

Assessing the Implementation of Child Protection Policies in Elementary Schools: Challenges and Best Practices

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ABSTRACT

Strengthening the child protection policy among elementary schools, promote a safer and conducive learning space to learners. However, several news casted on the bullying and violence encountered by victim learners from their classmates, teachers, or other stakeholders. Hence, this study aims to assess the level of implementation of child protection policies in elementary schools, focusing on awareness and understanding, policy implementation and compliance, training and capacity building and school culture and stakeholder engagement, and investigating the challenges and their best practices.

Using sequential explanatory research design, from 94 participants, primarily school staffs and teachers, through written interviews and survey questionnaires results indicated that the five constructs were strong in implementation, with Policy Implementation and Compliance yielding the highest mean ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.47$) and Training and Capacity Building the lowest ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.64$). Qualitative results identified areas of concern in terms of policy comprehension, resource management, reporting problems, training, and stakeholder relationship issues.

Best practices, on the other hand included systematic campaigns, constant monitoring of compliance with the policy, transparent reporting and referral, differential training modalities, and active stakeholder engagement. This study therefore recommends to continue reinforcing Child Protection Policy in Maramag Central Elementary School.

Keywords: child protection policy, implementation, challenges, best practices, elementary school

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine basic education system continues to evolve, placing children's safety, health, and well-being at the center of school governance. Schools function as learning institutions and as social and community spaces that must remain free from violence, bullying, exploitation, and neglect. To strengthen these protections, the Department of Education institutionalized DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, or the Child Protection Policy (CPP), which requires all schools to establish Child Protection Committees (CPCs). In Bukidnon, Division Memorandum No. 367, s. 2023 introduced Project SAFE to reinforce anti-bullying measures by expanding CPC functions, improving reporting mechanisms, and promoting a school culture of kindness and accountability.

Despite strong policy frameworks, implementation challenges persist. National reports reveal that incidents of bullying and abuse remain high, with the Council for the Welfare of Children (2022) and the PNP-WCPC (2021) documenting around 11,000 cases annually.

These figures show a widening gap between policy formulation and actual practice. In Bukidnon, limited funding, inadequate teacher training, overburdened school staff, and low stakeholder involvement weaken the enforcement of CPP and Project SAFE. Some CPCs exist only for compliance, reporting mechanisms are unclear, and awareness campaigns are insufficient, especially in rural and economically constrained schools.

Various studies support these observed challenges including Manalastas and Dela Cruz (2018) who found that underfunded schools often have inactive or non-functional CPCs, reducing their ability to respond to child protection issues. Zamora (2021) emphasized that trust issues and underreporting stem from weak

communication and limited community involvement. Research from Palawan further shows that poor coordination and inadequate training hinder CPP adoption, while Vidallon and Ydia (2019) argue that policies must align with local cultural and behavioral contexts. Delos Santos and Bermejo (2020) demonstrated that continuous, targeted training improves compliance with child safety standards, and Reyes and Tan (2021) reported that active CPC involvement reduces bullying. Navarro (2019) reinforced the importance of parental and community participation.

These studies collectively highlight issues mirrored in the Bukidnon context, under-resourced schools, insufficient training, weak reporting systems, and inconsistent policy execution. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the present study examines how school staff awareness, CPC functionality, reporting clarity, training quality, and stakeholder engagement influence the uptake of Project SAFE in rural elementary schools. Since most literature focuses on secondary or urban schools, a gap exists in understanding child protection implementation in elementary schools within rural settings such as Maramag.

This study aims to assess the implementation level of Division Memorandum No. 367, s. 2023 (Project SAFE) in elementary schools within the Bukidnon Division. Specifically, it seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of current child protection mechanisms, identify existing challenges, examine the role of school and community stakeholders, and generate evidence that may inform policy enhancement, capacity development, and improved school-based interventions. Ultimately, the study aspires to support safer, more responsive, and more childcentered learning environments aligned with national protection goals.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods Design, a research approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative methods in two distinct but connected phases. The study began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data to determine the level of implementation of child protection policies across identified dimensions.

