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Schools' Level of Practice and Awareness in the Implementation of Child Protection Policy

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Abstract: *This study aimed to determine the influence of schools' level of practice, awareness, and engagement of teachers in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy (CCP). The study results are as follows: the respondents remarked that they were "extremely aware" of the implementation of the Child Protection Policy; the level of practice of schools collectively got a "highly practiced" response among the respondents of the study for the implementation of the Child Protection Policy; all of the respondents remarked "always" on the level of engagement of teachers as regards emotional engagement, social engagement with colleagues, cognitive engagement, and social engagement with learners; statistical analysis showed that teachers' level of awareness significantly influences teachers' level of engagement in implementing CPP; teachers' level of practice significantly influences their level of engagement in implementing CPP.*

Keywords— level of awareness, level of practice, level of engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

Child protection remains a paramount global concern, particularly within educational institutions that serve as primary developmental environments for children, necessitating effective policies and proactive measures to ensure safety and growth (UNESCO, 2017; DepEd, 2012). In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) established the Child Protection Policy (CPP) through DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, mandating school-based committees, awareness campaigns, and robust collaboration with communities and local government units. However, recent trends reveal critical implementation gaps; over 10,000 public schools nationwide lack localized anti-bullying policies, violating the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 (Abello et al., 2023). This gap has tangible consequences, as bullying negatively impacts academic performance (DepEd, 2024). Within the Schools Division Office (SDO), the urgency is underscored by 15 reported bullying cases, three suspected physical abuse cases, and two online exploitation cases in 2023 alone, signaling systemic vulnerabilities despite responsive interventions.

Despite a strong institutional commitment to child protection, the CPP implementation in the SDO of Malolos is hindered by persistent issues that create critical gaps. The primary challenge lies in inconsistent adherence to protocols, with teachers lacking a thorough operational understanding of CPP guidelines and their specific roles, leading to confusion and disparities in policy enforcement across schools (Francisco & Tan, 2022). Furthermore, the division faces gaps in stakeholder awareness and resource allocation, as effective child protection relies on a collaborative ecosystem involving barangay officials, parents, and community members—yet regular, structured training and outreach programs remain insufficient. This disconnects between policy intent and grassroots execution undermines the sustainability of child protection efforts, leaving the existing framework vulnerable to inconsistent application and compromising the safety net for learners.

This study addresses these critical gaps by aiming to develop a tailored, community-responsive child protection framework for the SDO of Malolos, grounded in empirical findings to translate national mandates into localized, feasible actions. Its objective is to analyze current implementation approaches and challenges, address inconsistencies in policy adherence and stakeholder engagement, and propose a framework that provides clear guidelines for proactive interventions, strengthens accountability measures, and fosters a holistic support system for school administrators, educators, and children. Grounded in the principle that child protection policies achieve greater success when aligned with local norms, values, and practices (Anderson & Thiel, 2019), this study contributes a structured guidance system that serves as a point of reference for standardized implementation. By positioning Malolos as a potential model for proactive and comprehensive child protection in education, this research offers a blueprint for other divisions facing similar challenges, ultimately ensuring the welfare and protection of children through more efficacious, relevant, and resilient policy applications.

2. RELATED WORKS

2.1 On Level of Awareness

De Castro and Mendoza (2020) examined the awareness levels of Child Protection Policy among school staff and learners, revealing that while awareness of the CPP's existence is widespread, the depth of understanding remains uneven. In particular, their study found that urban schools demonstrate significantly higher awareness due to better access to training and information dissemination resources. Corroborating these

findings, Natividad and Garcia (2021) observed that urban teachers and school administrators typically possess a strong grasp of CPP provisions; in contrast, their research highlighted those rural schools struggle with limited access to educational campaigns and professional development opportunities, creating a notable disparity in policy awareness across regions. Hence the school head's attributes and leadership skills is essential for the awareness of teachers on CPP (De Castro & Jimenez, 2022).

Extending this line of inquiry, Flores and Cruz (2021) investigated the relationship between training frequency and CPP awareness, finding that schools offering regular, updated training programs exhibited significantly better implementation of CPP policies. This finding suggests that, as they argued, sporadic training directly impedes both awareness and practice. Similarly, Recio and De Guzman (2021) focused on parental involvement (Asio, 2025), demonstrating that schools actively engaging parents through workshops and school-community partnerships achieved better outcomes in child protection awareness. Conversely, their research revealed that schools lacking parent involvement faced considerable challenges in reinforcing CPP practices beyond the school setting especially at home (Asio, 2023).

Complementing these perspectives, Garcia and Santos (2022) emphasized the importance of learner awareness, finding that incorporating child protection education into the curriculum empowers learners to recognize and report abuse. However, their study noted that while some urban schools have successfully integrated such lessons, many rural and underserved schools have yet to do so. Taken together, these studies underscore that awareness of CPP is shaped by a complex interplay of training frequency, stakeholder engagement, and geographic context.

