

School Heads and Teachers' Awareness and Schools' Implementation of the Child Protection Policy

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Abstract

This study assessed the profile of the respondents, level of awareness of school heads and teachers of the child protection policy, level of implementation of schools, and significant relationships between variables. Employing a quantitative method using a descriptive-correlation research design with adopted instruments from Bayucca (2020) and Annex 2B of the Child Protection Policy, data was gathered from 118 school heads and teachers in public elementary and secondary schools in San Vicente, Camarines Norte. To analyze the data, frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation were used. The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents are female, aged 40-49 years old, holding the position of Teacher I, have attained a bachelor's degree, and have been in the service for 1-10 years. Findings also showed that school heads and teachers are highly aware of the child protection policy. In addition, schools implement such policy. Moreover, there is a weak negative correlation between the age of the respondents and the level of their awareness ($r=-.189$). Furthermore, there is a strong positive correlation between the level of awareness and the level of implementation ($r=.644$). With these results, the researcher proposed a brochure and training program to reinforce the awareness and implementation of the child protection policy. It is hereby recommended that the school continuously organize seminars and workshops and develop a monitoring and evaluation system for the policy. Further research is also encouraged to explore the impact of the proposed intervention on the awareness and implementation of the child protection policy.

Keywords: Child Protection; Policy; Awareness; Implementation; School Heads; Teachers

1. Introduction

The right to education is a fundamental human right, therefore, every child has the right to attend school without experiencing any fear. When schools offer quality, inclusive, and safe learning environments, children can learn, form friendships, and obtain the crucial skills they need to face social situations. However, far too many girls and boys around the world face violence at school. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021), around 246 million girls and boys every year experience violence in and around schools – on the way to school, on school grounds, and within classrooms.

The Department of Education (DepEd), the primary responsible for the safety of children in schools, ensures that children in schools remain safe from all forms of violence and abuse. In other words, the

institutions must protect every child under their care. School heads must ensure that the learning environment is child-friendly, gender-sensitive, safe, and conducive to learning. In the same manner, it is the responsibility of the teachers to facilitate learning and to take care of every learner under their care.

A very significant milestone was made as DepEd continues to protect the rights of its learners and keep them safe from abuse. In 2012, DepEd showed its expressed commitment to child protection when it issued DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 entitled “DepEd Child Protection Policy,” to ensure special protection for children who are at risk of prohibited acts stated in the policy. This policy emphasizes its commitment to a zero-tolerance against child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, bullying, and any other types of mistreatments. It also promotes positive non-violent discipline.

With the continuous effort to promote zero tolerance against any form of child abuse, the Department has been conducting several programs and capacity-building initiatives to further enforce its mandate to protect children in schools. However, teachers still allegedly commit acts that go against the promise of the child protection policy. The perception of teachers as learners’ second parents and the school as their second home is being damaged by such incidents. With this, the researcher firmly believed that this study is timely and relevant to the current landscape of the Department of Education vis-à-vis its child protection policy. This study was then conducted to determine the level of awareness of school heads and teachers of the child protection policy and the level of implementation in schools in San Vicente, Camarines Norte. The results of this study were used as a basis for the development of an intervention to raise the awareness of school heads and teachers and implementation of schools of the child protection policy.

2. Methods

This study utilized a quantitative method using a descriptive-correlation research design. The researcher employed a descriptive study to determine the profile of the respondents, the level of awareness of school heads and teachers of the child protection policy, and the level of implementation in schools. To find out if a variable has a relationship with another variable, correlation research was also conducted.

The researcher utilized a survey questionnaire divided into three sections. The first part contains the demographic profile of the respondent as to the sex, age, position, educational attainment, and length of service (in years). The next part was adopted from the instrument of the study of Bayucca (2020) which contains 15 questions containing a 5-point Likert scale to determine the school heads and teacher’s awareness of the DepEd Child Protection Policy. The last part was adopted from Annex 2B of the DepEd Child Protection Policy which contains another set of 15 questions containing a 5-point Likert scale about the school’s implementation of the said policy. To ensure the content validity of the research instrument, it was subjected to the perusal of child protection specialists in the Division of Camarines Norte.