This was followed by a qualitative phase aimed at explaining and enriching the statistical findings through in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. The use of this design allowed the researcher to first establish measurable trends and patterns and then investigate the underlying reasons behind those results. By combining numerical data with contextual narratives, the study achieved a more comprehensive understanding of how child protection policies are implemented in the elementary school setting.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Maramag Central Elementary School located in North Poblacion, Maramag, Bukidnon. The school is one of the largest public elementary institutions in the municipality and serves learners from Kindergarten to Grade 6 coming from both urban barangays and nearby rural communities. Its diverse student population and wide range of stakeholders make it a representative site for examining policy implementation in a rural–semi-urban context.

As a central educational institution within the Division of Bukidnon, the school provides a relevant environment for assessing the implementation of child protection policies, particularly those mandated under DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 and Division Memorandum No. 367, s. 2023 (Project SAFE).

Participants of the Study

The quantitative phase involved 100 respondents selected through stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation of key stakeholder groups involved in child protection implementation. The respondents consisted of seven school heads and grade-level chairpersons, sixty teachers, seven Child Protection Committee (CPC) members, and twenty-six parents. Stratification ensured that each subgroup directly engaged in child protection processes was adequately represented in the data.

For the qualitative phase, nine informants were purposively selected based on their experience, involvement, and familiarity with child protection policy implementation. These participants included school administrators,

teachers, CPC focal persons, and parents. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to gather rich, experience-based insights that helped explain the quantitative findings. Inclusion criteria required participants to have direct involvement in policy implementation or stakeholder engagement activities related to child protection.

Sampling Procedure

A two-stage sampling procedure consistent with the Sequential Explanatory design was employed. In the quantitative phase, stratified random sampling was used to divide the population into relevant strata—administrators, teachers, CPC members, and parents—and participants were randomly selected within each category. This approach minimized sampling bias and enhanced the representativeness of the sample.

In the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was utilized to identify informants who could provide detailed and meaningful explanations of the trends observed in the survey results. Participants were selected based on their direct involvement in child protection activities, years of service, and willingness to participate in interviews. The integration of probability and non-probability sampling techniques ensured both breadth and depth in the data gathered.

Research Instrument and Validation

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire designed to measure five key dimensions of child protection policy implementation: awareness and understanding, policy implementation and compliance, reporting and response mechanisms, training and capacity building, and school culture and stakeholder engagement. The instrument consisted of 25 Likert-scale items rated on a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), along with open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights.

To ensure validity, the questionnaire underwent expert review for content and face validity. A pilot test was conducted among 30 respondents from public elementary schools outside the research locale to avoid contamination of actual study participants. Feedback from the pilot test led to refinement of item clarity and structure. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.890, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal approval was obtained from the Schools Division Office of Bukidnon and the school administration. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was secured to ensure voluntary participation and confidentiality. Ethical standards in research were strictly observed throughout the process.

During the quantitative phase, the validated questionnaires were distributed either in printed form or through an online platform, depending on participant accessibility and preference. Respondents were given adequate time to complete the instrument, and the researcher clarified procedural questions without influencing responses. Completed questionnaires were collected and organized for statistical analysis.

Following the analysis of quantitative data, the qualitative phase commenced. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the purposively selected informants. Interviews were carried out face-to-face or through written responses when necessary. With participant consent, responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Member checking was conducted to ensure accuracy of transcription and interpretation.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly weighted mean, to determine the level of implementation across the five dimensions. Mean scores were interpreted using predetermined scale ranges corresponding to qualitative descriptions of implementation levels. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were coded, categorized, and organized into themes that explained patterns emerging from the quantitative results. The integration of both data strands occurred during interpretation, where qualitative findings were used to clarify, support, and contextualize statistical outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Level of implementation of the child protection policy in elementary schools in terms of Awareness and understanding of Child Protection Policies.

<i>Awareness and Understanding of Child Protection Policies</i>	N	Mean	Std	Description	Level of Implementation
I am aware of the purpose of implementing Child Protection Policies in schools.	94	4.72	.45	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
I am aware that our school has an established Child Protection Policy.		4.69	0.49	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
I can explain the key components of the Child Protection Policy.		4.68	.49	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
I understand my responsibilities as outlined in the Child Protection Policy.		4.66	.48	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
I am aware of the consequences of noncompliance with Child Protection Policies.		4.62	.51	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Overall Total		4.67	0.49	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented

Table 1 presents the level of Awareness and understanding among teachers regarding the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in primary schools. The total mean score of 4.67 (SD = 0.49) indicates that the teachers concur with the statements, which is an incredibly high level of implementation. Of the indicators, the highest mean value was obtained in the item "I know the purpose of using Child Protection Policies in schools" (M = 4.72, SD = 0.45). In contrast, the lowest mean was obtained in "I know the consequences of not following Child Protection Policies" (M = 4.62, SD = 0.51).

