

The Lived Experiences of Junior High School Students towards the Implementation of the 'No Single-Use Plastic Policy'

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of the Junior High School Students towards the implementation of no single-use plastic policy. The data were obtained from sixteen (16) participants. A purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of the participants of the study. The data are obtained using in-depth interviews. Emerging themes highlights the Implementation and Enforcement, Adaptation and Behavior Change, and Environmental Impact. In addition, there are six core ideas have emerged: declining enforcement over time, inconsistent application, new routines and habits, use of alternatives containers, cleaner campus environment, and enhanced school image. Moreover, the difficulties faced by junior high school students focusses on Food and Beverage Challenges, Economic Implication, and Policy Implementation Issues with six core ideas: packaging limitation, alternative packaging issues, higher costs of alternatives, impact on student's budget, inconsistent enforcement, and coping strategies. Further, the coping mechanism employed by the students are Replacement Strategies, Behavioral Adaptation, and Compliance Challenges. It six core ideas, use of reusable containers, eco-friendly bags, advance planning and preparation, changing purchasing habit, rule circumvention, and implementation inconsistencies. Moreover, to the recommendations of the students are Policy Implementation and Governance, Support and Infrastructure, and Education and Engagement. It has six core ideas: needs for stricter monitoring, establishing consequences, water refilling station, eco-friendly alternative, awareness campaigns, and incentive systems. Therefore, it is recommended that educational institutions, in implementing similar policies, consider these student experiences to optimize policy effectiveness and foster a sustainable school environment. Administrators should develop comprehensive strategies for consistent policy enforcement, provide accessible and affordable alternatives, and implement robust educational programs to promote student engagement and understanding.

Keywords: No Single-Use Plastic Policy, Behavioral Adaptation, Rule Circumvention

INTRODUCTION

The escalating global crisis of plastic pollution necessitates immediate and localized action, placing educational institutions at the forefront of fostering sustainable behavior. For Davao Central College, Basic Education Campus, the implementation of the "NO Single-Use Plastic Policy" is not merely a procedural change, but a pivotal step towards cultivating environmentally responsible citizens. This study holds profound significance for both the school and the policy implementors. By examining the lived experiences of Junior High School students, it provides crucial insights into the policy's efficacy, identifying areas for refinement and enhancement. For the school, it offers data-driven feedback to strengthen its environmental stewardship initiatives, ensuring alignment with its mission to develop holistic and responsible individuals. For the implementors, it serves as a practical assessment tool, enabling them to fine-tune strategies, improve student engagement, and maximize the policy's intended impact, thereby solidifying the institution's commitment to a sustainable future. The urgency of addressing single-use plastic pollution is underscored by alarming statistics and international calls to action. Research by Jambeck et al. (2015) has quantified the staggering volume of plastic waste contaminating our oceans, painting a stark picture of the environmental crisis. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2018) has responded with a global mandate for a paradigm shift away from single-use plastics, emphasizing the critical need for policy interventions at all levels. This global discourse highlights that the issue transcends geographical boundaries, demanding localized solutions within

specific contexts, such as educational settings, to contribute to the collective effort in mitigating plastic waste. Schools are increasingly recognized as vital spaces for instilling environmental consciousness and promoting sustainable practices. Research from diverse countries illustrates the multifaceted approaches to implementing plastic reduction policies. Studies by Sharma and Shah (2019) in India and Ochieng and Omondi (2020) in Kenya demonstrate the varied challenges and successes of these initiatives, emphasizing the importance of factors such as student awareness, the availability of viable alternatives, and the enforcement of established regulations. These studies collectively underscore the pivotal role of schools in shaping environmental attitudes and behaviors, thereby contributing to the broader goal of fostering a sustainable future. The Philippines, with its unique archipelagic geography and rapid urbanization, faces significant challenges in managing plastic waste. The Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (Republic Act 9003) provides the legal framework for waste reduction, yet reports from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR, 2019) highlight the persistent difficulties in its effective implementation. The complexities of waste management are further compounded by socio-cultural factors, as emphasized by David (2017), who underscores the need for context-specific approaches to address waste disposal behaviors effectively. This necessitates a nuanced understanding of local dynamics to craft and implement sustainable waste management policies. Davao City has demonstrated a commitment to environmental governance through initiatives like the Basura Alang sa Kinabuhi program and local ordinances regulating plastic use (Davao City Ordinance No. 0361-10, 2010). However, the city faces unique challenges, particularly due to the prevalence of sari-sari stores, which often rely heavily on single-use plastic packaging. This reliance presents a significant hurdle in the city's efforts to reduce plastic waste and necessitates innovative solutions that address the specific needs and practices of local businesses and consumers. Within Davao Central College, Basic Education Campus, the Junior High School students represent a critical demographic for understanding the impact of the “NO Single-Use Plastic Policy.” Their daily interactions with the policy provide a rich source of data on its effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. By focusing on their lived experiences, this study aims to uncover the nuanced perspectives and behaviors that shape the success of the policy. Understanding how students perceive and adapt to the policy is essential for refining implementation strategies and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to determine the live experiences of Junior High School students towards the implementation of “No Single-Use Plastic Policy”. This study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To describe the experiences of the Junior High School Students towards the implementation of the no single-use plastic policy in Davao Central College.
2. To account the challenges experience by the Junior High School Students towards the implementation of the no single-use plastic policy in Davao Central College.
3. To identify the coping mechanism employed by the Junior High School Students towards the implementation of the no single-use plastic policy in Davao Central College.
4. To solicit recommendations on the implementation of the no single-use plastic policy in Davao Central College.

