Research Article

ENHANCING LOCAL GOVERNANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE CHILD-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES IN MORONG, BATAAN

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ABSTRACT

Aims: This study aimed to assess the Local Government Challenges in creating and maintaining child-friendly environments in Morong, Bataan, and to explore the relationship between these challenges and the extent of child-friendly environments. It sought to identify the barriers that local governments face in promoting child welfare and examine the factors that contribute to or hinder the creation of supportive spaces for children in the community. **Study design:** A descriptive-correlational research design was employed to investigate the relationship between local government challenges and the extent of child-friendly environments in Morong. The study focused on understanding how local governance issues, such as policy enforcement, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and governance capacity, influence the creation and sustainability of child-friendly spaces and services. **Methodology:** The study involved 100 respondents selected through random sampling. Data were collected via a survey questionnaire that assessed local government challenges and the extent of child-friendly environments. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent (local government challenges) and dependent (child-friendly environments) variables. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and participant confidentiality were ensured. **Results:** The results indicated that the largest group of respondents were older adults, with 76% female participation. Key local government challenges identified included policy implementation and compliance (mean = 3.50), resource allocation and funding (mean = 3.43), and stakeholder engagement (mean = 3.33). The extent of child-friendly environments was positively rated, with community awareness (mean = 3.34) and government responsiveness (mean = 3.28) being highlighted as strengths. The statistical analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation (r = 0.433) between local government challenges and child-friendly environments, with a p-value of 0.000, indicating that overcoming governance challenges could significantly improve the creation and maintenance of child-friendly spaces. **Conclusion:** The study concluded that while Morong has made strides in creating child-friendly environments, there are significant governance and socio-economic barriers that hinder the full potential of child welfare initiatives. The results suggest that addressing challenges such as policy enforcement, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement could positively impact child welfare. The study emphasizes the need for continued investment in local governance, policy development, and capacity building to improve the quality of child-friendly spaces and services in Morong and similar municipalities. Further research is recommended to explore the role of community engagement and the impact of broader socio-economic factors on child welfare.

Keywords: Child welfare, Governance challenges, Local government, Policy implementation, Stakeholder engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Child-friendly environments are essential to safeguarding and advancing children's rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides a global framework for ensuring that children's welfare is prioritized, advocating for the provision of adequate resources to protect their right to safety, education, and overall well-being. According to the UNCRC, children must grow up in environments that shield them from harm, guarantee their access to education, and support their social and emotional development. While many countries have ratified this landmark convention, the actual implementation of its principles varies significantly across regions, exposing the challenges governments face in creating environments conducive to children's growth.

Internationally, the issue of child protection and welfare has been a growing concern, particularly in the past few decades. Numerous organizations, including UNICEF and the World Health Organization, have been vocal in advocating for policies that address child welfare comprehensively. They emphasize the importance of adopting holistic strategies that include not only access to education but also

protection from violence, and support for both physical and mental health. Despite advancements in global child welfare advocacy, many developing nations still struggle to address the root causes of child vulnerability, with a significant barrier being the gap between policy creation and its practical application at the local level.

Recent studies have highlighted that many developing countries face challenges in implementing child protection policies due to limited resources, political instability, and poor governance. At the local level, especially, child welfare programs often fall short due to underfunding, lack of infrastructure, and weak enforcement of laws. A 2022 study by Robinson and colleagues on child welfare governance found that local government capacity is a critical determinant in translating national child protection policies into meaningful outcomes (Robinson *et al.,* 2022). In some regions, the absence of child-friendly infrastructure—such as parks, recreational spaces, and safe educational facilities—further exacerbates these issues, hindering children's development and well-being.

These barriers are not unique to one country. For example, in the Philippines, despite having a robust legal framework for child welfare, including the Philippine Children's Welfare Code and the Anti-Child Abuse Law, the actual implementation of these policies often falls short at the local level. Local Government Units (LGUs), which are responsible for child protection enforcement, face numerous challenges, such as limited budgets, political factors, and poor

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governance. According to a report by the Philippine National Statistics Authority (2023), while national child welfare laws have been strengthened, local implementation remains inconsistent due to these systemic issues.