The results show that teachers possess a unique level of knowledge regarding the presence and operation of Child Protection Policies in schools. Their ability to explain the key elements and articulate their role is proof that the policy has been effectively disseminated and understood within the group of teachers. The lower mean on non-compliance consequence awareness may be a sign of reinforcement of sanctions towards policy violation.

Findings show that the schools have successfully implemented child protection awareness orientations and campaigns, and in the process, teachers have developed a good understanding of their role in safeguarding pupils. High Awareness reflects a good school culture where policies are not only developed but also embraced by stakeholders. However, identified knowledge gaps regarding non-compliance consequences provide areas where policy enforcement mechanisms can be further reinforced to facilitate optimal compliance and responsibility.

These findings correlate with the Lopez and Gozum (2019) research, which found that child protection policies are diminished by teachers' perception and Awareness of them to reduce instances of child abuse and neglect in schools. Similarly, Bhatia et al. (2021) argued that the success of policy implementation highly relies on how well teachers understand and accept their roles.

Current studies indicate that increased policy awareness among teachers establishes a secure learning environment and enhances the well-being of students (UNICEF, 2022; De Leon & Reyes, 2023). Hence, the high level of Awareness demonstrated in this study is a pointer that primary schools are on the right track in issues

related to safeguarding children, even though continued training on the implications of policy for responsibility and sustainability remains vital.

Table 2. Level of implementation of the child protection policy in elementary schools in terms of Policy Implementation and Compliance

Policy Implementation and Compliance	N	Mean	Std	Description	Level of Implementation
Disciplinary measures are aligned with the policy guidelines.		4.79	.44	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Teachers and staff follow the procedures outlined in the policy.		4.72	.50	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
The Child Protection Policy is consistently applied in our school.	94	4.71	.48	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Our school administration strictly enforces the Child Protection Policy.		4.70	.46	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Child protection measures are integrated into our daily school practices.		4.67	.47	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Overall Total		4.72	0.47	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented

Table 2 presents the responses of respondents regarding the enforcement and implementation of the Child Protection Policy in primary schools. With a grand mean score of 4.72 (SD = 0.47), it is a general, very highly implemented accordingly. "Disciplinary measures are consistent with the policy guidelines" (M = 4.79, SD = 0.44) as the highest, while "Child protection measures are integrated into our daily school routines" (M = 4.67, SD = 0.47) was the least.

High compliance is reflected in evidence found within Maramag Central Elementary School. Not only do teachers and staff adhere to procedures, but they also experience repeated use of policies with severe administrative sanctions. The high score disciplinary measure indicates that punishment and action against violations are firmly rooted in the policies of the Child Protection Policy, aimed at upholding justice and fairness. In comparison, the modestly lower mean on bringing daily child protection together is an indicator that, at the time of policy introduction, there are some gaps to fill in integrating child protection into daily school and classroom life at Maramag Central Elementary School .

The study findings provide the foundation for evidence that Maramag Central Elementary School not only possess knowledge of child protection policy but also function effectively with the support and cooperation of administrative staff. Disciplinary agreement in character is a successful system of accountability. However, the low integration score means that although policies exist in discipline-based counselling, they are not being implemented. Must respond to priority counselling functions, from compliance to building a culture where the protection of children is not merely governed, but actually internalized by the school culture.

This is attested by Calderón and Ochoa (2018), who advocate for the regular application of policy, as it inspires trust in the institutional system, making students feel safe in the school. Hajal and Tirosh (2020) also established that adherence to the process strictly in child protection enhances credibility and performance of the policy, removing the risk of child abuse and neglect. Conversely, Orbeta et al. (2022) believed that protective action should extend beyond enforcement only in the presence of institutionalization in everyday school life.