Research Questions

1. What has been your experience with the no single-use plastic policy implemented in your school?
 - 1.1 How has the no single-use plastic policy changed your daily routines and habits at school?
 - 1.2 What positive or negative impacts has the no single-use plastic policy had on your school life?
2. What specific challenges or difficulties have you faced while trying to follow the no single-use plastic policy at school?

- 2.1 Which aspects of the no single-use plastic policy have been the most difficult for you to adapt to, and why?
- 2.2 How do these challenges affect your ability to participate in regular school activities or routines?
3. What strategies or methods have you developed to adapt to the no single-use plastic policy at school?
 - 3.1 What alternatives to single-use plastics have you found most useful, and how did you discover or develop these solutions?
 - 3.2 How have you adjusted your habits or routines to successfully comply with the no single-use plastic policy?
4. What suggestions do you have to improve the implementation of the no single-use plastic policy at your school?
 - 4.1 If you could change or add anything to make the no single-use plastic policy more effective or easier to follow, what would it be?
 - 4.2 What additional support or resources do you think students need to better comply with the no single-use plastic policy?

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, established in 1986, explains that human behavior arises from the dynamic interplay of personal factors, behavior, and environment, emphasizing observational learning, self-efficacy, and reciprocal determinism; this framework is particularly relevant to this study as it allows for the analysis of how students interact with and respond to school policies, specifically by examining how their self-efficacy—their belief in their ability to comply—shapes their actions, and how reciprocal determinism elucidates the complex interaction between students' personal beliefs about environmental responsibility, their plastic use behaviors, and the school's environment, thus offering critical insights into the effective implementation of sustainable practices.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative-phenomenological research approach to explore the lived experiences of junior high school students. As Nassaji (2020) explains, qualitative research involves a naturalistic exploration of non-numerical data, seeking to understand phenomena deeply rather than control variables. This approach emphasizes process and patterns over final products, providing contextual and interpretive insights into how individuals perceive their social reality. The phenomenological design was selected specifically because it allowed researchers to gather rich, firsthand accounts from participants, illuminating their subjective experiences and perceptions. The study was conducted in Davao City, Philippines, with sixteen junior high school students participating, four from each grade level (7-10). This sample size aligns with methodological recommendations from established researchers: Creswell (2007) suggests 3-25 participants for phenomenological studies, Bernard (2013) supports this range, and Morse (1994, as cited in Bekele & Ago, 2022) recommends a minimum of six participants. Purposive sampling guided participant selection. As Nikolopoulou (2023) explains, this non-probability sampling approach selects participants based on specific qualities relevant to the research objectives. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection instrument. According to George (2023), semi-structured interviews involve asking questions within a predetermined framework while allowing flexibility to explore emerging topics. The data analysis process followed a rigorous thematic analysis framework. As Caulfield (2023) describes, thematic analysis involves systematically examining qualitative data to identify recurring patterns of meaning. The researchers implemented a six-step process: familiarization with the data, systematic coding, generating preliminary themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and labeling finalized themes, and writing up findings with supporting evidence. This structured approach helped minimize confirmation bias while ensuring analytical

rigor. The researchers adhered to ethical standards by obtaining institutional permission from Davao Central College prior to data collection and securing assent from all participants.

RESULT

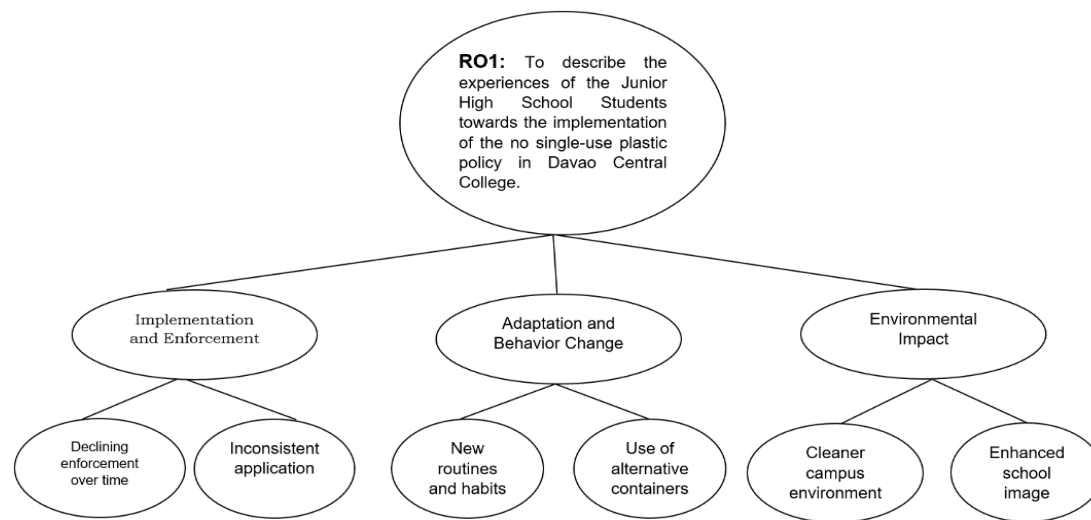


Figure 1. The Lived experienced of Junior High School Students Towards the Implementation of the No Single-Use Plastic Policy.

