

Student Perspective on School Safety in Mercedes District: Basis for an Intervention Plan

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ABSTRACT

This research assessed the profile of the schools, the student's characteristics, the perception of the students on the safety of public secondary schools, and the correlation between the profile of the school and the perception of the students on the safety of public secondary schools in Mercedes District offering senior high school programs. A stratified random sampling method was utilized involving 262 student-respondents with a survey questionnaire as the primary data collection tool which was validated by a panel of experts on student safety. Also, it employed a descriptive correlational approach to collect data and address the research questions. The data were analyzed using statistical methods, including frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson Chi-Square to assess variable relationships. Findings revealed that public secondary schools in the Mercedes district were mostly located in coastal areas, predominantly large and operating for more than ten years. The teaching and non-teaching staff across the district include 287 and have enrollments ranging from 300 to 499 students. The students were mostly in the age bracket of 16-17, predominantly women and Grade 12, participated as classroom officers, and had socioeconomic status below 10,957. The students perceived safety of public secondary schools along physical, psychological, and procedural were rated average, interpreted as agree with a weighted mean of 3.00, 3.04, and 3.14 respectively. The correlation between the profile of the school and the perception of the students on safety shows a significant relationship. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not accepted. Based on these findings, the proposed intervention plan was formulated. The study recommends that schools take action on implementing safety measures addressing its unique characteristics, safety programs should be tailored to the specific characteristics of the students, and may implement "Project CARE" to improve overall safety in public secondary schools, ensuring it is adaptable to various school contexts and includes regular review processes.

Keywords: safety perception, physical safety, psychological safety, procedural safety, school profile, students' characteristics

INTRODUCTION

Reference [1] emphasizes how a sense of safety enables students to focus, engage actively, and develop important social skills. When students feel safe, attendance improves, and deeper engagement with learning takes place, which contributes to emotional resilience. The benefits of student safety extend beyond the classroom. A safe environment enables teachers to focus on delivering quality instruction and creating positive learning experiences for all students which is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all [2]. Moreover, when schools provide quality, inclusive, and safe education, children can learn, build friendships, and gain the critical skills they need to navigate social situations [3].

Despite significant efforts to improve safety, schools continue to face challenges related to student well-being. Rising incidents of bullying, harassment, and violence are a growing concern, potentially desensitizing students and undermining their academic goals [4]. This issue is not confined to any one region; it is global, with millions of students exposed to gender-based violence near schools and facing bullying and physical violence [2], [5]. Furthermore, poor school infrastructure such as inadequate buildings and sanitation further contributes to students' sense of vulnerability [6]. The absence of comprehensive intervention and targeted protection

programs for at-risk students creates additional challenges [5]. These issues require a multifaceted approach that includes not only improving infrastructure but also enacting robust policies, implementing targeted protection programs, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion within schools.

Creating a safe and secure environment, free from violence, is a necessary condition for promoting learning within school settings. Considering the diverse challenges confronting educational institutions, there is an urgent need to reconsider and refine school safety strategies. Each school is unique, and school leaders must consider implementing safety policies and decisions that best suit the needs, culture, and community of the learning environment [7]. This involves examining all aspects of school safety such as physical, psychological, and procedural, ensuring that schools foster environments in which students can excel academically, emotionally, and socially.

In the Philippines, ensuring the safety and well-being of students within educational institutions is a top priority. The 1987 Philippine Constitution recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and mandates the state to protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being, which extends to safeguarding their safety in educational settings [8]. This constitutional framework is reinforced by several legal measures that focus on physical, psychological, and procedural safety within schools. This provision underscores the obligation of the state to ensure the holistic development of children and youth. To bolster school safety, educational institutions have implemented target-hardening tactics, addressing physical, procedural, and psychological aspects [9]. Physical safety encompasses visible upgrades such as fortified doors and surveillance systems. Procedural safety involves revised routines and policies, including lockdown drills and visitor protocols. Psychological safety aims to foster well-being and deter violence through interventions like mental health support and restorative justice, targeting potential aggressors to prevent harmful intentions and actions [10].

Ensuring student safety is essential for effective learning and overall development. While the Philippine government has implemented numerous laws and policies addressing safety, integrating student perspectives is critical for these policies to be effective. Reference [11] states that though student perceptions of safety are related to a whole host of positive outcomes and benefits, prior work also demonstrates that opinions regarding school safety vary between students and the school and are influenced by community factors. Thus, by understanding students' perception and their concerns, policymakers can create well-informed guidelines and strategies for the responsible and effective implementation of safety measures ultimately enhancing learning experiences.

The municipality of Mercedes, located in the Camarines Norte province, faces several unique challenges that affect the safety and educational experience of its students. The town's geographical features, including coastal areas, and islands, and susceptibility to natural disasters like typhoons and flooding, create significant barriers to ensuring safety. Reference [12] emphasize that coastal schools are particularly susceptible to safety risks due to their exposure to natural disasters like typhoons, flooding, and tsunamis. Additionally, socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of infrastructure limit access to quality education and exacerbate vulnerabilities within schools. Reference [13] supports this statement which highlights that students' sense of belonging is different in schools with high or low socioeconomic status.