Using total enumeration sampling, 118 school heads and teachers in public elementary and secondary schools in San Vicente, Camarines Norte participated in this study. For data tabulation and analysis in this study, Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20 were used. The profile of the respondents in terms of sex, age, position, educational attainment, and length of service (in years) was established using frequency and percentage. To determine the level of awareness of school heads and teachers and the level of implementation of schools of the child protection policy, the researcher utilized weighted mean as a measure of central tendency. To analyze the significant relationships between variables, the researcher used Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Profile of the Respondents

Profile of the respondents in terms of sex, age, position, educational attainment, and length of service in years was taken into consideration as these profile variables can influence the level of awareness of school heads and teachers and implementation of the child protection policy in public elementary and secondary schools in San Vicente, Camarines Norte. Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents in terms of sex, age, position, educational attainment, and length of service in years.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	19	16.10
Female	99	83.90
Total	118	100
Age		
20-29 years old	19	16.10
30-39 years old	31	26.27
40-49 years old	37	31.36
50-59 years old	26	22.03
60-65 years old	5	4.24
Total	118	100
Position		
Teacher I	62	52.54
Teacher II	19	16.10
Teacher III	27	22.88
Master Teacher I	4	3.39
Master Teacher II	3	2.54
Head Teacher I	1	0.85
Head Teacher V	1	0.85
School Principal I	1	0.85
Total	118	100
Educational Attainment		
Bachelor's Degree	48	40.68
Earned Units Toward a Master's Degree	47	39.83
Complete Academic Requirements Toward a Master's Degree	14	11.86
Master's Degree	8	6.78
Doctorate Degree	1	0.85
Total	118	100
Length of Service (In Years)		
1-10 years	61	51.69
11-20 years	23	19.49
21-30 years	31	26.27
31-40 years	3	2.54
Total	118	100

As to the profile in terms of sex, the majority of the respondents in this study are female (83.90%) and a smaller portion is male (16.10%). This sex distribution shows the predominantly female workforce in the education sector in San Vicente, Camarines Norte. Furthermore, this result proved that education is a female-dominated industry. This result concurs with the findings of dela Fuente (2021) that the majority of school heads and teachers are female.

When grouped according to their age, a significant portion of the respondents fall within the range of 40-49 years old (31.63%), and the smallest portion is 60-65 years old (4.24%). This suggests that a significant portion of the teaching workforce in San Vicente, Camarines Norte is in the middle age bracket. It is also noteworthy that there are respondents from both younger and older age brackets. This result implies that the education sector is dominated by middle-aged adults. This result agrees with the findings of Castino (2023) that the teaching workforce is in the middle age bracket, and 60-65 years old are the least in number. However, this result contradicts the findings of dela Fuente (2021) that the majority of the school heads and teachers belong to 20-29 years old.

In terms of position, the majority of the respondents in this study are Teacher I (52.54%). On the other hand, Head Teachers I and V and School Principal I are the least in number (0.85%). This distribution reflects the positions of school heads and teachers in San Vicente, Camarines Norte. This result shows that the majority of the workforce are in entry-level position. This result coincides with the findings of Rabina (2019) that the majority of the teaching workforce is Teacher I.

When grouped according to their educational attainment, a significant portion of the respondents had completed a bachelor's degree (40.68%), while doctorate holders were the least in number (0.85%). This distribution suggests that the majority of the respondents only reached the minimum qualification standard for positions in public schools and nearly as many have earned units toward master's degrees. However, it is also worth noting that there is a varied level of educational attainment among school heads and teachers in San Vicente, Camarines Norte. This result shows that the majority have bachelor's degrees and nearly as many are currently pursuing master's degrees. This result accords with the findings of Castino (2023) that the majority of the teaching workforce have bachelor's degrees and did not pursue any further studies.

In terms of the respondents' length of service, the majority of the respondents have been in service for 1-10 years (51.69%), while a few respondents have been in service for 31-40 years (2.54%). This distribution indicates a mix of relatively new and experienced school heads and teachers in San Vicente, Camarines Norte. This result implies that there is a higher proportion of new teachers compared to experienced, seasoned educators. This result agrees with the findings of dela Fuente (2021) that the majority of the teaching workforce is relatively new in service.

3.2. Awareness of School Heads and Teachers of the Child Protection Policy.

To gauge the level of awareness of school heads and teachers of the child protection policy, 15 statements were rated by respondents on a Likert scale from 1 (not aware) to 5 (highly aware). Table 2 presents the mean scores and interpretation to describe the level of awareness of school heads and teachers of the child protection policy.