As shown in Figure 1, from the collected data during the in-depth interview (IDI) of the participants, three (3) major themes have emerged in the coping mechanism of Junior High School students towards the implementation of the no single-use plastic policy, these are: Implementation and Enforcement, Adaptation and Behavior Change, and Environmental Impact. Also, six (6) core ideas have emerged; declining enforcement over time, inconsistent application, new routines and habits, use of alternative containers, cleaner campus environment, and enhanced school image.

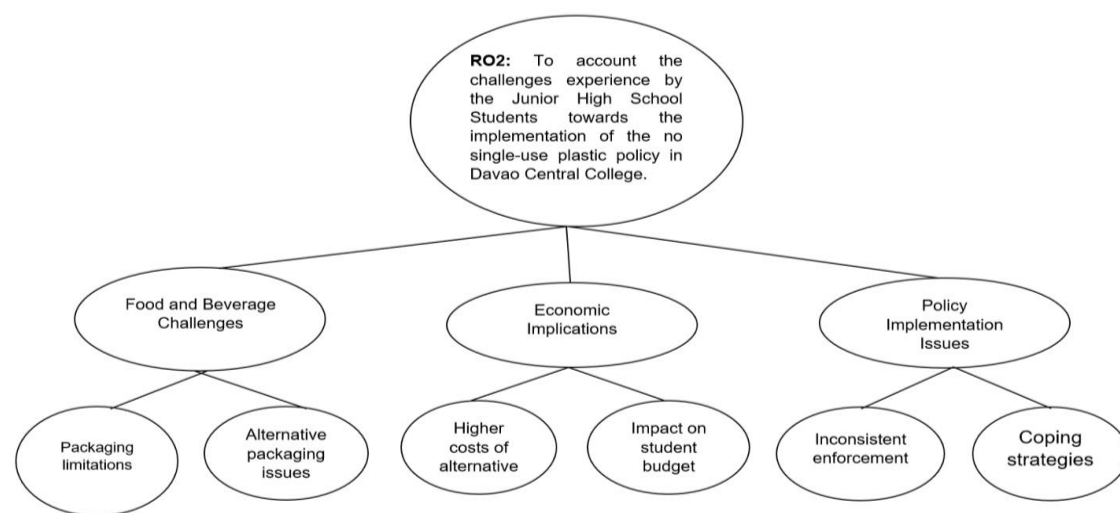


Figure 2. The Challenges faced of Junior High School Students Towards the Implementation of the No Single-Use Plastic Policy.

As shown in Figure 2, from the collected data during the in-depth interview (IDI) of the participants, three (3) major themes have emerged in the coping mechanism of Junior High School students towards the implementation of the no single-use plastic policy, these are: Food and Beverage Challenges, Economic Implications, and Policy Implementation Issues. Also, six (6) core ideas have emerged; packaging limitations, alternative packaging issues, higher costs of alternatives, impact on student's budget, inconsistent enforcement, and coping strategies.

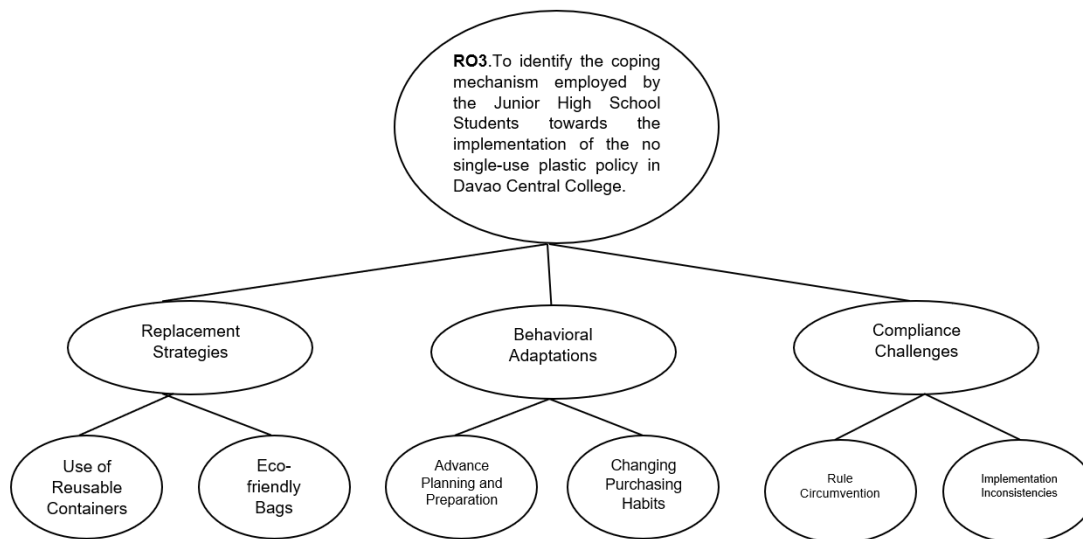


Figure 3. The Coping Mechanisms of Junior High School Students Towards the Implementation of the No Single-Use Plastic Policy.