This study is significant because it aims to address safety concerns in public secondary schools within the Mercedes district of Camarines Norte. By creating a safer learning environment, this research will help students focus on their studies, engage more effectively in learning activities, and achieve their academic goals. The study will also enable teachers and administrators to identify potential risks, provide early intervention, and offer support services to students struggling with fear or anxiety. Research shows that prevention efforts by teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and even students can reduce violence and improve the school environment [14].

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative research design, using a descriptive correlational approach to collect data and address the research questions. The descriptive research design was chosen to gather detailed information

about the profile of the school along with the school's geographic location; school size; years of operation; number of teaching and non-teaching staff; and total enrollment. This method also gathered detailed information on the students' characteristics along with age, gender, grade level, participation in school organization, and socio-economic status. Furthermore, the method assessed the perception of the students on the safety of public secondary schools along with physical dimension, psychological dimension, and procedural dimension. This data was analyzed using statistical methods, including frequency, percentage, and weighted mean. Meanwhile, the correlational method was applied in the analysis of the significant relationship between the profile of the school and the student's perception of the safety of public secondary schools in Mercedes District in which a thorough analysis was conducted using Pearson Chi-Square.

A total of two hundred sixty-two (262) student-respondents from eight (8) public secondary schools in Mercedes District with senior high school programs were chosen as respondents out of eight hundred fifteen (815) senior high school students. The researcher employed a Sample Size Calculator to determine the sample size with a confidence level of 95%, ensuring that the actual value is within $\pm 5\%$ of the measured or surveyed value. The sampling method chosen was probability sampling, specifically, the stratified sampling method followed by a simple random sampling technique to select the respondents.

The primary data collection tool used in this study is a researcher-made survey questionnaire which was divided into three parts. The first part was designed to collect information about the profile of the public secondary schools, the second part was designed to collect information about the student's characteristics, and the third part was designed to assess the student's perception of the safety of secondary public schools in the Mercedes District.

A rigorous content validation process was employed, consulting a panel of experts in student safety from the Department of Education. In terms of the internal consistency of the instrument, a dry run was conducted on 30 students of Camarines Norte Senior High School located in Daet, Camarines Norte. The result indicated a 0.93 using Cronbach's Alpha which means that the survey questionnaire is good as to its reliability. Thus, there is an internal consistency in the considered indicators. Then, the final copies of the questionnaire were presented for distribution to the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the results of the data analysis in response to the problems covered by this study.

Profile of the School

This section examines public secondary schools in the Mercedes district, focusing on geographic location, school size, years of operation, staffing levels, and total enrollment.

1) *School Geographic Location:* Table I shows that most public secondary schools in the Mercedes district are situated in coastal areas, with 5 or 62.5%; schools on the mainland near the center comprise 2 or 25.0%, while those in geographically isolated areas comprise 1 or 12.5%.

Table I school geographic location

Profile	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
The mainland near to center	2	25.0
The mainland far from center	0	0.0
A geographically isolated area	1	12.5
A coastal area	5	62.5

The data indicates that a significant portion of public secondary schools in the Mercedes district are situated in coastal areas, which presents unique challenges due to their exposure to natural disasters. To address these challenges, schools need to implement comprehensive emergency preparedness plans.

2) *School Size*: Table II revealed that the majority are classified as large schools, with 5 or 62.5%, followed by medium schools, with 2 or 25.0%, and small schools, with 1 or 12.5%.

Table II School Size

Profile	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Small School (15 and below teaching personnel)	1	12.5
Medium School (16 – 30 teaching personnel)	2	25.0
Large School (31 – 50 teaching personnel)	5	62.5
Mega School (51 and above teaching personnel)	0	0.0

Most public secondary schools in the Mercedes district are classified as large schools. In the Philippines, the school size is represented by the number of teaching personnel and the number of enrollments which is tied up with the school funding. This may reflect a trend where larger institutions are more prominent or more effectively maintained in the district due to better funding or more comprehensive administrative support which puts smaller rural schools at a disadvantage.

3) *Years of Operation*: In the study, all public secondary schools in the Mercedes district were found to be operational for 10 years and above as shown in Table III.

Table III School Years of Operation

Profile	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Less than one year	0	0.0
1-3 years	0	0.0
4-6 years	0	0.0
7-9 years	0	0.0
10 years and above	8	100.0

Secondary schools in the Mercedes district, like many long-established institutions in the Philippines, have been operational for over a decade. These schools benefit from their history of educational service, offering consistent instruction and fostering trust among students and families.

4) *Number of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff*: In terms of staffing, the schools in the district collectively have 5 principals, 3 assistant principals, 7 school heads, 5 department heads, 245 classroom teachers, 3 teacher aides, and 19 other professional staff members as presented in Table IV.

Table IV Number of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff

Profile	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Principal	5	

Assistant Principal	3	
School Head	7	
Department Head	5	
Classroom Teachers	245	
Teacher Aides	3	
Other professional staff	19	

The staffing data highlights a high student-to-teacher ratio, indicating that the number of classroom teachers is relatively large compared to other school staff. This imbalance can negatively impact the quality of education and limit the amount of individual attention each student receives. Furthermore, the low numbers of principals, assistant principals, department heads, and other support staff suggest that school leadership may be burdened with administrative tasks, which can compromise their effectiveness in managing school operations and supporting teachers.