This is also emphasized by UNICEF (2023), which indicates that the protection of children is required not only in enforcement but also in establishing a school culture that fosters this protection. Therefore, with their

extremely high compliance, schools must strive for higher integration at the practice level on a day-to-day basis to enhance child protection best practices.

Table 3. Level of implementation of the child protection policy in elementary schools in terms of Reporting and Response Mechanisms

<i>Reporting and Response Mechanisms</i>	N	Mean	Std	Description	Level of Implementation
There is a clear protocol for reporting child protection concerns.	94	4.68	.51	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Confidentiality is maintained in handling child protection reports.		4.68	.49	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
I know who to approach when a child protection issue arises.		4.64	.48	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Reported cases of abuse or bullying are addressed promptly and thoroughly.		4.57	.60	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
I am confident in using the reporting system for child protection concerns.		4.55	.60	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Overall Total		4.63	0.54	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented

Table 3 describes the respondents' beliefs regarding out-of-reporting and response mechanisms in the Protection Policy, with a mean of 4.63 (SD = 0.54), reflecting strong agreement with the indicators and indicating very high implementation. The highest frequency of ratings occurred on "There is a clear procedure for reporting child protection issues" and "Confidentiality is ensured in dealing with child protection reports" (M = 4.68), while the lowest was on "I am confident in using the reporting system for child protection issues" (M = 4.55, SD = 0.60).

The results indicate that Maramag Central Elementary School has satisfactory procedures and maintain confidentiality when dealing with child protection cases. The responses also confirm that the cases are being processed improperly and that the time-consuming processing areas have been identified as areas for one-time case processing improvement, where directions may be revised. This could be an indication that some teachers and non-teaching staffs are not skeptical about the organization's sorting procedure and are skeptical about the promptness of processing.

The fact that the Maramag Central Elementary School's organization system, although not perfect, is still running smoothly means that school is not yet succeeding in gaining complete confidence and seamless in the process. Good policy-making, facilitated by clear guidelines and effective confidentiality measures, is essential. However, earning the trust of staff and teachers is a matter that requires additional training, awareness campaigns, and the protection of whistleblowers. Secondly, punctuality is key, as delayed responses to reports can be prioritized. Implementing this is in the system. Implicitly good but requires improvement through enhanced responsiveness and empowering teachers with independent, active roles in making use of reporting avenues.

This discovery is supported by Alsubaie (2018), who revealed that teachers did not report instances of child protection because they lacked trust in the system. Kennedy et al. (2020) reiterated that confidentiality and procedural clarity are crucial in encouraging school staff to report cases of abuse or neglect. Garcia and Santos

(2023) determined that, despite having systems in place to report concerns in schools in the Philippines, it remains challenging to ensure that teachers respond promptly and establish trust, thereby ensuring that the system functions effectively. UNICEF (2024) also determined that more than the law is required for child protection systems to function. They must also ensure that they make employees feel good about themselves and that interventions are implemented early.

Table 4. Level of implementation of the child protection policy in elementary schools in terms of Training and Capacity Building

Training and Capacity Building	N	Mean	Std	Description	Level of Implementation
I have attended training on child protection policies.	94	4.43	.70	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
The training I received prepared me to handle child protection issues.		4.53	.67	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Our school provides regular updates and seminars on child protection.		4.55	.63	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
I feel equipped to recognize signs of abuse or neglect in students.		4.50	.64	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
I require additional training to effectively implement the child protection policy.		4.53	.56	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Overall Total		4.51	0.64	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented

Table 4 presents the respondents' responses regarding training and capacity development in child protection. An average score of 4.51 (SD = 0.64) indicates this is exceptionally high agreement among respondents. The highest average score was recorded for the item "Our school has regular child protection updates and seminars" (M = 4.55, SD = 0.63), and the lowest for "I have been trained on child protection policies" (M = 4.43, SD = 0.70).

The research indicates that teachers of Maramag Central Elementary School are being well-trained and periodically informed, and therefore can identify child protection concerns and respond accordingly. Their willingness to take additional training is an indication of a growth mindset and Awareness of the dynamic nature of child protection concerns.

The relatively low attendance report suggests that, despite training being offered, not all teachers may have regular access, or even if they do, the frequency may be infrequent.

Findings suggest that capacity within Maramag Central Elementary School has significantly improved, with teachers very well trained and well educated to manage issues of child protection.