As shown in Figure 3, from the collected data during the in-depth interview (IDI) of the participants, three (3) major themes have emerged in the coping mechanism of Junior High School students towards the implementation of the no single-use plastic policy, these are: Replacement Strategies, Behavioral Adaptations, and Compliance Challenges. Also, six (6) core ideas have emerged; use of reusable containers, eco-friendly bags, advance planning and preparation, changing purchasing habits, rule circumvention, implementation inconsistencies.

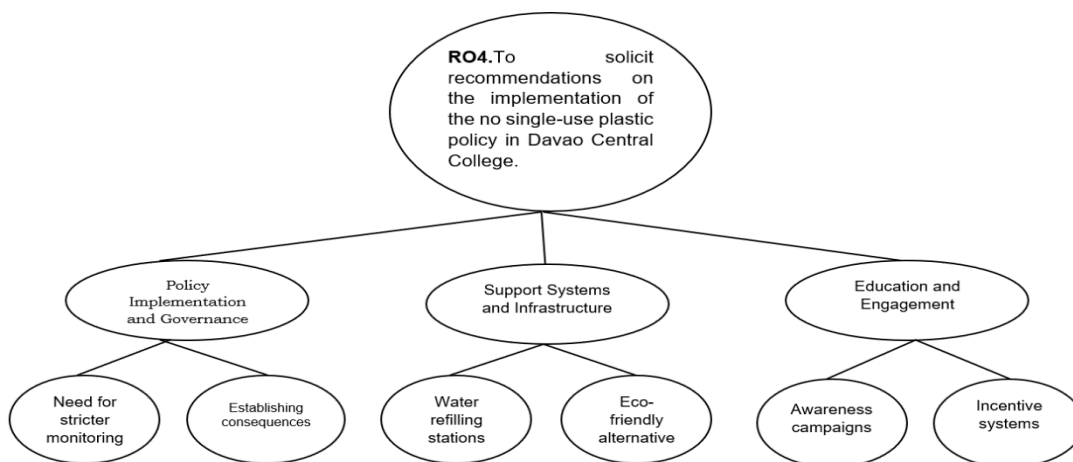


Figure 4. The Recommendations of Junior High School Students Towards the Implementation of the No Single-Use Plastic Policy.

As shown in Figure 4, from the collected data during the in-depth interview (IDI) of the participants, three (3) major themes have emerged in the recommendations of Junior High School students towards the implementation of the no single-use plastic policy, these are: Policy Implementation and Governance, Support Systems and Infrastructures, and Education and Engagement. Also, six (6) core ideas have emerged; need for stricter monitoring, establishing consequences, water refilling stations, eco-friendly alternatives, awareness campaigns, and incentive systems.

Declining Enforcement Over Time

The analysis reveals a pattern of decreasing enforcement of the No Single-Use Plastic Policy over time. Participants noted that while the policy may have been strictly implemented initially, adherence and

enforcement gradually diminished. This suggests a significant gap between the policy's initial introduction and its long-term implementation.

"However, as time passed, it seemed like the policy was no longer effective because we were able to use single-use plastic again." **IDI-P6-L22**

"And looking at the current state of our school, it hasn't been implemented much now."

IDI-P7-L29

Speed (2024) highlights that without sustained enforcement and public engagement, environmental policies lose effectiveness over time. Continuous monitoring, public awareness, and adaptive strategies are key to maintaining long-term success, including for policies like the No Single-Use Plastic Policy.

Inconsistent Application

The data indicates inconsistency in how the policy was applied across different areas of the school. A notable contradiction was observed in the school's own food service operations. These observations suggest that while the policy existed formally, its application lacked uniformity and thoroughness.

"The school canteen still uses some plastic packaging, which seems contradictory to the policy they're trying to enforce. Despite these inconsistencies, I've made an effort to comply by using reusable containers and bottles." **IDI-P16-L84**

"But there were still some that got through like my Hansel biscuit and many other foods from my classmates" **IDI-P11-L53**

A study by Babashahi (2021) found that over 54% of foods in Tehran's primary school canteens failed to meet national guidelines due to financial incentives, weak enforcement, and poor monitoring. The lack of principal authority and staff training worsened the issue. Solutions include clear policies, better training, stronger enforcement, and stakeholder involvement.

New Routines and Habits

Despite implementation challenges, the policy successfully prompted new daily routines and habits among students. These statements demonstrate how the policy influenced students to develop proactive planning behaviors to accommodate plastic-free practices.