5) *Total Enrollment:* Displayed in Table V is the total enrollment of the schools in the Mercedes district. The data indicated 3 or 37.5% of the schools have between 300 to 499 students, 2 or 25.0% have enrollments ranging from 100 to 299 students, 1 or 12.5% have 99 students or below, 1 or 12.5% have between 500 to 799 students, and another 1 or 12.5% have between 800 to 999 students.

Table V Total Enrollment

Profile	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
99 and below	1	12.5
100 to 299	2	25.0
300 to 499	3	37.5
500 to 799	1	12.5
800 to 999	1	12.5
1, 000 and above	0	0.0

This distribution of student populations across schools plays a critical role in resource allocation. Smaller schools often face challenges in securing adequate funding or resources compared to their larger counterparts, impacting their ability to effectively address various needs. Conversely, larger school benefit from economies of scale, resulting in cost savings and improved operational efficiency.

Students' Characteristics

This part provides an in-depth analysis of various factors that shape students' experiences, behaviors, and perceptions within the school environment such as age, gender, grade level, participation in school organization, and socioeconomic status.

1) *Age:* The data revealed in Table VI that the predominant age group among students is 16-17 years, comprising 142 or 54.20%. Students aged 18-19 years constitute 96 or 36.64%, while those aged 20 years and above account for 22 or 8.40%. A minimal fraction, 2 or 0.76%, falls into the category of 15 years old or younger.

Table VI Age of the Students

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
15 years old and below	2	0.76
16-17 years old	142	54.20
18-19 years old	96	36.64
20 years old and above	22	8.40

This age group is notable for being at a developmental stage where students exhibit higher levels of awareness and decision-making abilities, including their ability to assess their surroundings for potential safety risks. This increased awareness highlights the importance of implementing targeted school safety programs that cater to their developmental capabilities.

2) *Gender*: Data detailed in Table VII shows that the gender distribution is characterized by a higher proportion of women, who represent 137 or 52.29% of the student population, compared to men, who comprise 121 or 46.19%. Only 0.76% of students opted not to disclose their gender while the presence of transgender students is notably low at 0.38%. An equivalent percentage identifies with an alternative gender classification.

Table VII Students' Gender

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Woman	137	52.29
Man	121	46.19
Transgender	1	0.38
Prefer not to say	2	0.76
Something else fits better	1	0.38

Gender distribution shows a slight majority of female students over male students. The low representation of transgender students and those preferring not to disclose their gender reflects broader societal trends where non-binary and transgender identities are less visible.

3) *Grade Level*: Data shows that 140 or 53.44% of students are enrolled in the 12th grade, while 122 or 46.56% are in the 11th grade, reflecting a nearly equal distribution between these pivotal stages of secondary education.

Table VIII Students' Grade Level

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
11 th Grade	122	46.56
12 th Grade	140	53.44

Most respondents are in 12th Grade which has a minimal difference in 11th Grade. These grade levels are mostly between ages 16-18 as shown in Table 6, which are more mature and more capable of addressing issues and challenges regarding safety concerns. They also exhibit a higher level of awareness and decision-making abilities compared to the lower age group. This age distribution reflects a stable and well-functioning senior high school system.

4) *Participation in School Organization:* This participation varies significantly, with class officers showing the highest engagement at 112 or 42.75%. In contrast, involvement in the Red Cross Youth and School Musical Play is relatively minimal, each accounting for 6 or 2.29%, and no participation in Book Club.

Table IX Students' Participation in School Organization

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Supreme Secondary Learner Government Officer	38	14.50
Class Officer	112	42.75
YES-O	17	6.49
Red Cross Youth	6	2.29
Art Club	8	3.05
School Paper	14	5.34
School Musical Play	6	2.29
Book Club	0	0.0
Sport Club	34	12.98
Other	50	19.08

Student involvement in school organizations varies, reflecting engagement and leadership development aspects. High participation rates among class officers are often due to mandatory elections and leadership roles such as Supreme Secondary Learner Government Officers. In contrast, lower participation rates in activities like the Red Cross Youth and School Musical Play suggest a lack of interest or barriers to involvement. These organizations are more prevalent in schools near the city center due to accessibility to the provincial theater guild and the Philippine Red Cross.

5) *Socioeconomic Status:* Socioeconomic analysis indicates that many students came from families with incomes below PHP 10,957, accounting for 135 students or 51.52% of the population. This is followed by 81 students, or 30.92%, whose families fall within the low-income bracket of PHP 10,957 to PHP 21,914. Additionally, 27 students, representing 10.31%, are classified within the lower middle-class income bracket of (P21,914 to P43,828). The upper middle and rich category represent the lowest proportion of students, with each accounting for only 1 student, or 0.38% of the total population.