Morong, a municipality in the Province of Bataan, offers a unique case of progress and challenge in the effort to create a child-friendly environment. While the local government has made some advances in child protection and welfare initiatives, it still faces significant challenges. In a recent study, Mendoza (2023) explored the state of child-friendly spaces in Philippine municipalities, revealing that Morong struggles with funding and infrastructure issues, limiting its ability to provide adequate child-friendly spaces. The municipality lacks sufficient parks and recreational areas, which are essential for promoting children's physical and social development.

Moreover, governance issues in Morong reflect broader national trends. A 2023 study by Tan and Dela Cruz on local government capacities in the Philippines found that the lack of trained personnel and inadequate enforcement mechanisms at the local level significantly hinder the success of child protection programs (Tan & Dela Cruz, 2023). In Morong, this translates into weak enforcement of child welfare policies and insufficient community involvement, further limiting the effectiveness of existing programs.

Socio-economic factors, such as poverty and limited access to healthcare, exacerbate the challenges children face. Areas with high poverty rates often see children experiencing malnutrition, lack of education, and exposure to violence, all of which undermine their development. A study by Torres and Sison (2022) highlighted that children in low-income areas of the Philippines are disproportionately affected by inadequate social services and educational opportunities, which further perpetuates cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

The gap in the current literature is apparent. Although global and national frameworks for child welfare exist, there is a significant lack of research on local governance challenges that impede the implementation of child-friendly policies. Much of the existing research has focused on macro-level policies and national frameworks, leaving a gap in understanding the specific barriers faced by municipalities like Morong. Furthermore, the literature often overlooks the role of local stakeholders, including parents and community organizations, in ensuring the success of child welfare initiatives. This research aims to fill this gap by focusing on Morong and exploring how local governance factors, such as policy implementation, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and the capacity of local officials, influence the creation of child-friendly environments.

This study seeks to examine the specific challenges that Morong faces in creating a child-friendly environment. It will focus on understanding how local governance issues, such as policy enforcement, resource allocation, and governance capacity, impact the availability and quality of child-friendly spaces. Additionally, the research will explore the correlation between these governance challenges and the extent to which child welfare policies are effectively implemented. By focusing on a single locality, this study will provide valuable insights into the barriers and opportunities for improving child welfare at the local level and offer practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of child protection policies in municipalities. Through these investigations, the study aims to shed light on how local governments can better address the needs of children, ensuring that child-friendly spaces and services are adequately provided. The research will also help determine the relationship between local governance challenges and the availability

of child-friendly spaces, providing a clearer picture of what needs to be done to foster a safer, more supportive environment for children in Morong and similar municipalities.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored in the theory of Good Governance (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2009), which emphasized the importance of transparency, accountability, participation, and responsiveness in governance. This theory focused on how effective governance structures influenced the efficient implementation of policies and the allocation of resources. It was particularly relevant for understanding the Local Government Challenges (IV) in Morong, as it helped analyze how the local government's capacity to enforce policies, allocate resources, and engage with stakeholders impacted the creation and sustainability of child-friendly environments. The Good Governance Theory posited that the success of child welfare programs, including child protection policies and services, depended on the quality of governance at the local level. If governance was weak or resources were mismanaged, even well-designed child protection policies might have failed to serve children's needs effectively.

Moreover, for the Child-Friendly Environments (DV), the study was anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which explored how children's development was shaped by interactions within multiple layers of their environment. This theory focused on the impact of various environmental systems on a child's well-being, such as the family, school, community, and policies. In this context, it emphasized how external factors, such as community engagement, local policies, and the availability of child-focused infrastructure (like parks, schools, and healthcare services), influenced children's overall development. The Ecological Systems Theory helped understand how different layers of the environment, shaped by local government, affected the quality of life for children. The theory contributed to analyzing how the policies and practices of local governments directly contributed to creating supportive, child-friendly environments that enabled positive developmental outcomes.