"I now prepare my snacks in advance by transferring them from their original packaging to containers. I always carry a reusable water bottle instead of buying bottled drinks".

IDI-P13-L146

"Now I bring my own tumbler and pack my own lunch meal instead of buying other plastic-package products". **IDI-P4-L107**

Lee and Manfredi (2021) cited that systematic strategies, educational interventions, and institutional support effectively promote sustainable habits among students. Structured approaches encourage recycling and reuse, while motivational factors, such as personal drive and social norms, influence behavior toward reusable container use. Educational programs further reinforce waste reduction, and institutional initiatives play a key role in shaping sustainable practices.

Use of Alternative Containers

The analysis shows a shift toward using reusable containers, particularly for beverages. This indicates that students not only adopted alternative containers to comply with the policy but also discovered practical benefits in making these changes.

"I now always bring a reusable water bottle, whereas before, I didn't."

IDI-P-6- L112

"We really need to buy aqua flasks in order to keep my water cold".

IDI-P10-L133

Studies conducted by Wang, et.al (2022) entitled "UI Zero Plastic as an action towards sustainable campus" shows that the use of disposable plastic has reduce and replaced with other alternatives such as using glasses and plates when serving drinks and food, and using other alternative materials to wrap foods such as banana leaves and paper. Many UI members have brought their own tumblers or food containers when there are activities. In addition, personal motivation, environmental awareness, and convenience significantly influence the shift from single-use to reusable containers. Individual benefits and health concerns drive this change, though barriers like accessibility persist. University-led green initiatives and social norms further reinforce sustainable behavior, highlighting the combined impact of personal, contextual, and institutional factors in promoting reusable container use.

Cleaner campus environment

Participants observed tangible environmental improvements on campus as a result of the policy. These statements suggest that despite implementation inconsistencies, the policy contributed to a reduction in visible plastic waste on school grounds.

"The positive impacts that no single use plastic policy had in my school life is that it made the surroundings look cleaner since not much plastic trash can be seen around". **IDI-P1-L169**

"In a positive impact, the no single use plastic policy has lessened the trash in our campus". **IDI-P8-L197**

Studies show that while challenges exist in managing single-use plastics (SUPs) on campuses, strategic initiatives and community engagement can drive positive outcomes. Promoting environmental awareness and integrating plastic waste reduction into teaching have proven effective. The success of the UI Zero Plastic program highlights the role of comprehensive socialization efforts in reducing plastic waste and creating a cleaner campus environment cited by (Seblos, et.al, 2023).

Enhanced school image

The final sub-theme identifies how the policy contributed to the institution's reputation and identity. This suggests that beyond immediate environmental benefits, the policy contributed to the school's external perception and institutional pride.

These findings illustrate how the No Single-Use Plastic Policy, despite implementation challenges, influenced student behaviors and contributed to both environmental improvements and institutional reputation at Davao Central College.

"Davao Central College's no single use plastic policy has significantly improved the school's cleanliness, which enhances its image and reinforces its positive reputation within Davao city." **IDI-P3-L10**

"There are several positive impacts this policy has brought, such as improved cleanliness, improved school image, etc." **IDI-P3-L175**

Studies shows that implementing No Single-Use Plastic (NSUP) policies in educational institutions promotes Sustainable Development Goal by addressing environmental concerns and reinforcing a commitment to sustainability. These policies foster environmental stewardship, improve cleanliness, and enhance the institution's public image and reputation, as stakeholders recognize the school's dedication to sustainable practices. Beyond environmental benefits, such policies can positively influence public perception and institutional pride (Cordova, et.al, 2023).

Packaging Limitations

Students face significant challenges related to the packaging of food and snacks in a plastic-free environment. The dependency on plastic packaging in the retail food industry creates a disconnect between available products and the school's environmental policy, placing the burden of adaptation on students.

"Many commercially available snacks come in plastic wrappers, creating inconvenience for students who must transfer these items to reusable containers before bringing them to school." IDI-P13-L65

Studies conducted by Norton, et.al (2024) highlight the challenges students face with food packaging, particularly the prevalence of plastic-wrapped snacks and limited sustainable options. Research emphasizes the need for improved infrastructure, targeted education, and biodegradable alternatives to reduce plastic dependency. Effective waste management strategies and educational programs are essential to promote sustainable practices and align commercial packaging with environmental policies.

Alternative Packaging Issues

The alternative packaging solutions implemented in the school canteen present their own set of challenges. As it was sustainable alternatives currently in use fail to match the practical benefits of plastic packaging. Paper-based alternatives were frequently criticized for their functional limitations.

"Paper packaging tears easily, becomes soggy when in contact with food, and in some cases, even affects the taste of the food." IDI-P16-L155

"Paper bags can mix with food items like pizza rolls, burgers, and cheese sticks, making them difficult to eat." IDI-P6-L22

Paper-based packaging in school canteens faces durability issues, including tearing, soggy, and altered food taste. Chemical residues from production can leach into food, posing health risks. Limited recyclability also reduces long-term sustainability. Effective solutions must balance practicality, safety, and environmental impact (Alam, et.al, 2019).

