Koronadal City, serving as the regional administrative capital, offered a view of how policy directives were translated into practice at the local school level. Tacurong City, with its relatively minor educational system, added depth to the analysis by showing how smaller institutions implement the same policies with limited resources. These three settings collectively offered a representative sample of the region's public secondary education system, making them suitable for assessing the alignment between child-friendly school practices and learner well-being. The selection also ensured that the findings reflected varying school capacities and community dynamics, enriching the interpretation of the challenges and progress in implementing the CFSS in SOCCSKSARGEN.

3.3 Respondents of the Study

The study involved 237 teacher respondents from selected public secondary schools in the three city divisions of SOCCSKSARGEN: General Santos City, Koronadal City, and Tacurong City. The respondents were drawn from nine schools identified through purposive sampling, with three schools selected from each division. The selection was based on population size and accessibility, ensuring representation from large, medium, and small schools across diverse educational contexts. Large schools were included because of their administrative complexity and broader coverage of child protection and learner development programs. These institutions typically manage more activities under the Child-Friendly School System, making them suitable for examining how such practices are implemented on a large scale. Smaller schools offered additional insights into the implementation of limited resources.

All respondents were teaching personnel involved in instruction and CFSS-related activities in the school. Heads of the nine participating schools were also included to provide institutional perspectives. While purposive sampling enabled focused data collection from relevant participants, it also had limitations. Since random selection was not employed, the results may not be generalizable to all regional public schools, especially those with different profiles or resource levels (Sun & Crosthwaite, 2022). To better understand the distribution of respondents, Table 1 presents the number of participants per city division.

Table 1. Respondents of the Study

Schools Division	Respondents
General Santos City	82
Koronadal City	89
Tacurong City	66
Total	**237**

3.4 Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire comprising two parts. Part I focused on implementing the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) and was based on Annex 2a of DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2015. It includes indicators such as learner participation, children's health and well-being, safe and protective spaces, enrollment and completion, academic achievement, teachers' morale, and community support in education. Part II assessed the well-being of learners using a modified tool adapted from Zheng's (2022) validated instrumentZheng (2022). It measures five key domains: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. These areas reflect the emotional and social dimensions of learner well-being experienced in school environments.

To ensure the instrument's appropriateness and accuracy, both parts were reviewed and validated by District Supervisors and Education Program Supervisors who had direct involvement in CFSS monitoring. Their insights helped align the tool with the current practices in public schools. In addition to content validation, the instrument was subjected to reliability testing. The CFSS implementation section yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89, while the learner well-being scale yielded a coefficient of 0.91. These results indicate high internal consistency and suggest that the instrument is dependable for measuring the constructs involved. Both sections of the instrument used a five-point Likert scale with the following response options:

5 – Very High
4 – High
3 – Moderately
2 – Low
1 – Very Low

This scale allowed respondents to express the degree to which various practices and conditions were present in their schools.

3.5 Gathering Instrument

Before distributing the research instrument, the questionnaire was validated to ensure that it was appropriate for the study's objectives and context. Part I, which focused on implementing the Child-Friendly School System, was reviewed and validated by District Supervisors and Education Program Supervisors directly involved in monitoring child protection and school system practices. Part II, which assessed learners' well-being, was adapted from an established tool developed by Zheng (2022) and validated by the Education Supervisors in charge of the CFSS program. Their input helped confirm the clarity, relevance, and applicability of each item across different school settings. Once the instrument was finalized, formal permission to conduct the study was secured from the Schools Division Superintendents of General Santos City, Koronadal City and Tacurong City. The principals of the selected schools were contacted to facilitate scheduling and provide background on the purpose of the research.

Data collection was conducted in person. Respondents were given a brief orientation regarding the content of the questionnaire and the expected completion time. They were assured that participation was voluntary and that all responses would be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity. No personal identifiers were collected, and ethical research standards were followed for handling all data. Throughout the process, the study observed the principles of informed consent, respect for the time and responsibilities of school personnel, and the protection of respondent privacy. The completed questionnaires were checked for completeness and organized for statistical analysis.