This study's conceptual framework centered on the relationship between the Local Government Challenges (IV) and the Child-Friendly Environments (DV) in Morong, Bataan. It aimed to explore how various challenges the local government faced in implementing child welfare policies and programs affected the municipality's overall child-friendly environment. The Local Government Challenges (IV) referred to the barriers and difficulties encountered by the local government in creating an environment that supported children's welfare. These challenges included policy implementation and compliance, where the effectiveness of local ordinances and alignment with national child protection policies could significantly influence child welfare outcomes. Another key challenge was resource allocation and funding, which determined how child-focused programs and infrastructure, such as parks, playgrounds, and educational facilities, were adequately supported. Additionally, stakeholder engagement and community participation were critical in the success of child welfare initiatives, as the involvement of local communities, parents, and other stakeholders ensured that children's needs were prioritized and that policies were effectively implemented. The capacity and training of local government officials in child protection laws and child-friendly governance also played a crucial role in the successful execution of child welfare programs. Lastly, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms helped assess the effectiveness of child welfare initiatives, ensuring that the policies in place met the intended outcomes for children's well-being. These

governance challenges hindered or facilitated the establishment of a child-friendly environment, directly impacting the availability of resources and services essential for children's growth and development.

Additionally, Child-Friendly Environments (DV) encompassed the physical, social, and policy-driven spaces and services that promoted children's well-being and development. A child-friendly environment supported the holistic development of children by providing access to safe, inclusive, and quality education; protective services that shielded children from harm, abuse, and exploitation; and healthy and recreational spaces, such as parks and playgrounds, that allowed for physical, mental, and social growth. The extent to which local governments could create and maintain these environments was heavily influenced by their ability to address the challenges identified above. Factors such as the availability and accessibility of child-friendly spaces, the quality of child welfare and protection services, and inclusive and equitable education opportunities played a significant role in determining whether children could thrive in their communities. Furthermore, community awareness and advocacy for children's rights were essential in promoting a child-centered environment where the public understood and actively upheld children's rights.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between local government challenges and child-friendly environments in Morong, Bataan. A total of 100 respondents were selected through random sampling, ensuring that each individual had an equal chance of being chosen. Data were gathered using a survey questionnaire that included sections on local government challenges (such as policy implementation, resource allocation, community participation, and local officials' capacity) and the extent of child-friendly environments (such as the availability of parks, quality of child welfare services, access to education, and overall well-being of children). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while Pearson's correlation analysis assessed the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity, were upheld throughout the study. The findings provided valuable insights into how local governance impacted the creation of child-friendly environments, focusing on governance challenges and child welfare in Morong.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. **What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, occupation, level of education, and participation in local child welfare programs/initiatives?**

In terms of age, the largest group of participants, accounting for 44%, fell within the 46 years old and above category, followed by 25% in the 26-35 age range and 24% in the 36-45 age group. The smallest group consisted of the 18-25 years old category, representing only 7% of the sample. This distribution suggests that most respondents are older adults, likely with more life experience and, possibly, a longer exposure to child welfare issues. These individuals may bring a wealth of personal experience to their perceptions of child welfare but could also reflect generational gaps in understanding or engagement with newer, more modern child welfare practices (Kaufmann *et al.,* 2022). Research by Smith *et al.,* (2023) similarly indicated that older adults tend to have more entrenched views on child welfare, which can sometimes create barriers to implementing

progressive child welfare policies, especially when younger perspectives are absent.

Gender distribution was significantly skewed, with 76% of respondents identifying as female, 23% as male, and 1% preferring not to disclose their gender. This suggests that women remain the predominant participants in child welfare-related activities, likely due to their traditional roles as primary caregivers. According to research by Hall and Wilson (2022), women are more likely to engage in child welfare initiatives, which is consistent with historical trends in many societies. However, this also highlights a gap in male participation, an issue that has been increasingly recognized in the literature. Studies by Thomas *et al.,* (2023) noted that a lack of male involvement can undermine the comprehensiveness of child welfare programs and that encouraging greater male participation is crucial for achieving balanced and inclusive child development initiatives.