2.2 On Level of Practice

Torres (2021) examined the adoption and implementation of CPP across Philippine schools, finding that most urban schools have successfully incorporated CPP into their frameworks, supported by training programs, school-based child protection committees, and coordination with local authorities. In contrast, the study revealed that rural schools face significant implementation challenges due to limited resources and insufficient infrastructure. Reinforcing this disparity, Reyes and Santos (2020) documented a noticeable gap in CPP practice between urban and rural schools, highlighting that although the policy is mandated by law, enforcement remains inconsistent, and resource limitations severely hinder full execution in underserved areas.

Building on the issue of resource constraints, Aquino (2022) explored the role of teacher readiness in CPP effectiveness, concluding that successful implementation largely depends on educators' competence to respond to child protection issues. Adding to this concern, Flores and Dizon (2021) identified a critical gap in teacher preparedness, reporting that many public-school teachers lack sufficient training on identifying and managing cases of child abuse and neglect. Moreover, their study noted that large class sizes and logistical constraints further impede teachers' ability to implement child protection measures effectively.

Beyond teacher preparedness, Barrios (2020) and Cruz and De Vera (2022) focused on monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, emphasizing that schools must establish effective systems to monitor CPP implementation and ensure accountability. Nevertheless, both studies found that many schools, particularly in remote regions, lack the infrastructure and dedicated staff to maintain such oversight. Addressing the collaborative dimension of implementation, Ramos and Santiago (2021) highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, demonstrating that successful CPP implementation requires partnerships between schools, local government units, and non-governmental organizations. However, their research noted that while urban schools have established strong external ties, rural schools often struggle to forge these partnerships due to geographical and logistical barriers.

Finally, Cabrera and Reyes (2021) examined the impact of school leadership on CPP practice, revealing that schools with committed administrators who prioritize child safety maintain more robust systems for reporting and managing abuse cases. In doing so, their findings underscore the critical role of leadership in cultivating a culture of child protection (Surio & Jimenez, 2026; De Castro & Jimenez, 2022; Jimenez, 2021). Collectively, these studies illustrate that the level of CPP practice is shaped by multiple interconnected factors, including geographic location, teacher preparedness, monitoring systems, community collaboration, and administrative leadership.

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3. STATEMENT OF THR PROBLEM

This study aimed to investigate the schools' level of practice, awareness, and engagement of teachers in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of teachers regarding the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in the schools?

2. What is the level of practice of schools in implementing the Child Protection Policy?

3. How may the level of engagement of teacher-respondents be described?

4, Does the level of practice of schools in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy significantly influence the level of engagement of teachers?

5. Do teachers' level of awareness in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy significantly influence their level of engagement?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Design

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design (Asio, 2021) with regression analysis to quantify

teachers' awareness, school practice levels, and engagement in Child Protection Policy (CPP) implementation, establishing predictive relationships among variables. Descriptive statistics (means, SDs) profiled levels (e.g., "extremely aware," "highly practiced," "always engaged"), while correlational regression tested influences (awareness/practice on engagement), identifying gaps for a tailored enhancement framework. Francisco and Tan (2024) applied it to CPP gaps in Bulacan, finding significant awareness influences, underscoring regression's fit for policy diagnostics.

4.2. Respondents

The respondents for this study were 150 public secondary school teachers selected from public schools in Schools Division Office, utilizing stratified random sampling to ensure diverse and representative participation. Creswell (2014) emphasized the efficacy of stratified random sampling in educational research, noting its ability to produce more precise results by reducing sampling bias, particularly in studies involving heterogeneous populations such as teachers from various school locations and experience levels—a point reinforced by Gracia et al. (2020), who found that this approach ensures adequate representation of diverse groups and avoids overgeneralization of results from dominant populations. To further ensure the relevance and reliability of the findings, a clear set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was established. This rigorous selection process, combined with a sample size of 150 teachers deemed sufficient to achieve statistical power for quantitative analysis while allowing for diverse experiences in the qualitative portion, ensured that data were gathered from participants well-acquainted with CPP guidelines and challenges, thereby strengthening the validity, comprehensiveness, and reliability of the research findings.

4.3. Instrument

The researcher adopted two (2) survey questionnaires from the literature review. The first was developed by Macatimpag (2018), the awareness and implementation survey questionnaire for DepEd CCP in Schools, focusing on the level of awareness and practice of schools in implementing CPP, and the second was the engaged teacher scale (ETS) developed by Klassen et al. (2013) in terms of emotional engagement, social engagement with colleagues, cognitive engagement, and social engagement with learners.

4.4. Data Analysis

The data gathered from the respondents was presented, analyzed, and interpreted based on the statistical procedures. The researcher used the frequency count, percentage, standard deviation, weighted mean, Pearson moment correlation and regression analysis.