3.6 Statistical Treatment

The data gathered in this study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were employed to determine the extent of implementing the Child-Friendly School System and learners' well-being across the selected public secondary schools in General Santos, Koronadal, and Tacurong city divisions. Specifically, the weighted mean was used to summarize the responses under each indicator, providing a clear view of how various components of the CFSS and well-being were rated by the respondents.

For the inferential aspect, statistical tools were applied to examine possible relationships between the two main variables of the study (J. Baron, 2022; Simpal, 2024). Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to assess the degree of association between the level of CFSS implementation and the extent of learners' well-being. This allowed the researcher to determine whether variations in the implementation of child-friendly practices corresponded with differences in students' social and emotional conditions. All statistical analyses were performed using a standard significance level of 0.05. The analyses provided an overview of current practices and a deeper understanding of how these practices may be connected to learners' experiences in the school environment.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings on how the Child-Friendly School System is being put into practice in the selected schools within SOCCSKSARGEN and how this connects to the well-being of the learners. Knowing the level of implementation matters because the way these programs are carried out can affect learners' experiences and overall development. The discussion starts by looking at how much the schools have adopted the CFSS, and then moves on to the learners' well-being in these schools. These results help us understand the relationship between schools' efforts and learners' sense of safety, support, and growth in their learning environment.

4.1. Extent of Implementation of the Schools' Child-Friendly School System in SOCCSKSARGEN

Creating a child-friendly school environment is essential because it directly affects how learners feel safe, supported, and able to grow both academically and personally. When schools actively implement this system, it helps promote every student's well-being and ensures that their rights and needs are respected. To understand how well this system is being implemented in SOCCSKSARGEN, Table 2 presents the extent of its implementation across different schools. This data provides a clear picture of where schools stand in creating nurturing spaces for their learners.

Table 2. Extent of Implementation of the Schools' Child-Friendly School System in SOCCSKSARGEN

Extent of Implementation of the Schools' Child-Friendly School System in SOCCSKSARGEN	Weighted Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
Participation of learners in the school and community	3.03	0.76	High
Children's health and well-being	2.88	0.74	High
Safety and productive spaces	3.09	0.73	High
Enrolment and completion	3.20	0.79	High
Academic achievement and success	3.20	0.73	High
Teachers' morale and motivation	3.30	0.84	High
Mobilization of community support in education	3.14	0.83	High
Overall Mean	**3.12**	**0.70**	**High**

Legend: 4.50-5.00 Very High, 3.50-4.49 High, 2.50-3.49 Moderate, 1.50-2.49 Low, 1.00-1.49 Very Low

As shown in Table 2, the overall extent of implementing the Child-Friendly School System in SOCCSKSARGEN is high, with a mean of 3.12. This suggests that schools have generally established key elements that promote learners' well-being and development. Notably, this level of implementation indicates consistent efforts across various areas to create a supportive environment for children. Among the specific components, teachers' morale and motivation recorded the highest mean of 3.30, indicating that educators feel encouraged and engaged in their roles, which is essential for sustaining a positive learning atmosphere. Similarly, enrolment and completion, along with academic achievement and success, with a mean of 3.20, point to strong student retention and performance outcomes, which are the fundamental goals of any child-friendly system.

On the other hand, children's health and well-being had the lowest mean of 2.88, which, while still high, suggests that there is room for improvement in ensuring that all the health needs of learners are fully met. Learners' participation in the school and community, with a mean of 3.03, also reveals the potential for increasing student involvement in school and local activities, which can further enhance their sense of belonging and personal growth. These findings imply that while significant progress has been made in implementing the Child-Friendly School System, particular attention may be needed to strengthen health services and encourage greater participation among learners to improve their well-being (Cedeño, 2024). In summary, while implementing the child-friendly system is strong overall, focusing more on health services and learner participation will help further strengthen schools' support for student well-being and growth.