When examining occupation, the data showed that 44% of respondents were parents or guardians, 26% were local government officials, 18% were teachers or school personnel, and the remaining 12% were community members or from other occupations. This breakdown highlights the central role that parents and local government officials play in child welfare. A similar study by Castro and Diaz (2022) found that local government officials and educators were key players in shaping and implementing child welfare programs. The involvement of these groups underscores the importance of their roles in providing resources and policy implementation at the local level. However, the relative underrepresentation of teachers and community members suggests potential gaps in outreach and inclusion in child welfare activities, which could hinder the full potential of these initiatives.

The educational background of the respondents showed that 64% were college graduates, 30% had a high school education, and 6% had post-graduate qualifications. This indicates that the sample was relatively well-educated, which is important for understanding the level of knowledge and awareness of child welfare policies. However, the diversity in educational backgrounds suggests that communication strategies need to be tailored to ensure that all community segments are reached effectively. Recent studies, such as those by Roberts and Liu (2023), suggest that inclusive education and awareness campaigns should be a priority, as they ensure that people from all educational backgrounds can contribute to and benefit from child welfare initiatives.

In terms of participation in child welfare programs, 76% of respondents reported active involvement, while 24% indicated they had not participated. This high engagement rate suggests a strong foundation for community involvement in child welfare. However, the 24% who reported no participation reflects a potential gap in accessibility or awareness. Several studies, including those by Patel *et al.,* (2023), pointed out that barriers such as lack of awareness, physical inaccessibility, and social stigmas often prevent certain groups from engaging with child welfare programs. These findings suggest that to achieve more inclusive participation, efforts need to be made to remove these barriers, ensuring that all community members, regardless of their socio-economic status or awareness level, are able to access and engage in child welfare initiatives.

Overall, the findings from this study suggest that while significant engagement exists in child welfare programs in Morong, there is a need to expand efforts to include more men, younger adults, and a broader spectrum of the community in these programs. The literature supports these findings, emphasizing the need for more inclusive, multi-faceted approaches to child welfare that actively engage all demographics. By increasing the participation of these

underrepresented groups, child welfare systems can be made more holistic, ensuring that the welfare of all children is adequately supported through collective, community-driven action.

2. What are the Local Government Challenges in Creating and Maintaining Child-Friendly Environments in Morong?

The data presented in Table 1 provides a summary of the Local Government Challenges in Creating and Maintaining Child-Friendly Environments in Morong, based on the respondents' perceptions of various governance factors that impact child welfare. The findings reveal several critical insights into the challenges faced by local government in fostering child-friendly spaces and programs.

The highest mean score of 3.50 (SD = 0.50) was recorded for Policy Implementation and Compliance, suggesting that respondents strongly agree on the importance of enforcing policies and adhering to national standards. This result reflects the general consensus that policy enforcement is a significant barrier to creating child-friendly environments. As noted by recent studies (García & Reyes, 2022), policy implementation challenges are often linked to inconsistent enforcement at the local level, particularly in municipalities with limited administrative capacity. This issue is compounded by a lack of alignment between national child welfare laws and local governmental practices (Mendoza & Dizon, 2023).

Following closely was Resource Allocation and Funding, which received a mean score of 3.43 (SD = 0.49). This indicates strong agreement on the necessity of adequate funding and resource distribution for supporting child welfare initiatives. As highlighted by González and Tan (2023), the allocation of sufficient financial resources remains a major obstacle for many local governments, particularly in underfunded municipalities, which struggle to provide essential services such as healthcare, education, and recreational facilities for children. The respondents' views align with these findings, suggesting that more investment in child welfare is crucial for long-term success.

Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation received a mean of 3.33 (SD = 0.49), emphasizing the importance of involving local stakeholders, including parents and community members, in child welfare programs. This resonates with the findings of Pérez *et al.,* (2022), who noted that active community participation is essential for the sustainability of child welfare programs. Engaging local stakeholders not only enhances the relevance of child welfare initiatives but also helps ensure that policies are tailored to the specific needs of the community.

Capacity and Training of Local Government Officials scored 3.27 (SD = 0.54), indicating a strong agreement that local government officials require more training on child protection laws and effective governance practices. This finding is consistent with research by Sison and Torres (2023), which pointed out that local officials' lack of expertise in child welfare policies undermines the effectiveness of child protection measures. Capacity building for local officials is crucial for ensuring that policies are implemented efficiently and with the necessary understanding of child rights.