Higher Costs of Alternatives

The financial burden associated with plastic alternatives emerged as a significant concern. This creates an economic challenge for students who must regularly purchase these alternatives, especially when they forget to bring their own reusable containers or bags. The cumulative effect of paying for paper bags and alternative containers was described as adding up over time, indicating that the environmental policy has ongoing financial implications for students.

"Finding alternatives since some alternatives are quite expensive, like recycled Eco bags instead of cellophanes." IDI-P2-L96

"When I forget to bring their own reusable containers or bags." IDI-P9-L35

Alternative packaging, like biodegradable materials, is more expensive due to higher production costs and limited infrastructure. This creates a financial burden for students, especially when they forget reusable containers and must buy single-use alternatives. Support measures, such as affordable or subsidized options, are essential to balance sustainability with student affordability as cited by (Zenpacks, 2024).

Impact on Student Budget

The economic strain of the plastic-free policy is particularly pronounced for students operating on limited budgets. The higher prices at the canteen, likely reflecting the increased cost of sustainable packaging, further constrain students already limited financial resources. This sub-theme highlights how environmental policies, while well-intentioned, can create disproportionate economic hardship for students with constrained financial resources.

"I have only 50 pesos per day as my allowance, 30 of that is for transportation fees so that it just leaves 20 pesos left since there were higher prices from the canteen. That just makes my money even more limited than before." **IDI-P11-L127**

"I often have to pay extra for paper bags when buying food which increases my daily expenses." **IDI-P9-L190**

Balancing environmental goals with student affordability is essential, as higher canteen prices from sustainable packaging strain limited student budgets. Providing affordable or subsidized reusable containers can ease this burden. Sustainable practices are economically necessary, with plastic pollution damages projected to cost up to \$281.8 trillion by 2040, Cordier, et.al (2024) in their study entitled *"Reducing plastic production: Economic loss or environmental gain?"*

Inconsistent Enforcement

The data reveals frustration with the inconsistent application of the plastic-free policy. Students reported variable enforcement by security personnel, noting that this inconsistency creates confusion about what items are permitted on campus and undermines the perceived legitimacy of the policy. Furthermore, some students avoid penalties for bringing plastic items while others are strictly disciplined, creating perceptions of unfairness that may diminish respect for the policy overall.

"Some days the guards are very strict, while other days they barely check." **IDI-P13-L135**

"Some students get away with bringing plastic while others are strictly penalized, which feels unfair and undermines the seriousness of the policy." **IDI-P16-L155**

Inconsistent enforcement of plastic-free policies in schools creates confusion and unfairness, weakening compliance and respect for regulations. Clear policies, consistent enforcement, and stakeholder involvement are essential to promote environmental responsibility and ensure policy effectiveness as cited by Doorn (2024) in her study entitled *"Challenges and Initiatives on Single- Use Plastics in Universities: A Metasynthesis"*.

Coping Strategies

In response to the challenges posed by the plastic-free policy, students have developed various workarounds and coping mechanisms. These include concealing plastic items under other belongings to avoid detection by guards and transferring plastic-packaged items to reusable containers like Tupperware or lunch boxes. These coping strategies indicate that students are finding ways to navigate around policy constraints rather than fully adapting to the plastic-free expectations, potentially undermining the environmental goals of the initiative.

"Bringing food or items in plastic to school is sometimes hidden under the bag so the guard won't see it, or sometimes we put it in a Tupperware or lunch box." **IDI-P6-L108**

"When school activities require using plastics, it's hard to sneak in and hide the plastic." **IDI-P7-L185**

Despite increased awareness from zero-waste campaigns, many students still rely on plastics due to policy inconvenience and inconsistent enforcement. Clear policies, stakeholder involvement, accessible alternatives, and environmental education are key to encouraging genuine sustainable behavior as cited by Hamid (2020) in their study about *"Zero-Waste Campaign: Assessment on University Student's Behavior, Awareness, and Impact on Plastic Products."*

Use of Reusable Containers

Participants mentioned that adopting reusable containers as a primary strategy for reducing plastic waste. The participants recognized the importance of durable, reusable containers as viable alternatives to single-use plastic packaging for both food and beverages.

"I started bringing my own tumbler that can contain or store large amount of drinking water and packed my own lunch." IDI-P4-L12

"I use Tupperware to store food instead of plastic." IDI-P6-L18

According to the study conducted by Jiang, et.al (2020), to address the issue of excessive takeaway packaging waste in China, reusable containers present a superior solution compared to biodegradable alternatives. They eliminate waste at its source, are compatible with all food options, and leverage established dishwashing infrastructure. Though initially more expensive, their reusability will ultimately lead to cost savings.

Eco-Friendly Bags

The adoption of eco-friendly bags emerged as another significant replacement strategy. Participants mentioned to replaced plastic bags with more sustainable options, including repurposing existing materials and investing in new cloth alternatives.