Table X Socioeconomic Status

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Below P10,957	135	51.52
Low income but not poor (P10,957 to P21,914)	81	30.92
Lower middle class (P21,914 to P43,828)	27	10.31
Middle class (P43,828 to P76,668)	13	4.96
Upper middle (P76,669 to P131,484)	1	0.38

Upper middle but not rich (P131,483 to P219,140)	4	1.53
Rich (P219,140 and above)	1	0.38

Socioeconomic status (SES) shapes students' perceptions of safety along physical, psychological, and procedural within school environments. For students from lower SES backgrounds, limited resources and opportunities at home may heighten concerns about physical safety. These students often face additional challenges due to inadequate access to basic necessities such as stable housing, nutritious food, and academic support. Furthermore, lacking essential safety gear like umbrellas, boots, and appropriate clothing for harsh weather conditions can increase their vulnerability during travel to and from school. Psychological safety is another critical aspect, as students from lower-income households might experience emotional stress due to financial challenges, stigma, or feelings of marginalization, all of which can diminish their confidence and academic engagement. Procedurally, students' trust in the fairness and effectiveness of school rules and support systems is often linked to how accessible and equitable these systems are. In schools with a majority of lower-income students, resource limitations can lead to perceptions of unfairness or inadequate support, further affecting their sense of security.

Perception of the Students on the Safety of Public Secondary Schools in Terms of Physical Safety

This section offers a detailed examination of students' views on safety along physical, psychological, and procedural dimensions.

1) *Physical Safety*: Table XI presents the students' perceptions of physical safety in public secondary schools within the Mercedes district. Overall, students rated their physical safety as agree, with a weighted mean of 3.0, and all indicators interpreted as agree. The highest-rated indicator was the perception that the school establishes safe spaces to ensure students' comfort in sharing ideas and concerns, with a weighted mean of 3.15. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator, which states that there are functional security cameras installed and strategically placed for safety monitoring of learners and school personnel received the lowest mean score of 2.69.

Table XI Students' Perception of School Safety In Terms Of Physical Safety

No.	Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1	The school establishes safe spaces to ensure student's comfort in sharing ideas and concerns.	3.15	Agree
2	The school utilizes updated bulletin boards, text alerts, visual cues, social media, and the like for a multi-layered communication approach.	3.09	Agree
3	There are functional security cameras installed and strategically placed for the safety monitoring of learners and school personnel.	2.69	Agree
4	The school premises are well-lit and free from dark corners for visibility and to reduce safety risks.	2.87	Agree
5	Emergency exits are clearly marked, unobstructed, and easily accessible.	2.98	Agree
6	The use of school facilities, including the playground, library, covered court, etc., is considered secure and safe.	3.08	Agree

7	Classrooms and common areas are well-maintained and hazard-free.	2.97	Agree
8	The school is taking into consideration both its size and the ratio of students to teachers in classrooms for sufficient space for instruction and other related activities.	3.10	Agree
9	The school has readily available and up-to-date emergency hotline numbers posted in strategic locations within the school vicinity.	3.06	Agree
Average		3.00	Agree

Legend:

4 – (3.26 – 4.0) Strongly Agree 2 – (1.76 – 2.50) Disagree

3 – (2.51 – 3.25) Agree 1 – (1.0 – 1.75) Strongly Disagree

Schools in Mercedes District have taken meaningful steps to implement safety measures by establishing secure spaces such as the Guidance Office, School Clinic, and various club offices. These areas provide more than just physical protection; they offer students a space to address their emotional and psychological needs as well. Furthermore, creating a culture of openness extends beyond just providing a safe space for students to speak up. It actively involves students in safety decision-making processes, such as helping identify areas that may require additional security measures.

Despite the positive strides taken, the study also highlights areas that need improvement, particularly in terms of surveillance systems. The low effectiveness rating of security cameras by students in the Mercedes District indicates that these systems, while present, may not be fully functional or strategically placed to address the needs of the school community.

2) *Psychological Safety*: Table XII provides an overview of students' perceptions of psychological safety in public secondary schools within the Mercedes district. Overall, students rated their psychological safety as agree, with a weighted mean score of 3.04 and all indicators interpreted as agree. The highest-rated indicator, with a weighted mean of 3.20, was the perception that walking to and from school is safe. On the other hand, the lowest-rated indicator states that the school provides adequate resources for managing stress and anxiety with a weighted mean of 2.84.

Table XII Students' Perception Of School Safety In Terms Of Psychological Safety

No.	Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1	The school environment promotes a sense of emotional security and well-being.	3.11	Agree
2	The school embraces diversity and uniqueness in its celebration of differences.	2.97	Agree
3	The classroom environment fosters students' comfortable expression of thoughts and opinions during class.	3.14	Agree
4	Walking to and from school is safe.	3.20	Agree
5	The school provides adequate resources for managing stress and anxiety.	2.84	Agree

6	Students are confident in the school's ability to handle situations involving discrimination or harassment.	2.87	Agree
7	The school offers programs or activities promoting mental health awareness of students and staff, creating a supportive environment.	3.15	Agree
8	Students are comfortable reaching out to school authorities about personal or emotional issues.	3.02	Agree
9	The school has programs that teach students skills like self-awareness, emotional regulation, and relationship building, helping them manage their emotions and navigate social situations.	3.17	Agree
10	The students have access to psychosocial intervention, if needed, provided by a trained PFA provider or guidance designate, and the school has a functional referral system for counseling services.	2.97	Agree
11	Occurrences of physical altercations, threats, or aggression towards other students have been noted within the school environment.	3.01	Agree
Average		3.04	Agree