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms scored 3.00 (SD = 0.52), indicating agreement that effective monitoring and evaluation systems are lacking. This result points to a key challenge in assessing and improving child welfare programs. As highlighted by Upton (2023), without effective monitoring, it is difficult to identify program deficiencies and make necessary adjustments to improve service delivery. This lack of evaluation systems can result in poorly implemented programs that fail to meet their intended outcomes.

Socio-Economic and Environmental Factors received a mean of 3.21 (SD = 0.49), indicating agreement that factors like poverty and limited access to services pose significant challenges in creating child-friendly environments. These socio-economic barriers often hinder children's access to quality education, healthcare, and recreational spaces, which are essential for their development. Studies such as those by Cordero and Velasco (2022) have demonstrated that poverty significantly affects children's well-being, limiting their opportunities for social and educational advancement.

The overall mean of 3.29 falls under the "Strongly Agree" category, suggesting that respondents generally perceive local government challenges as significant in the creation and maintenance of child-friendly environments. These results highlight several key areas for improvement, particularly the need for stronger governance structures, improved resource management, and better community involvement. Furthermore, the findings point to the need for more robust training for local government officials, enhanced monitoring and evaluation systems, and policies that address broader socio-economic issues.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes that while there is a high level of engagement with child welfare programs in Morong, there are significant governance and socio-economic barriers that hinder the full potential of these initiatives. The results suggest that local government efforts must be complemented by broader social policies aimed at improving socio-economic conditions and access to essential services, thereby creating sustainable child-friendly environments.

Table 1. The Summary of the Local Government Challenges in Creating and Maintaining Child-Friendly Environments

Items	Mean	SD	Description
1. Policy Implementation and Compliance	3.50	0.50	Strongly Agree
2. Resource Allocation and Funding	3.43	0.49	Strongly Agree
3. Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation	3.33	0.49	Strongly Agree
4. Capacity and Training of Local Government Officials	3.27	0.54	Strongly Agree
5. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms	3.00	0.52	Agree
6. Socio-Economic and Environmental Factors	3.21	0.49	Agree
Overall Mean	**3.29**	**0.50**	**Strongly Agree**

Legend: 1.00 – 1.75 (Strongly Disagree), 1.76 – 2.50 (Disagree), 2.51 – 3.25 (Agree), 3.26 – 4.00 (Strongly Agree)

3. What is the extent of Child-Friendly Environments in Morong?

The data presented in Table 2 provides a summary of the extent of Child-Friendly Environments in Morong, based on respondents' perceptions of the availability and quality of various child welfare factors. The findings indicate a generally positive view of the child welfare situation in the municipality, while also identifying areas for improvement.

The highest mean score of 3.34 (SD = 0.49) was recorded for Community Awareness and Child Rights Advocacy, which suggests that respondents strongly agree that there is a high level of

awareness and advocacy for children's rights within the community. This reflects the success of local efforts in promoting children's rights and building community consciousness about the importance of safeguarding children's welfare. Research by Dela Cruz and Punzalan (2023) found similar positive outcomes in communities where strong child rights advocacy programs were implemented, noting that awareness campaigns lead to greater community involvement in child welfare initiatives. The result in Morong highlights the effectiveness of advocacy efforts in engaging the public in child protection activities, a trend that is essential for fostering sustainable child welfare programs.

Closely following this was Government Responsiveness and Policy Effectiveness, which scored 3.28 (SD = 0.51), indicating strong agreement that the local government is responsive and effective in implementing child welfare policies. This finding is consistent with recent studies, such as those by Mendoza & Santos (2023), which observed that effective governance plays a crucial role in improving the outcomes of child welfare programs. The perceived effectiveness of local government in Morong could be attributed to a combination of policy development and institutional responsiveness, contributing to the overall positive perception of child welfare services. However, as noted by Lee *et al.,* (2023), there remains a need for ongoing monitoring and refinement of policies to ensure long-term effectiveness, as challenges such as resource allocation can affect the implementation of these policies.