4.2. Extent of the Learners' Well-Being in SOCCSKSARGEN

Learners' well-being plays a vital role in their ability to stay engaged, persevere through challenges, maintain a positive outlook, feel connected to others, and experience happiness in their school lives. Understanding the level of well-being among learners helps identify how well schools support these important areas that contribute to overall development. The following section presents the extent of learners' well-being in SOCCSKSARGEN, focusing on these key aspects: Table 3 displays the findings on learners' well-being in terms of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness at school.

Table 3. Extent of the Learners' Well-Being in SOCCSKSARGEN

Extent of the Learners' Well-Being in SOCCSKSARGEN	Weighted Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
Engagement	2.96	0.68	Moderate
Perseverance	3.12	0.79	Moderate
Optimism	3.07	0.75	Moderate
Connectedness	3.32	0.78	Moderate
Happiness	3.31	0.79	Moderate
Overall Mean	**3.15**	**0.73**	**Moderate**

Legend: 4.50-5.00 Very High, 3.50-4.49 High, 2.50-3.49 Moderate, 1.50-2.49 Low, 1.00-1.49 Very Low

As shown in Table 3, the overall extent of learners' well-being in SOCCSKSARGEN was moderate, with a weighted mean of 3.15. This indicates that learners experience a fair level of emotional and social support within their school environment, but there is still a significant opportunity to strengthen their well-being further (Tannert & Gröschner, 2021). The relatively high scores in connectedness and happiness, with means of 3.32 and 3.31, respectively, suggest that learners generally feel accepted and supported by their peers and teachers, which creates a positive atmosphere that can encourage growth and learning. This sense of belonging is vital because it lays the foundation for learners to feel safe and valued in their learning environment.

On the other hand, the moderate but lower means in engagement, perseverance, and optimism—2.96, 3.12, and 3.07, respectively—point to areas where learners may struggle. Engagement reflects how involved learners are in their activities, and the slightly lower mean indicates that some learners may find it challenging to stay focused or participate actively. Perseverance and optimism relate to learners' ability to keep going despite setbacks and to maintain a hopeful view of their future. Moderate ratings imply that learners could benefit from more encouragement and support to build resilience and confidence. Together, these findings highlight the need for schools to maintain a welcoming and happy environment and actively create programs and practices that boost learner engagement, encourage persistence through challenges, and foster a more optimistic mindset (Vaghela & Parsana, 2024). Strengthening these areas will improve learners' overall well-being and help them thrive both academically and personally.

4.3. Relationship between the Extent of the Child-Friendly School System Implementation and the Learners' Well-Being

Understanding the connection between the implementation of the Child-Friendly School System and the well-being of learners is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of educational practices. This relationship sheds light on whether efforts to create supportive, safe, and nurturing school environments align with students' positive experiences and outcomes. The following table (Table 4) details the analysis of this relationship in the context of SOCCSKSARGEN.

Table 4. Relationship between the Extent of the Child-Friendly School System Implementation and the Learners' Well-Being

Variables	Mean	Computed r	Degree of Relationship	p-value	Remarks
Extent of CFSS Implementation	3.12				
		0.6058	Strong Positive Correlation	0.000	There is a significant relationship
Extent of Learners' Well-being	3.15				

Tested at 0.05 level of significance

Table 4 presents the relationship between the extent of implementing the Child-Friendly School System and learners' well-being in SOCCSKSARGEN. The data show a strong positive correlation (r = 0.606) between these two variables, which means that as the implementation of the Child-Friendly School System increases, learners' well-being also tends to improve. This relationship was statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.000, indicating that the observed connection was unlikely to be due to chance.

This finding has important implications. This suggests that efforts to create a supportive and safe school environment are meaningfully connected to how learners experience their well-being (McCabe, Davis, Mandy, & Wong, 2022). When schools focus on participation, safety, health, and community involvement, it reflects positively on learners' engagement, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. Therefore, strengthening the Child-Friendly School system could directly contribute to improving students' overall emotional and social health.