However, the recognized practice in the pretext of internet bullying and exploitation requires continuous training to ensure educators are up to date and competent in practice. The restricted degree of access to training and attendance, therefore, ensures that planning within the institutions must be such as to offer a level playing ground for everybody.

The above findings are in agreement with the work of Powell and Graham (2017), which centred on the reality that continuous training is essential as a factor in improving teachers' capacity to protect children. Additionally, Ebuña and Calayag (2020) found that ongoing child protection professional development enhances teachers' self-confidence in handling sensitive situations.

Beyond this, recent evidence by Cagasan and Villanueva (2022) in Philippine schools emphasizes that, despite initial training, follow-up seminars continue to stress the need for exercise practices to be prioritized. UNICEF (2023) also emphasizes that the functioning of the system requires emphasis on staff.

Table 5. School culture and stakeholder engagement

<i>School Culture and Stakeholder Engagement</i>	N	Mean	Std	Description	Level of Implementation
Students are taught about their rights and how to protect themselves.		4.70	.50	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
There is collaboration among teachers, staff, and parents in child protection efforts.		4.67	.52	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Our school promotes a culture of respect, safety, and protection.	94	4.65	.48	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Our school fosters an environment where students feel safe to speak up.		4.62	.53	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Parents are aware of and support the Child Protection Policy.		4.61	.61	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented
Overall Total		4.65	0.53	Strongly Agree	Very Highly Implemented

Table 5 presents the respondents' opinions on school culture and stakeholder engagement in child protection. The mean of 4.65 (SD = 0.53) indicates high agreement, i.e., very highly practiced. The highest indicator, "Students are taught about their rights and how to protect themselves" (M = 4.70, SD = 0.50), was followed by the lowest mean, "Parents are aware of and support the Child Protection Policy" (M = 4.61, SD = 0.61). The observations confirm that Maramag Central Elementary School can cultivate a culture of safety, respect, and protection among students who are empowered by knowledge of their rights.

The high levels of cooperation among parents, teachers, and staff of Maramag Central Elementary School also informatively attest to a concern for child protection at the community level. However, the relatively lower score on parent awareness and support indicates that, although the schools are taking the first step, not all parents may be as aware or supportive of the Child Protection Policy.

The reports highlight that Maramag Central Elementary School's climate safety is not a product of institutional planning, but rather requires the active participation of all stakeholders, foremost among them parents and students.

Although students are well-informed about their rights, pockets of weakness among parents suggest that the source of the problem with effective home-school collaboration remains present. Additional efforts in outreach and communication from the school will be necessary to educate the parents and engage them more meaningfully in child protection activities. This is especially important because adequate child protection is sustained over time if both home and school are committed.

The outcome of this research is consistent with Darling-Hammond et al. (2019), who suggest that the construction of a culture of respect and safety requires the engagement of all school members. Banerjee and Daniels (2021) also emphasize that parent awareness and engagement are fundamental for ensuring the continued success of child protection programs.

Villanueva and Torres (2023) also recently suggested that educating students on their rights renders them less susceptible to abuse. UNICEF (2025) also noted that strengthening a culture of protection must extend beyond policy compliance to ongoing stakeholder engagement, particularly in fostering home-school partnerships.

For the qualitative part of this study, the following table will serve as a guide for assessment.

Table 6. Challenges encountered by elementary school personnel in the implementation of child protection policies

Emerging themes	Codes	Supporting Responses
Understanding the Policy	Lack of training and orientation Technical or legal jargon in the policy Limited access to copies of the policy Heavy workload and time constraints	<i>“Lack of proper orientation or training” “Technical language makes the policy difficult to interpret” “No copy of the child protection policy available for teachers”</i>
Resource Allocation	Limited resources and budget Lack of parental and community support Cultural and societal barriers Resistance from staff and inadequate infrastructure	<i>“Limited resources and weak support from parents” “Cultural and societal norms, staff training” “Resistance from some staff members”</i>
Reporting Concerns	Fear of retaliation or conflict Lack of confidentiality Unclear or complex reporting procedures Emotional burden on teachers	<i>“Fear of retaliation, lack of confidentiality”, “Teachers are already loaded with teaching tasks” “Emotional trauma associated with reporting”</i>
Training	Limited training opportunities Budget and schedule conflicts Overloaded workload Lack of localized/contextualize training	<i>“Limited availability of local context with teacher schedules”, “Scope and role limitations”</i>
Stakeholder Involvement	Low parental participation Lack of time and Awareness Cultural sensitivities and distrust Power imbalances in the community	<i>“Low participation of parents and community” “Distrust and cultural beliefs discourage open discussion”</i>