The Availability and Accessibility of Child-Friendly Spaces also scored highly, with a mean of 3.28 (SD = 0.58). This reflects strong agreement that child-friendly spaces, such as parks and recreational areas, are accessible to children in the community. Access to such spaces is crucial for children's physical and social development, as it provides them with opportunities for play and interaction, which are integral to their well-being (Chavez & Ruiz, 2022). Despite the positive feedback, the variation in the standard deviation suggests some perceived differences in the availability of these spaces across the community, which may highlight areas that require further development. The Quality of Child Welfare and Protection Services received a mean of 3.21 (SD = 0.55), indicating agreement that child protection services, such as health and nutrition programs, are of good quality. While respondents generally rated these services positively, the score suggests that there is room for improvement. As noted by various studies (e.g., Ortega & Rodriguez, 2023), the effectiveness of child protection services often hinges on the quality and accessibility of healthcare, education, and social services. In Morong, there may be opportunities to enhance these services through increased funding, improved coordination, and capacity building for local service providers.

Inclusive and Equitable Education Opportunities scored 3.23 (SD = 0.56), indicating agreement that education opportunities for all children, including those with special needs, are accessible and of adequate quality. This finding is in line with recent reports from the Department of Education (2023), which highlighted efforts to improve access to quality education for marginalized groups. However, continued investment in inclusive education is necessary to ensure that all children, regardless of socio-economic background or ability, benefit equally from educational opportunities.

The Overall Child Well-Being and Development score of 3.15 (SD = 0.57) shows agreement that the overall well-being and development of children in the community are satisfactory. While this result is generally positive, it also indicates that there is still room for improvement. This finding is supported by research from Lopez & Castillo (2023), who noted that while basic child welfare programs may be in place, addressing the full spectrum of children's needs—physical, emotional, and psychological—requires continuous effort and a more comprehensive approach.

The overall mean of 3.24 (SD = 0.54) falls under the "Agree" category, indicating that respondents are generally satisfied with the extent of child-friendly environments in Morong but acknowledge that there are areas where improvement is needed. These results highlight the strengths of community awareness, government responsiveness, and the availability of child-friendly spaces while also pointing to the need for continued efforts to improve the quality of child welfare services, education opportunities, and overall child development in the municipality.

In conclusion, while Morong has made significant progress in creating a child-friendly environment, particularly in terms of community engagement and policy effectiveness, ongoing efforts are needed to enhance the quality of child welfare services and ensure equitable access to resources for all children. By addressing the areas identified in the study, the municipality can further strengthen its child welfare initiatives and ensure a better quality of life for its young residents.

Table 2. The summary on the extent of Child-Friendly Environments

Items	Mean	SD	Description
1. Availability and Accessibility of Child-Friendly Spaces	3.28	0.58	*Strongly Agree*
2. Quality of Child Welfare and Protection Services	3.21	0.55	*Agree*
3. Inclusive and Equitable Education Opportunities	3.23	0.56	*Agree*
4. Community Awareness and Child Rights Advocacy	3.34	0.49	*Strongly Agree*
5. Government Responsiveness and Policy Effectiveness	3.28	0.51	*Strongly Agree*
6. Overall Child Well-Being and Development	3.15	0.57	*Agree*
Overall Mean	**3.24**	**0.54**	**Agree**

Legend: 1.00 – 1.75 (Strongly Disagree), 1.76 – 2.50 (Disagree), 2.51 – 3.25 (Agree), 3.26 – 4.00 (Strongly Agree)

4. Is there a significant relationship between Local Government Challenges and the extent of Child-Friendly Environments in Morong?

Table 3 presents the results of the test for the significant relationship between Local Government Challenges and the extent of Child-Friendly Environments in Morong. The analysis reveals a moderate positive correlation between the two variables, with an r-value of 0.433, suggesting that as local government challenges increase, the extent of child-friendly environments in the municipality also tends to improve. This finding is somewhat unexpected, as one might anticipate that increased challenges would hinder the development of child-friendly environments. However, this result suggests that local government efforts, even when faced with challenges, may lead to progress in creating child-friendly spaces, possibly through adaptive strategies or incremental improvements.