Legend:

4 – (3.26 – 4.0) Strongly Agree 2 – (1.76 – 2.50) Disagree

3 – (2.51 – 3.25) Agree 1 – (1.0 – 1.75) Strongly Disagree

The findings of the study indicate that students in the Mercedes district experience an average sense of safety as they walk to and from school. This sense of safety significantly enhances their emotional well-being and preparedness for learning. The positive school environment and secure surroundings contribute to emotional stability, enabling students to concentrate on their studies and personal development.

Despite this average sense of safety, there is a notable shortage of resources for managing stress and anxiety in schools in the Mercedes district. While initiatives such as seminars and symposia on mental health have been conducted, they are often insufficient to meet the growing demand for comprehensive mental health support. This gap highlights the urgent need for schools to invest more in mental health resources, such as counseling services and stress management programs, to better support students' emotional well-being.

3) *Procedural Safety*: Table XIII illustrates students' perceptions of procedural safety within public secondary schools in the Mercedes district. The overall average weighted mean for procedural safety is 3.14, interpreted as agree. The indicator with the highest mean of 3.26, interpreted as strongly agree states that the school emphasizes the presence of programs that reward good behavior, attendance, and academic achievement, fostering positive reinforcement rather than relying solely on punitive measures. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator pertains to schools' effective measures to prevent bullying and harassment with a weighted mean of 2.85, which is interpreted as agree.

Table XIII Students' Perception of School Safety in Terms of Procedural Safety

No.	Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
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1	There is a readily available handbook or online resource outlining school rules, expectations, and consequences for violations.	3.16	Agree
2	The school has a transparent discipline procedure addressing student behavior issues, with fair and consistent consequences applied.	3.12	Agree
3	Parents receive timely communication regarding school policies, upcoming events, and student progress.	3.25	Agree
4	Schools establish comprehensive protocols for addressing medical emergencies, including first aid procedures, effective communication strategies, policies regarding facility use, after-hours access, and regulations for specific areas.	3.14	Agree
5	Security personnel are trained and visible to ensure a proactive safety presence on campus.	3.02	Agree
6	The school has effective measures to prevent bullying and harassment.	2.85	Agree
7	Schools have evacuation procedures for various emergencies, including fires and natural disasters, with designated assembly points and routes.	3.20	Agree
8	Teachers and staff are trained to handle emergency situations, contributing to a prepared and responsive school community.	3.22	Agree
9	There is a clear communication of support services like counseling services, academic support programs, or healthcare services.	3.13	Agree
10	The school has programs that reward good behavior, attendance, and academic achievement, promoting positive reinforcement over solely punitive measures.	3.26	Strongly Agree
Average		3.14	Agree

Legend:

4 – (3.26 – 4.0) Strongly Agree 2 – (1.76 – 2.50) Disagree

3 – (2.51 – 3.25) Agree 1 – (1.0 – 1.75) Strongly Disagree

The data indicates that students strongly agree on the effectiveness of programs that reward good behavior, attendance, and academic achievement, supporting the notion that positive reinforcement can significantly enhance student motivation and behavior. By rewarding desirable behaviors, the school not only boosts student motivation but also strengthens engagement with safety protocols. This ensures that students are more likely to adhere to safety procedures and actively participate in safety drills and training. Thus, integrating positive reinforcement into procedural safety helps build a cohesive and responsive school environment, where students are encouraged to follow safety guidelines and contribute to a culture of preparedness.

The study highlights a critical concern regarding the effectiveness of preventive measures against bullying and harassment in schools, particularly in terms of procedural clarity. While the measures are within an average

range, the lowest-scoring indicator reflects students' uncertainty about how to report incidents, leaving them unsure of how to respond effectively. This ambiguity often results from inconsistent or insufficient communication about the school's policies, leading to a lack of preparedness and support among students. Such gaps in awareness can foster perceptions of an unsafe environment, as students may feel hesitant to report incidents due to fear of consequences or not knowing the proper steps to take. This silence perpetuates unresolved conflicts, further undermining students' trust in the system. To address this issue, schools must prioritize clear and consistent communication about anti-bullying measures through awareness campaigns, accessible reporting mechanisms, and open discussions. Providing visible support systems, such as trained staff and peer advocates, can reassure students and encourage proactive responses. By cultivating a culture of procedural safety and empowering students with knowledge and support, schools can create a more secure and inclusive environment where every student feels valued and protected.

Correlation between the Profile of the School and the Perception of the Students on the Safety of Public Secondary Schools

Analysis of the significant relationship between the profile of the school and the student's perception of the safety of public secondary schools in Mercedes District was conducted using Pearson Chi-Square.

Tables XIV through XVI analyze how various school characteristics, including geographic location, school size, years of operation, number of teaching and non-teaching staff, and total enrollment, affect students' perceptions of safety. These characteristics are examined against various indicators in terms of physical safety, psychological safety, and procedural safety using the Pearson Chi-Square test.