Table 6 findings represent the level of problems that primary school teachers in Maramag Central Elementary School encounter in applying the Child Protection Policy. Five broad themes were realized from the responses, namely policy interpretation, reporting, training, and stakeholder engagement. They represent the reality that, despite policies being put in place to protect students, there are systemic and situational obstacles to the full and proper application.

Understanding of the Policy

The most significant issue at Maramag Central Elementary School is a lack of policy understanding, as teachers and non-teaching staff face the technicalities of the rules because they are not adequately oriented and trained in this area. The trainers explained that the policy's technical vocabulary is hindering understanding, and some even stated that they were not provided with an official copy to read. A heavy workload and stringent time limits further limit the degree to which they can read the policy.

By quoting participant No. 5, "...No copy of the child protection policy available for teachers ...,"

(participant No. 5, Written Interview), another stated, "...technical language makes the policy hard to understand..." (participant No. 1, Written Interview)

These findings confirm that access and comprehension are the greatest needs at Maramag Central Elementary School, as noted by Cabrera (2019), if versions are locale-suitable and explained, policies are misinterpreted and weakly enforced.

Resource allocation

Also of concern in Maramag Central Elementary School is the implementation of policy with limited resources and support from parents and the community, particularly in resisting conformity.

"...,poor support from parents," (respondent 7, written Interview)

"...,cultural and societal norms" and even "some staff members' resistance." (respondent 3, Written Interview)

These findings suggest that Maramag Central Elementary School's cultural resistance and community segregation from the outside world, as well as internal staff resistance and inadequate infrastructure, are significant barriers to policy implementation. Alampay and Jocson (2018) claim, that child protection interventions will always fail when there is no commitment of resources, support from culture, and support from the community.

Reporting concerns

The third standing issue at Maramag Central Elementary School is in reporting concerns, whereby the process itself drives staff away from reporting cases due to fear, complexity, and emotional cost.

Respondent 5 (written Interview) filled in "...fear of retaliation, lack of confidentiality..", and also mentioned that reporting was difficult work, given that they have heavy course loads. Others used the term "*emotional trauma of filing reports*" (Respondent 1, Written Interview), which describes the individual cost paid by teachers following the reporting of sensitive matters.

This is consistent with the WHO (2020), which presumably believes that uncertain processes and a lack of mechanisms ensuring confidentiality will discourage teachers from reporting child protection problems, exposing children to increased risk.

Training

Reports the training, during conflicts, respondents said there is a lack of localized or context oriented materials at Maramag Central Elementary School. Respondent 3 (written Interview) identified "...scope and role limitations...", as evidence of the absence of depth or applicability to the particular roles of teachers. Garcia and de Guzman (2021) support this, suggesting that continuous and culture-specific training is necessary to equip educators with the necessary knowledge and skills to detect and address child protection issues.

Stakeholder involvement

Finally, stakeholder involvement at Maramag Central Elementary School is hindered by a complex interplay of poor parental attendance, unawareness, and cultural barriers that impede each other's entry into child protection. One interviewee noted "...low participation of parents and community...", (respondent 8, written Interview) and another "...distrust and cultural beliefs discourage open discussion...", (respondent 2, written Interview).

These are the stories that contribute to provoking the challenge for Maramag Central Elementary School to achieve inclusive participation, especially where suspicion and cultural taboos are present. Torres (2018) further stated that successful collaboration between schools, parents, and society is at the center of adequate child protection; otherwise, schools will be governing in a vacuum.

By this, the barriers at Maramag Central Elementary School refer to the fact that while child protection policies are stereotypically found to be necessary, their implementation is prevented by structural factors like insufficient

resources, insufficient training, and insufficient infrastructure, procedural factors like inappropriateness within reporting systems and ambiguity of policy terminology, and sociocultural forces like staff resistance, parent disconnection, and culture.