The p-value of 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant. As a result, the null hypothesis (Ho), which posits that there is no significant relationship between local government challenges and the extent of

child-friendly environments, is rejected. This rejection confirms that there is indeed a significant relationship between the two variables. In other words, the challenges faced by local government play a critical role in influencing the creation and maintenance of child-friendly environments in Morong.

These findings have important implications for policy and governance in Morong. The positive correlation suggests that addressing local government challenges—such as improving policy implementation, enhancing resource allocation, and fostering better stakeholder engagement—could have a positive impact on the development of child-friendly environments. As identified in previous studies (e.g., Tan & Cruz, 2022), addressing governance challenges at the local level is essential for ensuring that child welfare policies are not only enacted but also effectively implemented. This underscores the importance of improving governance capacity to ensure that the progress made in creating child-friendly spaces is sustainable and impactful.

In conclusion, the statistical significance of the relationship between local government challenges and child-friendly environments in Morong highlights the need for targeted interventions in governance practices. By addressing the identified challenges, the local government can further enhance the quality and accessibility of child-friendly spaces and services, thus fostering a more supportive environment for children's growth and development.

Table 3. The Test of the significant relationship between Local Government Challenges and the extent of Child-Friendly Environments

	Child-Friendly Environments		
	r-value	p-value	Decision on Ho
Local Government Challenges	.433**	.000	Rejected

Significant if P-value <0.05
Legend: Ho is rejected if Significant
Ho is accepted if Not Significant

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the Local Government Challenges in creating and maintaining child-friendly environments in Morong, Bataan, and to explore the relationship between these challenges and the extent of child-friendly environments. The results revealed that local government challenges, particularly in policy implementation, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement, significantly affect the development of child-friendly spaces and services. Respondents strongly agreed that issues like the capacity of local officials, resource distribution, and enforcement of child protection policies need to be addressed for successful implementation. Furthermore, the extent of child-friendly environments in Morong was generally rated positively, with respondents agreeing that there is good community awareness, government responsiveness, and availability of child-friendly spaces. However, there were areas where improvements are needed, particularly in child welfare services, education opportunities, and overall child development.

Thus, the statistical analysis confirmed a moderate positive correlation between the local government challenges and the extent of child-friendly environments, indicating that overcoming these challenges can improve the quality of child welfare programs and spaces. The study emphasizes the importance of enhancing local governance to foster better child-friendly environments, which are essential for children's well-being and development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthen Policy Implementation and Compliance:** Local government officials should focus on improving the enforcement of child protection laws and ensuring that local ordinances align with national policies. This can be achieved through regular audits, clearer enforcement mechanisms, and holding local officials accountable for child welfare initiatives.
2. **Increase Resource Allocation and Funding for Child Welfare Programs:** Adequate funding and resource distribution are critical to sustaining child-friendly spaces and services. The local government should prioritize allocating funds for child welfare programs and infrastructure development, such as parks, playgrounds, and educational facilities.
3. **Enhance Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation:** The involvement of parents, guardians, and the broader community in child welfare initiatives is vital for their success. The local government should create more avenues for community participation, including public forums, workshops, and partnerships with local NGOs and educational institutions to increase awareness and advocacy for children's rights.
4. **Invest in the Capacity Building of Local Government Officials:** Training programs on child protection laws, child-friendly governance, and program management should be introduced for local government officials. This will ensure that officials are better equipped to effectively manage and implement child welfare programs.
5. **Develop Strong Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:** The local government should establish more robust monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of child welfare programs. Regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and community consultations, can help track progress and identify areas for improvement.
6. **Address Socio-Economic Factors:** Local policies should consider socio-economic challenges that affect children's welfare, such as poverty and lack of access to healthcare. Comprehensive programs that address these underlying issues are necessary to create an environment conducive to children's development.
7. **Improve Access to Quality Education and Child Welfare Services:** Efforts should be made to enhance the availability and quality of education, healthcare, and protection services for children, particularly those from vulnerable groups. This could involve expanding support for children with special needs and ensuring that all children have access to safe and inclusive educational opportunities.

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