1) *Correlation Between School Profile and Students' Perception of Physical Safety:* The study reveals a significant relationship between the school's profile in terms of geographic location, school size, number of teaching and non-teaching staff, total enrollment, and the student's perceptions of physical safety with several indicators shown in Table XIV. However, years of operation showed no relationship, as this variable was consistent across all schools.

Table XIV Correlation between School Profile and Students' Perception of Physical Safety

Profile		Physical Safety Indicators								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Geographic Location	Pearson Chi-Square	14.194*	16.638*	11.861	10.911	20.360**	15.702*	25.481**	9.299	29.136**
	Df	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.028	0.011	0.065	0.091	0.002	0.015	0.000	0.157	0.000
School Size	Pearson Chi-Square	10.923	33.151**	18.584**	7.742	11.913	24.473**	16.824*	8.717	17.438**
	Df	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.091	0.000	0.005	0.258	0.064	0.000	0.010	0.190	0.008
No. of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff										
School Head	Pearson Chi-Square	3.729	4.079	2.734	8.098*	2.892	2.871	4.173	3.145	7.210
	Df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

	Sig. (2-sided)	0.292	0.253	0.434	0.044	0.409	0.412	0.243	0.370	0.066
• Department Head	Pearson Chi-Square	3.207	2.663	7.713	2.813	0.035	3.468	1.948	2.149	7.023
	Df	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.201	0.447	0.052	0.421	0.998	0.325	0.583	0.341	0.071
• Classroom Teacher	Pearson Chi-Square	38.182*	51.726**	65.397**	39.120**	37.105*	45.077**	54.455**	35.847*	51.504**
	Df	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.012	0.000	0.000	0.009	0.016	0.002	0.000	0.023	0.000
• Teacher Aides	Pearson Chi-Square	1.066	5.872	6.361	0.334	5.166	5.354	12.796**	0.445	4.290
	Df	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.587	0.118	0.095	0.953	0.160	0.148	0.005	0.801	0.117
• Other Professional Staff	Pearson Chi-Square	8.257	20.612*	23.150**	24.895**	14.552	12.752	29.945**	15.444	22.885**
	Df	6	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.220	0.014	0.006	0.003	0.104	0.131	0.000	0.079	0.006
Total Enrollment	Pearson Chi-Square	18.298	28.794**	32.251**	25.620*	16.209	22.067*	31.538**	17.001	40.052**
	Df	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.107	0.004	0.001	0.012	0.182	0.037	0.002	0.150	0.000

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

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The findings of the study emphasize that geographic location significantly impacts students' perceptions of physical safety. This relationship is influenced by several factors such as the safe spaces for students to share ideas and concerns; the utilization of a layered communication approach; the well-marked emergency exits; the security and safety of school facilities such as playgrounds, libraries, and covered courts; the maintenance of classrooms and common areas; and the availability of readily accessible and up-to-date emergency hotline numbers in strategic locations.

The results indicate that school size has a notable impact on specific aspects of perceived safety. This significant relationship is shaped by several factors such as the implementation of a layered communication approach; the functionality of security cameras; the safety and security of school facilities; the maintenance of classrooms and common areas; and the availability of emergency hotline numbers.

Based on the result of the study, leadership roles such as school heads and department heads demonstrated minimal influence on perceptions of safety, likely due to their less direct interaction with students. Classroom teachers have a highly significant relationship with almost all indicators suggesting that they play a pivotal role

in shaping students' perceptions of safety. In addition, teacher aides have limited significant correlations, except where their presence enhances safety perception, potentially through assistance in supervision. Other professional staff show significant correlations underlining their contribution to a comprehensive safety strategy.

Finally, the significant relationship between total enrollment and the safety perceptions of the students on physical safety is determined by the layered communication approach in school; the functionality of security cameras; the well-lit premises; the safety and security of facilities; the importance of maintaining well-kept classrooms and common areas; and the strategically posted emergency hotline numbers.

2) *Correlation Between School Profile and Students' Perception of Psychological Safety*: The study shows a significant relationship between the school profile and the students' perceptions of psychological safety with several indicators presented in Table XV. However, years of operation reveal no relationship, as this variable was consistent across all schools.

Table XV Correlation between School Profile and Students' Perception of Psychological Safety

Profile		Psychological Safety Indicators										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Geographic Location	Pearson Chi-Square	18.67 3**	21.35 9**	25.46 9**	7.756	1.805	26.09 6**	12.47 3	22.71 7**	11.73 4	15.40 2*	6.372
	Df	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
	Sig.(2-sided)	0.005	0.002	0.000	0.257	0.066	0.000	0.052	0.001	0.068	0.017	0.383
School Size	Pearson Chi-Square	13.341*	21.48 6**	3.059	19.31 8**	7.584	14.30 7*	5.686	2.090	5.827	7.368	9.087
	Df	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.038	0.001	0.801	0.004	0.270	0.026	0.459	0.911	0.443	0.288	0.169
No. of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff												
• School Head	Pearson Chi-Square	2.541	4.348	5.149	3.308	4.644	5.550	1.002	1.975	2.386	2.530	0.759
	Df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.468	0.226	0.161	0.346	0.200	0.136	0.801	0.578	0.496	0.470	0.859
• Department Head	Pearson Chi-Square	2.396	1.243	2.326	2.082	2.038	0.822	2.419	0.719	2.493	3.091	1.716
	Df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.494	0.743	0.508	0.556	0.565	0.844	0.490	0.869	0.477	0.378	0.424