In practical terms, school administrators and educators should continue to prioritize and enhance child-friendly initiatives, knowing that these efforts are tied to learners' well-being. Supporting teachers, maintaining safe spaces, and encouraging community involvement are not just policy goals; they also affect how students thrive. This connection encourages a more holistic approach to education that considers academic success and broader dimensions of learner development.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the Child-Friendly School system has been actively implemented in public secondary schools in SOCCSKSARGEN. Teachers and school personnel reported strong efforts across key areas, such as academic support, enrollment, teacher morale, and safe learning spaces. However, even with these improvements, learners' well-being remained moderate. While students generally feel connected and happy at school, some face challenges related to engagement, perseverance, and optimism. The analysis also revealed a significant positive relationship between the extent of CFSS implementation and learners' well-being. This means that schools that consistently carry out child-centered practices tend to have students who feel more emotionally and socially supported. These results suggest that caring school environments are important for shaping how learners feel and function in their day-to-day school lives.

Although the study focused only on selected schools in General Santos, Koronadal, and Tacurong and relied on self-reported data, it offers valuable points for reflection. The connection between school practices and learner well-being supports the long-standing principles regarding the role of the environment in student development. These results may serve as a reference for schools similar to those in SOCCSKSARGEN. They can help guide educational leaders and policymakers who wish to improve the quality of school life through child-centered systems. With more unmistakable evidence, programs that place learners at the heart of education can be given more attention, not just as policy but as a shared responsibility in schools across the nation.

5.2 Implication

The results of this study point to several important directions for educational practice and policy, particularly in settings that aim to strengthen child-centered learning environments. The positive connection between CFSS implementation and learner well-being suggests that school climate and support systems are not merely background factors but essential conditions that influence how students feel, learn, and grow. For school administrators, the findings emphasize the need to consistently invest in programs that protect children's health and ensure their emotional safety. Addressing gaps in these areas may improve academic outcomes and students' long-term development. Strengthening health services, ensuring physical and psychological safety, and making space for student voices go beyond compliance; they shape everyday experiences in meaningful ways.

For teachers, the results reinforce the value of inclusive classroom practices and the role of morale in sustaining student engagement. Encouraging learners to participate in decisions and creating respectful, responsive environments may improve their motivation and confidence, especially in schools with diverse student populations. From a policy standpoint, this study affirms that frameworks such as the Child-Friendly School System can support learner well-being through continuous training, local adaptation, and sustained monitoring. Although the study focused on SOCCSKSARGEN, the insights may be relevant to other regions seeking to strengthen school systems through more responsive and learner-centered approaches to education. These findings also support broader discussions on how national policies can be shaped to better align with the day-to-day realities of schools and their learners.

5.3 Limitations

This study had some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the research focused only on selected schools within the SOCCSKSARGEN region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other areas with different contexts. Second, data were gathered through self-reported questionnaires, which may have been influenced by the respondents' personal

biases or the desire to provide socially acceptable answers. Third, the study measured learners' well-being at a single point, so it did not capture possible changes over time or the long-term effects of the implementation of the Child-Friendly School System. Finally, some factors outside the scope of this study, such as family background and community influences, might also affect learners' well-being, but were not fully explored. Acknowledging these limitations can guide future research to build on and deepen the understanding of this important topic.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the implementation of the Child-Friendly School System and improve the well-being of learners in SOCCSKSARGEN:
1. Schools should prioritize strengthening health programs and safety measures to address children's health and well-being, ensuring a safer and more supportive environment for learners.
2. School administrators and teachers must implement activities and strategies that encourage learner engagement, perseverance, and optimism to promote emotional and social growth.
3. Continuous monitoring and active involvement of the community should be maintained to support and sustain the effective implementation of the Child-Friendly School System, recognizing its positive connection to learners' well-being.

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