"One of the strategies that I recently adapted to follow no single-use plastic policy is using old paper bags and eco bags". IDI-P2-L7

"I also purchased several cloth bags for carrying items around campus". IDI-P16-L60

We can significantly reduce waste, conserve resources, reduce pollution, protect wildlife, and reduce carbon emissions by using eco-friendly bags. Their use promotes sustainable practices and has a positive impact on the environment. The advantages of eco-friendly bags are biodegradability, reusability, and recyclability (Ashwini, V. et al. (2022).

Advance Planning and Preparation

Participants emphasized the importance of advance planning to successfully avoid single-use plastics. Participants highlights how preparation has become integrated into their daily habits.

"I also plan my meals ahead of time to avoid unnecessary purchases that would require extra packaging". IDI-P9-L25

"I've established a nightly routine of preparing my containers and water bottle for the next day". IDI-P13-L154

Rabiu and Jaeger-Erben (2024) cited that, to minimize plastic waste from school lunches, preparing snacks and meals at home is key. Plastic is deeply ingrained in daily life, making it hard to avoid, even for those trying to be eco-friendly. While packaging-free shops offer solutions, their limited availability and convenience pose challenges. Successfully reducing single-use plastic requires finding ways to seamlessly incorporate alternatives into everyday routines.

Changing Purchasing Habits

Significant changes in purchasing decisions were reported as participants became more conscious consumers. Participants are showing a shift toward prioritizing more environmentally friendly packaging indicating a broader shift in consumption patterns.

"If I have to buy snacks or drinks, I make sure to choose papers and biodegradable packaging". IDI-P4-L12

"By using more reusable items and buying less plastic items". IDI-P5-L129

Moreover, Reusable packaging offers a valuable solution to the growing problem of waste management. By prioritizing materials designed for multiple uses, we can significantly reduce the volume of single-use packaging that ends up in landfills and polluting our environment. This shift towards reusable options helps conserve natural resources, as fewer raw materials are needed for continuous production of disposable packaging. Furthermore, the implementation of reusable packaging systems can contribute to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions associated with the manufacturing and disposal of single-use items (Amewu & Amuzu, 2019).

Rule Circumvention

Some participants admitted to circumventing the rules when full compliance seemed difficult. Participant suggesting that rule-breaking may be normalized within certain contexts of the implementation.

"Sometimes, I hide food that's still in plastic at the bottom of my bag so it's not seen, because sometimes there's no time to remove it and transfer it to another container" IDI-P6-L18

"We still brought the plastic materials at school as of the day because I have noticed that we just kind of ignore this policy." IDI-P11-L36

In fact, Selwyn and Bulfin (2015) cited that, people actively engage in "tactics of contestation," finding ways to navigate or bypass regulations that hinder their desired actions. These tactics encompass covert behaviors, technical manipulations, and various forms of subversion, demonstrating a consistent effort to accommodate or work around imposed restrictions. This pattern reveals that when individuals perceive rules as impeding their goals, they are inclined to find alternative, non-compliant pathways.

Implementation Inconsistencies

Participants noted inconsistencies in policy implementation that hindered their compliance efforts. These statements highlight how institutional inconsistencies undermine individual efforts to comply with the policy.

"Like the canteen, for example, they stop putting the bought items a paper bag. Instead, they just gave us the product even with plastic." IDI-P11-L36

Honestly, I haven't really adjusted to this properly or completely, and to be honest, it's really hard to adjust or change the routines I'm used to because it's really difficult to do, especially since even the canteen sells food in plastic".

IDI-P6-L130

Moreover, implementation inconsistencies, arising from policies that fail to anticipate regulated firms' behavior, lead to ineffectiveness, such as "emission leakage" in environmental policy. While this study found no leakage during firm closures due to strong regulation, it highlights the need to address temporal aspects of leakage, like regulatory laxness. Policymakers must maintain vigilance and strengthen supervision to prevent potential leakage and ensure policy effectiveness (Wang, Liu, & Zang, 2022).

Establishing consequences

The participants indicate a notable absence of clear consequences for policy violations. The absence of defined consequences appears to contribute to decreased compliance over time as students observe others violating the policy without repercussion.

"I recommend adding consequences for anyone caught or seen using single-use plastics." IDI-P6-L81

"In order to make it more effective, the policy's supervision must be greatly tightened and violation of said policy must have heavier consequences." **IDI-P15-L116**

In fact, Watters (2019) cited that, consequences serve as a crucial tool for students to understand the impact of their actions, highlighting why certain behaviors are undesirable. They help individuals, including students, to determine their actions by weighing potential outcomes. However, unlike adults, students often lack a full understanding of how their choices affect themselves and others. Therefore, establishing and consistently enforcing clear consequences is essential for fostering positive classroom behavior, despite it being a challenging aspect of teaching.

Need for stricter monitoring

The participants emphasized the importance of more rigorous monitoring, particularly at campus entry points. This suggests that even motivated students perceive enforcement as inconsistent, potentially undermining their own commitment to compliance.