● Classroom Teacher	Pearson Chi-Square	50.809**	45.092**	48.843**	32.824*	3.201	55.440**	34.539*	33.576*	30.367	33.790*	27.290
	Df	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.048	0.333	0.000	0.032	0.040	0.085	0.038	0.161
● Teacher Aides	Pearson Chi-Square	6.443	17.484**	7.453	5.563	2.877	10.239*	0.187	8.380*	1.290	5.249	4.678
	Df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.092	0.001	0.059	0.135	0.411	0.017	0.980	0.039	0.731	0.154	0.096
● Other Professional Staff	Pearson Chi-Square	10.654	15.806	17.364*	14.825	6.810	8.868	12.633	7.956	4.496	12.311	4.206
	Df	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.300	0.071	0.043	0.096	0.657	0.450	0.180	0.539	0.876	0.196	0.897
Total Enrollment	Pearson Chi-Square	25.493*	28.515**	12.937	17.270	1.539	20.514	9.830	4.999	10.128	16.290	11.710
	Df	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.013	0.005	0.374	0.140	0.483	0.058	0.631	0.958	0.605	0.178	0.469

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

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The findings of the study emphasized that geographic location significantly impacts students' perceptions of psychological safety. This significant relationship is inspired by several factors such as the promotion of a sense of emotional security and well-being; the celebration of diversity and uniqueness; the comfort in expressing thoughts and opinions; the confidence in the school's ability to handle situations involving discrimination or harassment; the students' comfort in reaching out to school authorities; and the students' access to psychosocial intervention.

The results revealed that school size has a substantial contribution to specific aspects of the perceived safety of students along psychological dimensions. This significant relationship is influenced by several factors such as the students' sense of emotional security and well-being; the celebration of diversity and uniqueness; the perceptions that walking to and from school is safe; and the confidence in the school's ability to handle situations involving discrimination or harassment.

The research presents that leadership roles such as school heads displayed minimal influence on perceptions of safety, likely due to their less direct interaction with students. Staffing levels, particularly the number of classroom teachers, show a significant relationship with students' perceptions among all psychological safety indicators. Teacher aides and other professional staff also contribute to the creation of psychological safety, especially in schools with diverse student populations.

Finally, the relationship between total enrollment and students' perceived psychological safety is determined by the student's sense of emotional security and well-being and the celebration of diversity and uniqueness.

3) *Correlation Between School Profile and Students' Perception of Procedural Safety*: Table XVI presents a significant relationship between the school profile and the students' perceptions of procedural safety with several indicators. However, years of operation reveal no relationship, as this variable was consistent across all schools.

Table XVI Correlation between School Profile and Students' Perception of Procedural Safety

Profile		Procedural Safety Indicators									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Geographic Location	Pearson Chi-Square	6.529	5.856	23.141**	28.087**	22.535**	17.205**	23.723**	10.867	35.930**	17.022**
	Df	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.367	0.440	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.009	0.001	0.093	0.000	0.009
School Size	Pearson Chi-Square	9.788	16.498*	19.275**	31.217**	18.407**	7.033	30.928**	13.591*	33.558**	12.935*
	Df	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.134	0.011	0.004	0.000	0.005	0.318	0.000	0.035	0.000	0.044
No. of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff											
• School Head	Pearson Chi-Square	2.190	2.407	6.413	7.224	3.198	11.633**	1.312	2.035	13.242**	4.537
	Df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.534	0.492	0.093	0.065	0.362	0.009	0.726	0.565	0.004	0.209
• Department Head	Pearson Chi-Square	3.343	0.015	2.370	3.043	0.895	7.429	0.496	1.431	4.709	2.347
	Df	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.342	0.993	0.499	0.385	0.827	0.059	0.781	0.698	0.194	0.504
• Classroom Teacher	Pearson Chi-Square	38.319*	42.667**	43.488**	59.719**	59.349**	35.039*	60.298**	39.229**	67.488**	39.970**

	Df	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.012	0.003	0.003	0.000	0.000	0.028	0.000	0.009	0.000	0.007
•Teacher Aides	Pearson Chi-Square	1.638	3.643	4.538	6.036	6.980	7.851*	1.493	0.780	6.842	3.927
	Df	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.441	0.162	0.209	0.110	0.073	0.049	0.474	0.854	0.077	0.269
•Other Professional Staff	Pearson Chi-Square	29.754**	33.799**	17.837*	31.375**	32.146**	18.004*	31.209**	17.501*	38.598**	14.830
	Df	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.000	0.000	0.037	0.000	0.000	0.035	0.000	0.041	0.000	0.096
Total Enrollment	Pearson Chi-Square	24.239*	26.378**	26.238*	45.698**	35.630**	18.455	48.202**	23.494*	50.973**	21.079*
	Df	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
	Sig. (2-sided)	0.019	0.009	0.010	0.000	0.000	0.103	0.000	0.024	0.000	0.049

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

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The study reveals a significant relationship between geographic location and students' perceptions of procedural safety. This perception is shaped by several factors such as the timely communication received by parents regarding school policies, upcoming events, and student progress; the comprehensive protocols of schools addressing medical emergencies; the well-trained security personnel; the effectiveness of safety measures to prevent bullying and harassment; the evacuation procedures for various emergencies; the clear communication of support services; and the programs that reward good behavior, attendance, and academic achievement.