The repeated reference to workload, fear of discipline, and absence of backup is indicative of professional and emotional strain in teachers and suggests that child protection can never be considered the teachers' work, but requires backup at the system level.

These findings are in line with international and local studies that have already established the same issues. UNICEF (2021) recognizes that without adequate training, resources, and Coordination among stakeholders, child protection policies are merely on paper and cannot be effectively implemented.

Likewise, Alampay and Jocson (2018) and Garcia and de Guzman (2021) base their argument on the need for multi-level support to facilitate effective implementation, building working relationships among teachers, parents, the community, and policymakers to address issues.

In response to this, the findings of the current study once again confirm that it is the responsibility of all and an investment in altering the system and culture to establish and re-establish safe and caring learning environments, which is essential for children's safety.

Table 7 Emerging Themes on Best Practices in the Implementation of Child Protection Policy in Elementary Schools

Emerging Themes	Codes	Supporting Responses
Awareness and Understanding	Regular training, seminars, and orientations Use of role-playing, case studies, and collaborative learning Distribution of informative materials and guidelines	“Regular in-service training, roleplaying, and case studies” “Orientation sessions and workshops”
Policy Compliance	Regular monitoring and evaluation Designation of child protection focal persons Clear and updated guidelines Inclusion of compliance in performance evaluation	“Designation of child protection focal persons” “Regular monitoring and evaluation”
Reporting and Response	Establishment of child protection committees or officers Clear reporting protocols and referral systems Coordination with guidance counsellors and LGUs Standardized forms and documentation	"Having a designated standardized officer", "Immediate referral system, and clear protocols"
Training Approaches	Specialized training on child protection policies, gender positive discipline Workshops on mental health and classroom management Guest speakers, experts, and online courses	“Training on child protection policies and mental health awareness” “Collaborative workshops and webinars”

Stakeholder Engagement	Parent-teacher meetings and community awareness campaigns Student-led safety and discipline activities Establishment of child protection committees	"Conducting regular parent-teacher meetings", "Community-based awareness campaigns", "Studentled activities promoting safety"
Emerging Themes	Codes	Supporting Responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting positive behavior and conflict resolution skills 	

Table 7 evidence indicates best practices from the teachers and non-teaching staff's perspective in Maramag Central Elementary School to ensure the application of the Child Protection Policy. Five themes were primarily integrated into their response: Awareness and Compliance with Policy, Reporting and Response, Training Strategy, and Partnership with Stakeholders. Practice evidently indicates how far schools have attempted to establish setting strategies wherein child protection is no longer just a piece of paper, but a reality at school.

Awareness and Understanding

The information domain and Awareness of the highest importance are preserved in Maramag Central Elementary School through constant training, seminars, orientation, and other learning activities, such as roleplaying and case studies. Presentation of content and instruction also deliberately conveys the same impression.

"..., Regular in-service training, role-playing, case studies, and Orientation sessions and workshops can be used for translating policy applications and information into practice...," according to respondent 5 (written Interview). Al-Daraweesh and Al-Khalidi (2019) indicated that participatory learning activities in child protection policy increase teachers' sensitivity towards child protection policies and their preparedness to intervene effectively in actual situations.

Policy Compliance

Theme compliance policy is an indication that Maramag Central Elementary School is being held accountable, as evidenced by the presence of plain-sight child protection focal persons, periodic monitoring and evaluation, and improved guidelines. Some even include compliance in performance reviews. Respondent 3, (written interview) also included *"..., designation of child protection focal persons" and "regular monitoring and evaluation" as measures of success..."*

These steps not only define compliance policy but also ensure policy sustainability in Maramag Central Elementary School, in the sense that regular auditing and accountability by the leader provide assurances for compliance sustainability and bridge gaps in child protection implementation, as affirmed by Desiderio and De Guzman (2020).

Reporting and Response

Similarly, of great value is emphasizing and responding to the importance of referral-emphasizing agency. Respondent 6 (written interview) referred to such methods as *"...,having a child protection officer with a special safeguarding role" and "immediate...,"* referral system and established protocols," which indicate that there should be organization and clarity so that intervention at Maramag Central Elementary School can be used organizationally effectively. Save the Children (2021) also emphasizes the same, which was emphasizing having clear referral emphasizing-agency working so that children do not get abused or neglected.