4.5. Data Gathering

To ensure the smooth flow of data collection, the researchers adhered to a systematic sequence of procedures. First, the researchers briefed the participants about the nature and purpose of the study, emphasizing that participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the freedom to decline involvement without any consequence. Following this orientation, the respondents were provided with informed consent forms, which they signed to formally indicate their voluntary agreement to participate. Once consent was secured, the researchers coordinated with the respective school heads to determine the teachers' availability, after which the survey forms were prepared. Prior to the administration of the instruments, the researchers assured the participants that all information gathered would be treated with absolute confidentiality. The data collection was then conducted virtually through Google Forms, an online platform that facilitated efficient and secure responses. Upon completion, the researchers retrieved the collected data and, with the assistance of a statistician, proceeded to analyze, interpret, and present the findings. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the results, the findings were subsequently presented to the respondents for validation, allowing them to confirm that the interpretations faithfully reflected their responses.

5. RESULTS

The results were presented based on sequence and order of the questions raised:

Problem 1: What is the level of awareness of teachers regarding the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in the schools?

Based on the respondents, the level of awareness of teachers in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy exhibits a high level of awareness and understanding of the policies and guidelines aimed at protecting children from abuse, violence, exploitation, and bullying in educational settings. The findings imply that teachers are well-informed and conscious of their roles and responsibilities in ensuring a safe and nurturing environment for children within the school context.

Problem 2: What is the level of practice of schools in implementing the Child Protection Policy?

These results collectively demonstrate that schools have a strong commitment to implementing child protection measures, including policy adoption, awareness campaigns, committee organization, training activities, disciplinary procedures, and collaboration with relevant agencies.

The findings imply that schools are actively engaged in creating safe and supportive environments for children, ensuring their well-being and protection from various forms of abuse, violence, and exploitation.

Problem 3: How may the level of engagement of teacher-respondents be described?

These results collectively indicate that teachers exhibit a profound emotional connection, enthusiasm, and joy in their roles, underscoring their dedication and commitment to the teaching profession.

Problem 4: Does the level of practice of schools in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy significantly influence the level of engagement of teachers?

The result of the study reflects an overall high level of engagement among teachers across all aspects, underscoring their unwavering dedication to emotional, social, and cognitive involvement in their roles within the educational setting. It is strongly supported by Antony-Newman (2024), to improve teacher readiness for parent engagement, and propose an integrated parent engagement policy framework: parent engagement policy for educators, inclusion of parent engagement components in teacher education programs, and requirements for parent engagement competencies in teacher certification standards.

Problem 5: Do teachers' level of awareness in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy significantly influence their level of engagement?

The results of the linear regression analysis suggest that a higher level of awareness in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy is associated with a greater level of engagement among teachers. This underscores the importance of promoting awareness and understanding of child protection policies in fostering higher levels of teacher engagement in school environments. Though teachers are aware of the Child Protection Policy program of the Department of Education (Asio et al., 2020), they must be aware of preventive measures, such as providing immediate response, reporting incidents, fact-finding, documentation, intervention, referral, and disciplinary measures (Alda et al., 2024).

Problem 4: What is the level of awareness of teachers regarding the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in the schools?

The results of the linear regression analysis suggest that a higher level of practice in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy is associated with a greater level of engagement among teachers. This highlights the importance of effectively implementing child protection practices in schools to enhance teacher engagement and create a safer and more supportive learning environment for learners.

6. DISCUSSION

Collectively, the findings indicate that teachers in the SDO are highly aware of child protection policies, actively practice these policies within their schools, and demonstrate deep engagement across multiple dimensions. However, the variability in certain areas, particularly regarding deep understanding of DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, and the consistent use of specialized training modules—suggests that while the foundation is strong, there remains room for strengthening specific aspects of implementation. The strong influence of practice on engagement highlights that sustained, high-quality implementation of child protection measures not only safeguards learners but also enhances teacher commitment and professional fulfillment. These results affirm the importance of continuous capacity building, consistent policy enforcement, and the cultivation of supportive school environments where both teachers and learners can thrive.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while teachers in the SDO are highly aware of child protection policies, actively practice these measures, and demonstrate exceptional engagement, the findings reveal nuanced gaps in deep policy comprehension and the consistent delivery of specialized training. The strong predictive power of practice on engagement highlights that strengthening implementation fidelity not only enhances child safety but also fosters greater teacher commitment and professional fulfillment.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Given the variability in teachers' understanding of the foundational policy document, the SDO should conduct regular deepening sessions and policy refresher courses focused specifically on DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012. These sessions should emphasize teachers' specific roles, responsibilities, and the procedural aspects of the policy to ensure uniform comprehension across all schools. It is also recommended that the SDO develop and standardize a comprehensive training package that includes these topics, ensuring that all schools have access to updated, contextually relevant materials. To sustain and deepen both awareness and practice, the SDO should institutionalize a continuous professional development program on child protection. Schools should establish or enhance existing monitoring systems to track the implementation of CPP practices, particularly the conduct of training activities and the use of specialized modules. Further, schools should build stronger, more systematic partnerships with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Philippine National Police (PNP) Women and Child Protection Desks, and non-governmental organizations. Lastly, the SDO should develop a localized, community-responsive child protection framework that addresses the specific gaps identified—particularly in training consistency and policy comprehension

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