The study also underscores the impact of school size on procedural safety perceptions. This perception is influenced by multiple factors such as the transparent discipline procedure of the school; the timely communication received by parents; the comprehensive protocols for addressing medical emergencies; the security personnel who are trained and visible; the schools' evacuation procedures for various emergencies; the trained teachers and staff in handling emergency situations; the clear communication of support services in school; and the programs that reward good behavior, attendance, and academic achievement.

Leadership also plays a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of procedural safety. The correlation found between the number of school heads and procedural safety in one indicator suggests that leadership influences specific aspects of procedural safety. However, the lack of significant findings in other indicators may indicate that leadership effects are context-specific. Classroom teachers have a significant impact as evidenced by the significant relationship found among all procedural safety indicators. Teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring

procedural fairness and transparency through their interactions with students and their enforcement of school policies. The presence of other professional staff, such as counselors and administrative staff, also affects students' perceptions of procedural fairness.

Finally, the study shows that total enrollment notably impacts procedural safety perceptions, with a significant relationship between school size and almost all procedural safety indicators. This perception determined by the readily available handbook or online resource outlining school rules, expectations, and consequences for violations; the transparent discipline procedure; the timely communication on school policies, upcoming events, and student progress; the establishment of comprehensive protocols for addressing medical emergencies; the trained security personnel; the evacuation procedures for various emergencies; the trained teachers and staff in handling emergency situations; the clear communication of support services; and the programs that reward good behavior, attendance, and academic achievement also revealed a significant relationship.

Interventions that may be Proposed to Improve the Implementation of the Safety of Public Secondary Schools

According to the findings of this study on general agreement on the presence of safety measures, there is room for improvement in several areas. It suggests that students recognize efforts made by the school but also highlight specific aspects that require attention to ensure a safer and more supportive learning environment.

As to physical safety, while the school's efforts in providing safe spaces have been recognized by the students, the study highlights the need for functional security cameras, which are essential for monitoring and ensuring the safety of learners and staff. As to psychological safety, while students generally feel safe walking to and from school, the study highlights a significant need for resources to help manage stress and anxiety. The study also reveals that procedural safety measures, while present, require strengthening to address issues such as bullying and harassment.

Project C.A.R.E. which stands for Creating a Resilient Environment is a program that aims to create a resilient educational environment where students feel safe, supported, and empowered to thrive. By addressing physical, psychological, and procedural safety in a comprehensive manner, the project seeks to enhance student well-being, foster positive relationships, and ensure that schools are places of growth and opportunity.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn: 1) Most public secondary schools in the Mercedes District are located in coastal areas, are large, have been operating for over ten years, have 287 teaching and non-teaching staff, and have enrollments ranging from 300 to 499 students. 2) Most students are aged 16-17 years, are female, in Grade 12, participate as classroom officers, and have a socioeconomic status below PHP 10,957. 3) The students perceived the safety of public secondary schools in the Mercedes district, along with physical safety, psychological safety, and procedural safety, to be average, interpreted as agree. 4) There is a significant relationship between the school profile in terms of geographical location, school size, number of teaching and non-teaching staff, and total enrollment with the student's perceived safety along with physical, psychological, and procedural safety. 5) An intervention plan was proposed to help public secondary schools in the Mercedes District improve their safety measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After a thorough analysis of the data gathered in the study, the following are highly recommended: 1) Schools must take action on implementing safety measures addressing the unique characteristics of the schools. Coastal schools must enhance safety measures by formulating a contingency plan for natural hazards like typhoons, storm surges, tsunamis, and flooding. These plans should involve teaching and non-teaching staff, students, parents, SPTA, and other stakeholders. Schools with over ten years of operation should regularly update their safety protocols, and measures should be scaled to fit the student enrollment size. 2) Safety programs should be tailored in accordance with the specific characteristics of the students, ensuring their specific needs are met. Addressing gender-specific safety issues and providing support for students from lower socioeconomic

backgrounds. Classroom officers can be leveraged to lead peer safety initiatives. 3) Schools should improve physical safety by upgrading security and emergency response systems. Psychological safety programs should be expanded to focus on self-awareness and emotional regulation, while procedural safety should be strengthened with positive reinforcement programs. 4) Schools should regularly adjust safety measures based on the evolving needs of the students and the characteristics of the school. 5) The school may implement “Project CARE” to improve overall safety in public secondary schools, ensuring it is adaptable to various school contexts and includes regular review processes.

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