"The stricter watch of single use plastics entering the building is an urgent need because plastics can easily be brought inside the school." **IDI-P3-L8**

"I suggest that guards would thoroughly examine the bags of students since you can still easily sneak foods in." **IDI-P10-L32**

This study of Schoenefeld (2019) reveals that monitoring practices are influenced by institutional factors, policy implementation, and data quality, and are themselves subject to implementation challenges. To improve monitoring, the design of rules, institutional support, and information quality criteria must be addressed, treating policy monitoring as a distinct governance activity.

Water Refilling Stations

The most frequently mentioned infrastructural need was water refilling stations. The consistency of this recommendation across multiple responses suggests water bottles constitute a significant portion of plastic waste on campus, and that providing alternatives could substantially reduce plastic usage.

"The school could provide water refilling station for the students." **IDI-P4-L10**

"We should install water refilling stations to provide easily accessible water refilling stations, to encourage students to bring reusable water bottles." **IDI-P6-L16**

In fact, Kubassa (2025) cited that, water refilling stations connected to the water network are vital for reducing plastic bottle waste. By eliminating the need for bottled water, these dispensers significantly decrease plastic consumption and the associated CO₂ emissions from transportation. The German Water Resources Act supports this by encouraging the installation of such dispensers, emphasizing the efficient use of tap water and minimizing reliance on plastic bottles.

Eco-Friendly Alternatives

Students expressed a need for available alternatives to plastic products, particularly in food service. These responses indicate that students perceive limited plastic-free options on campus, making compliance difficult even for motivated individuals. The focus on canteen operations suggests institutional practices significantly impact overall plastic usage on campus.

"Have the canteen sell plastic free snacks products." **IDI-P4-L10**

"The canteen should completely shift to eco-friendly packaging and utensils." **IDI-P14-L50**

Roy and Morya (2022) cited that, Eco-friendly alternatives, such as cutlery made from plant-based materials like rice and wheat, are crucial for minimizing these harmful effects. These substitutes offer biodegradable properties, reduce exposure to toxic plastic byproducts, and support sustainable development goals related to health and climate action. Ultimately, shifting to these alternatives is essential to lessen our reliance on plastic and protect the environment and human health.

Awareness Campaigns

Participants emphasized the importance of educational initiatives. These responses suggest that knowledge gaps exist regarding the policy's environmental importance, and that addressing these gaps could improve voluntary compliance.

"To conduct seminar to further explain to students about the positive impacts of following the no single use plastic policy." IDI-P2-L6

"We need to strengthen awareness campaigns about the environmental impact of single-use plastics." IDI-P13-L42

In fact, Aithal (2024) cited that, awareness campaigns, such as seminars, educate people and industries about sustainable practices. These campaigns teach about alternatives, recycling, and circular economy models, leading to gradual and lasting changes. Focusing on education avoids the economic and practical issues that come with bans, and engages everyone in responsible plastic management. This approach, which includes public education and stakeholder collaboration, is seen as more effective in fostering behavioral changes than outright bans.

Incentive systems

Participants suggested positive reinforcement approaches. These responses indicate that current implementation may rely primarily on prohibitions rather than positive motivation, and that adding recognition or rewards could increase compliance, particularly among students who are not intrinsically motivated by environmental concerns.

"The school could also organize a No Plastic Day challenge with rewards for students who participated or engaged in the program." IDI-P4-L77

"The implementation could be improved by creating a reward system for students who consistently follow the policy." IDI-P14-L47

Seblos, et.al (2023) cited that, to encourage student compliance with plastic waste reduction policies, schools should focus on awareness and incentives rather than strict bans. Incentives, alongside disciplinary measures, are effective in building consistent habits and practices around reducing plastic waste. Furthermore, integrating plastic reduction into the curriculum and providing clear policy guidelines for behavior are essential. These strategies, combined with rewards and motivation, are key to fostering an environmentally conscious school community.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the No Single-Use Plastic Policy at Davao Central College has yielded mixed results. While it has successfully promoted cleaner campus environments and new sustainable habits among Junior High School students, the policy suffers from declining and inconsistent enforcement. Students face significant practical challenges including limitations in food packaging options, higher costs of alternatives, and budget constraints. They have developed various coping strategies such as using reusable containers and planning, though some resort to rule circumvention when faced with implementation inconsistencies. For greater effectiveness, the policy requires stricter monitoring with established consequences, improved

infrastructure like water refilling stations, greater availability of affordable eco-friendly alternatives, enhanced awareness campaigns, and incentive systems to encourage compliance

RECOMMENDATIONS

The No Single-Use Plastic Policy at Davao Central College requires strengthening through clearer guidelines and consistent enforcement mechanisms across campus. Installing water refilling stations and providing affordable eco-friendly alternatives in the canteen will support compliance, while training canteen staff on sustainable practices will ensure proper implementation. Security guards must maintain uniform enforcement at all entry points to eliminate confusion and unfairness. Environmental education should be integrated into the curriculum, accompanied by awareness campaigns and recognition systems to motivate compliance. Clear consequences for violations, alongside incentives and stakeholder collaboration, will reduce the financial burden on students while supporting policy goals. Ongoing monitoring of long-term effects on student behavior and environmental impact will ensure continuous improvement of this sustainability initiative..

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