The respondents' level of awareness of the child protection policy is at 4.50 which falls within the category of highly aware. The results show that school heads and teachers demonstrated the highest level of awareness in statement 14 (Child protection policy aims to prevent violence against children in schools and make these available to all schools), with a mean score of 4.69 interpreted as highly aware. However, statement 2 (I have read and understood the DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012) got the lowest mean score of 4.05 interpreted as aware. It can also be noted that all statements, except statement 2, got an interpretation of highly aware.

The result shows that school heads and teachers in San Vicente, Camarines Norte possess a high level of awareness of the child protection policy. The result further suggests that school heads and teachers have a significant understanding that child protection policy aims to prevent violence against children in schools. It also implies that although school heads and teachers possess a strong level of awareness of the policy, there is a lack of understanding of the provisions of the DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 or the DepEd Child Protection Policy.

Table 2. Awareness of School Heads and Teachers of the Child Protection Policy

	Statement	Mean	Interpretation
1.	There is a DepEd Order on Protecting Children in School from Abuse, Violence, Exploitation, Discrimination, Bullying, and other forms of abuse.	4.64	Highly Aware
2.	I have read and understood the DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012.	4.05	Aware
3.	According to the 1987 Constitution, the State shall defend the right of children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect treatment, maltreatment, and exploitation, including sexual abuse.	4.54	Highly Aware
4.	The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) aims to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, and exploitation, including sexual abuse.	4.46	Highly Aware
5.	The DepEd aims to ensure that all schools are conducive to the education of children.	4.61	Highly Aware
6.	Teachers and learning facilitators, especially in learning centers, are children's substitute parents expected to discharge their functions and duties with this in mind.	4.58	Highly Aware
7.	DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 aims to provide special protection to children who are gravely threatened or endangered by circumstances that affect their normal development and over which they have control and to assist the concerned agencies in their rehabilitation.	4.37	Highly Aware
8.	DepEd aims to ensure such special protection to children from all forms of abuse and exploitation and care as is necessary for the child's well-being.	4.49	Highly Aware
9.	DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 has a zero-tolerance policy for any act of child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse.	4.38	Highly Aware
10.	There are different forms of bullying.	4.65	Highly Aware
11.	Bullying is committed when a student commits an act or a series of acts directed towards another or several students in a school setting, which results in physical and mental abuse, harassment, intimidation, or humiliation.	4.64	Highly Aware
12.	Corporal punishment is a penalty imposed for an alleged or actual offense, which is carried out, for discipline, or training by a teacher, school administrator, an adult, or any other child who has been given or has assumed authority for punishment or discipline.	4.36	Highly Aware
13.	Positive and Non-violent discipline of children is a way of thinking, holistic, constructive, and proactive approach to teaching that helps children develop appropriate thinking and behavior in the short and long term and foster discipline.	4.57	Highly Aware
14.	Child protection policy aims to prevent violence against children in schools and make these available to all schools.	4.69	Highly Aware
15.	Violence against children committed in schools is an act or series of acts committed by school administrators, and academic and non-academic personnel against a child.	4.45	Highly Aware
	Average Weighted Mean	4.50	Highly Aware

Legend: 1.00 – 1.80 = Not Aware; 1.81 – 2.60 = Slightly Aware; 2.61 – 3.40 = Moderately Aware; 3.41 – 4.20 = Aware; 4.21 – 5.00 = Highly Aware

In contrast to the findings that school heads and teachers are highly aware of the child protection policy, Bayucca (2020) found that the respondents are only knowledgeable and have an idea of the provisions of the child protection policy. Nevertheless, it validates that statement 2 received the lowest mean score among the statements on awareness.

3.3. Implementation of Schools of the Child Protection Policy

To measure the level of implementation of schools of the child protection policy in San Vicente, Camarines Norte, 15 statements were also rated by respondents on a Likert scale from 1 (not implemented) to 5 (highly implemented). The mean scores for each statement indicate the school's implementation level, with a higher mean indicating a higher level of implementation. Table 6 presents the mean scores and interpretation for each statement, as well as the average weighted mean and interpretation to describe the level of implementation of schools of the child protection policy.