Training procedures

Another best practice of Maramag Central Elementary School under training procedures is the adoption of distinctive and diverse practices, such as child protection policy training, gender sensitivity training, mental

health training, and classroom management training, by schools. Guest lectures, workshops, webinars, and elearning are conducted for these courses, thereby making the training cost-effective and accessible.

As testified by respondent 7 (written Interview), "... , *Training on child protection policies and mental health awareness*" and "*collaborative workshops and webinars.*," were really beneficial.

They concur with Garcia and de Guzman (2021), under the premise that multi-dimensional training approaches enhance teacher competence and self-esteem in handling cases of child protection.

Stakeholder participation

Lastly, stakeholder involvement at Maramag Central Elementary School is the policy of note in child protection daily. The school complements Coordination through parent-teacher advisory committees, community awareness, provision of safety for pupils, and effective discipline and conflict resolution.

The examples of "*constant conferences with parents*" (respondent 3, written Interview) and "*studentinitiated activities for safety*" (respondent 9, written Interview) illustrate that teachers, parents, students, and communities, as cofactors, develop a shared responsibility culture. It was also explained by Torres (2018) that a joint communal entity can reshape children's rights, thereby empowering them and allowing them to understand and know their rights.

Collectively, these best practices suggest Maramag Central Elementary School successful roll-out of the Child Protection Policy depends on mutually reinforcing strategies that reinforce one another through capacity building, open systems, and collective action. Schools in the Philippines particularly in basic education like Maramag Central Elementary School took initiative and strategizes action if adversities may come through training strategizing and monitoring and instilling the culture and sense of responsibility to every child enrolled in their institution. These initiatives enable teachers to enhance their skills in teaching and classroom management by creating a conducive learning environment that is more responsive and inclusive to students. These follow international standards, such as those outlined by UNICEF (2022), which emphasize that the whole-school approach should be the top priority for child protection, based on Awareness, responsibility, a reporting system, and collaboration with the community. Save the Children (2021) also believes that diverse types of training and participation from various groups will enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of child protection.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this research, it is reasonable to state that the Child Protection Policy (CPP) in primary schools is most enforced among the five studied constructs namely; awareness and understanding, enforcement and compliance of policy, reporting and response system, capacity and training, and school culture and stakeholders' involvement.

Teachers and staff expressed high levels of Awareness of purpose in policy and roles, and schools consistently practiced processes, particularly in the domains of disciplinary action and policy compliance. In a few instances, gaps were perceived in training, confidence reporting, and stakeholder participation. Training and capacity building, though present, are the most vulnerable link in implementation and require more frequent, accessible, and contextual learning for teachers and staff. Additionally, despite general familiarity among teachers with reporting systems, issues regarding confidentiality, workload, and fear of retaliation continued to prevent their complete utilization. Utilization is also seen as an improvement factor, as well as a parent improvement since community and parents' schools' practices are practically weaker than the school's practice in-house. Lastly, the findings confirm that the implementation of the CPP needs to be holistic and integrative, where training, compliance, reporting, and community participation support one another to foster a protective and secure learning environment for the child as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several direct recommendations are proposed to strengthen the implementation of child protection policies in primary schools.

School heads and the Schools Division Office (SDO) may prioritize capacity-building by providing regular, mandatory, and well-funded training for all teaching and non-teaching personnel. These sessions must include updated topics such as internet safety, cyberbullying, and mental health, and should be scheduled in ways that are practical for teachers.

Child Protection Committees (CPCs) and school administrators may simplify reporting procedures, strengthen confidentiality, and ensure that teachers and staff are protected from retaliation when filing sensitive reports. Regular audits of reporting systems should also be conducted to guarantee accuracy and responsiveness.

Parents, barangay officials, local government units (LGUs), and community organizations may engage through continuous education programs, collaborations, and student-led initiatives that promote children's rights and well-being.

Furthermore, teachers and curriculum planners may integrate child protection principles into classroom routines, co-curricular activities, and teacher performance expectations.

Lastly, DepEd and LGUs may address resource gaps by providing updated policy materials, funding additional protection measures, and improving school facilities to ensure safe, child-friendly environments. Through these measures, schools can transition from mere policy compliance to building a fully functional and sustainable child protection system.

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