Table 3. Implementation of Schools of the Child Protection Policy

	Statement	Mean	Interpretation
1.	The school has a written school-based child protection policy being reviewed every three (3) years.	4.11	Implemented
2.	There is a code of conduct incorporated in the school-based child protection policy for students, school administrators, non-teaching personnel, teachers, visitors, and off-campus activities.	4.12	Implemented
3.	The code of conduct has specific provisions to address potential risks to students.	4.00	Implemented
4.	Promotion or information dissemination of the school-based child protection policy is done during school opening for students, teachers, non-teaching personnel, and parents.	4.16	Implemented
5.	There are written procedures to guide in conducting disciplinary proceedings in cases of offenses committed by students.	4.22	Highly Implemented
6.	There is an established system for identifying students who may be suffering from significant harm based on physical, emotional, or behavioral signs.	4.03	Implemented
7.	The school has developed and implemented a school-based referral and monitoring system to address child abuse cases.	4.18	Implemented
8.	The school has an active coordination with the Women and Child Protection Desks of the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO), and other government and non-government organizations.	4.38	Highly Implemented
9.	The school has a clear policy on the use of positive and non-violent discipline for children.	4.34	Highly Implemented
10.	There is an organized Child Protection Committee (CPC) in the school composed of the school head, guidance counselor/teacher, and representative of the teachers, parents, students, and community.	4.35	Highly Implemented
11.	There is an annual capacity-building activity for the members of the CPC.	3.86	Implemented
12.	The CPC is meeting regularly to discuss appropriate interventions and/or responses to school problems on bullying and child abuse cases and other concerns.	3.87	Implemented
13.	The school with its CPC has initiated information dissemination programs and organized activities for the protection the protection of children from abuse, exploitation, violence, harm, and bullying.	4.03	Implemented
14.	There is strong student participation in the promotion of the child protection policy of the school.	4.08	Implemented
15.	There is a feedback mechanism in the school to monitor the implementation of the child protection policy.	4.02	Implemented
Average Weighted Mean		4.12	Implemented

As shown in the table, the level of implementation of schools is at 4.12 which falls within the category of implemented. Schools demonstrated the highest level of implementation in statement 8 (The school has active coordination with the Women and Child Protection Desks of the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO), and other government and non-government organizations), with a mean score of 4.38 interpreted as highly implemented. However, statement 11 (There is an annual capacity-building activity for the members of the CPC) got the lowest mean score of 3.86 interpreted as implemented. It can also be noted that only 4 out of 15 statements got an interpretation of highly implemented, while 11 out of 15 statements got an interpretation of implemented.

The result shows that schools implement such a policy. The result further suggests that strong coordination exists between schools and PNP, MSWDO, and other government and non-government organizations. It also implies that schools conduct annual capacity-building activities for CPC members, although there is still a need for improvement.

This result conforms to the findings of Bayucca (2020) that schools implement the child protection policy although not that rigid. The researcher further concluded that certain important aspects of the child protection policy are not being actively adhered to or observed by schools.

3.4. Relationship Between the Profile of the Respondents and the Awareness of the Child Protection Policy

To gain a further understanding of the profile of the respondents and the level of their awareness of the child protection policy, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was utilized to establish the significant relationship between these variables. Table 4 shows the significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and their level of awareness of the policy.

Table 4. Relationship Between the Profile of the Respondents and the Awareness of the Child Protection Policy

Variables	r	Correlation	df	p-value	Relationship
Sex	-.049	Weak	116	.602	Not Significant
Age	-.189	Weak	116	.040	Significant
Position	-.019	Weak	116	.836	Not Significant
Educational Attainment	-.076	Weak	116	.412	Not Significant
Length of Service	-.031	Weak	116	.743	Not Significant

As shown in the table, the correlation coefficient (r) between the age of the respondents and the level of their awareness is -.189, showing a weak negative correlation. Additionally, there is a significant relationship between the age of the respondents and the level of awareness of the child protection policy, $r = -.189$. This indicates that as respondents' age increases, their level of awareness tends to be slightly lower. This implies that as school heads and teachers grow older, there is a slight decline in their awareness of the child protection policy. This means that age slightly influences the respondents' level of awareness of the child protection policy.

This result differs from the findings of Rabina (2019) that no relationship exists between the age of the respondents and their extent of awareness of the child protection policy. The researcher further concluded that age does not influence the respondents' extent of awareness of the child protection policy. The researcher only found a significant relationship between the level of awareness and educational attainment and the position of the respondents.

3.5. Relationship Between the Awareness and the Implementation of the Child Protection Policy

To gain further understanding of the level of awareness of school heads and teachers and the level of implementation of schools of the child protection policy, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was also utilized to establish the significant relationship between these variables. Table 5 shows the significant relationship between the level of awareness of school heads and teachers and the level of implementation of schools of the child protection policy, as well as the type of correlation and the significance between the variables.

As shown in the table, the correlation coefficient (r) between the level of awareness of school heads and teachers and the level of implementation of schools of the child protection policy is .644, indicating a strong positive correlation. Additionally, there is a significant relationship between the variables, $r = .644$. This implies that as the level of awareness increases, the level of implementation of schools also tends to increase. The result proved that when school heads and teachers are aware of the policy, school's implementation follows. This means that the respondents' level of awareness of child protection policy affects the schools' level of implementation of such policy.

Table 5. Relationship Between the Awareness and the Implementation of the Child Protection Policy

r	Correlation	df	p-value	Relationship
.644	Strong	116	.000	Significant

This result aligns with the study of Asio et al. (2020) indicating a significant relationship between the awareness levels of school heads and teachers and the actual implementation of the child protection policy within schools. Moreover, the researcher concluded that when teachers are knowledgeable about the policy, the school tends to comply with its provisions.

3.6. Proposed Intervention to Raise the Awareness and Implementation of the Child Protection Policy

Considering the findings, a brochure about the salient points of the DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 was developed and proposed to reinforce the awareness of school heads and teachers of the child protection policy. It contains acts that children should be protected from such as bullying or peer abuse, child abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, other forms of abuse, and corporal punishment. The brochure also highlighted the duties and responsibilities of school personnel and the procedures for handling cases of violation on the rights of the child.

Additionally, a training program designed for the Child Protection Committee was created to address the gaps in the implementation of the said policy. It covers discussion on the duties and responsibilities of the Child Protection Committee, forms and signs of child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse among learners, appropriate interventions and/or responses to school problems on bullying and child abuse cases and other concerns and drafting a school-based child protection policy.

The proposed intervention was validated by Atty. Kimberly A. Israel, the Legal Officer of the Legal Unit of the Division of Camarines Norte. It was also suggested that the proposed brochure and training program be distributed to school heads and teachers.

4. Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the study's findings are as follows:

1. The majority of the respondents are female, aged 40-49 years old, holding the position of Teacher I, have attained a bachelor's degree, and have been in the service for 1-10 years. This implies that education is a female-dominated industry, with mostly middle-aged adults, in entry-level positions, who have bachelor's degrees, and relatively new teachers.
2. School heads and teachers demonstrate a high level of awareness of the child protection policy, indicating a strong commitment to the DepEd Child Protection Policy.
3. Schools implement the provisions of the DepEd Child Protection Policy, suggesting that schools have made significant efforts to implement child protection measures.
4. There is a significant relationship (weak negative) found between the age of the respondents and the level of their awareness of the child protection policy. This implies that as respondents' age increases, their level of awareness tends to be slightly lower.
5. There is a significant relationship (strong positive) found between the level of awareness and the level of implementation of child protection policy. This implies that as the level of awareness of school heads and teachers increases, the level of implementation of schools also tends to increase.
6. The proposed brochure and training program can reinforce the awareness of school heads and teachers and the implementation of schools of the child protection policy.

5. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools may continuously organize seminars and workshops on the salient features of the child protection policy to reinforce school heads and teachers' awareness of the policy.
2. Schools are encouraged to further strengthen the implementation by developing a monitoring and evaluation system to regularly assess the implementation of the child protection policy and identify areas that need improvement.
3. Since the level of awareness of the child protection policy is significantly lower among older respondents, schools may develop age-specific awareness programs that address the needs of different age groups.
4. Although a positive correlation was found between the level of awareness and the level of implementation of the child protection policy, future researchers may explore the significantly lower implementation as compared to awareness. Hence, further research is encouraged to explore the challenges of the Child Protection Committee in enforcing the policy to its full extent thus identifying the critical points in implementation.
5. Schools may disseminate the proposed brochure to reinforce the awareness of school heads and teachers of the child protection policy. The training program designed for the Child Protection Committee may also be utilized by schools to address the gaps in the implementation of the said policy.
6. Further research is encouraged to explore the impact of the proposed intervention on the awareness and implementation of the child protection policy.

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