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An In-Depth Analysis of Child Protection Implementation: Policy and Practice

Reymar J. Toliao, Ligaya G. Novida, & Denmark S. Macalisang

Department of Education

ABSTRACT

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*Corresponding Author:

reymar.toliao@deped.gov.ph

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This study analysed the implementation of child protection policies in public schools within the District of Jimenez, Misamis Occidental, during the School Year 2025–2026. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, the study explored existing child protection policies, challenges encountered in implementation, and best practices adopted to strengthen child protection within schools and the community. Data were gathered from key stakeholders, including school heads, teachers, guidance personnel, parents, and barangay officials, through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The findings revealed that schools implemented child protection policies aligned with DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, supported by functional Child Protection Committees, anti-bullying programs, guidance services, and formal reporting mechanisms. However, implementation was constrained by limited training, heavy workloads, fear of reporting, resource limitations, administrative challenges, and emerging digital risks. Despite these challenges, schools adopted effective best practices such as continuous awareness initiatives, positive discipline approaches, strong community collaboration, and multi-sectoral partnerships. The study highlights the need for sustained capacity-building, strengthened coordination, and institutional support to ensure effective child protection implementation.

Keywords: child protection, community involvement, implementation challenges, public schools, qualitative research

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Introduction

Child protection is a cornerstone of global human rights and social development, encompassing the laws, policies, and practices that ensure children's safety, dignity, and holistic well-being. It seeks to prevent and respond to all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children—a goal shared by nations through international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16.2, which calls for the end of all forms of violence against children (UNICEF, 2023). According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), over one billion children globally experience some form of physical, emotional, or sexual violence each year. These alarming figures highlight the need for effective child protection systems that combine legal, educational, and social welfare interventions. As UNICEF (2024) underscores, child protection must be seen not merely as a legal responsibility but as a shared moral and social obligation that involves the active participation of families, schools, governments, and communities.

In the Philippine context, child protection is enshrined in several national laws and government issuances designed to safeguard children's rights and welfare. These include Presidential Decree No. 603 or the Child and Youth Welfare Code, Republic Act No. 7610 or the Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act, Republic Act No. 10627 or the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, and Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 40, s. 2012, known as the Child Protection Policy. Together, these frameworks mandate schools and local government units (LGUs) to establish Child Protection Committees (CPCs) and adopt mechanisms to prevent and address child abuse, bullying, and neglect. However, despite these legislative efforts, UNICEF Philippines (2022) reported that nearly 60 percent of children aged one to fourteen have experienced some form of violent discipline, with 11.6 million children reporting physical aggression and 9.1 million subjected to physical punishment. This reflects the persistent gap between the presence of laws and the effectiveness of their implementation. Santos (2025) argues that while the Philippines has made significant policy progress, the success of child protection still hinges on how these laws are localized and internalized within schools and communities.

Several scholars and practitioners have emphasized the critical role of educational institutions and community partnerships in translating child protection policies into meaningful action. According to Reyes (2023), schools serve as the primary setting where children's rights are actualized, as they provide both preventive education and immediate response mechanisms through CPCs. Dela Cruz (2023) further explains that when teachers, parents, and local leaders collaborate in implementing child protection measures, there is a measurable improvement in the detection, reporting, and management of abuse cases. Meanwhile, Cruz and Bautista (2024) highlight that community participation and continuous training are key determinants of policy effectiveness, especially in rural areas where access to social services may be limited. These perspectives collectively affirm that the gap between child protection policies and their actual implementation is not a matter of legal deficiency but rather of institutional capacity, coordination, and awareness among stakeholders at the grassroots level.

In the District of Jimenez, a municipality in Misamis Occidental, challenges are particularly pronounced. Local data from the Department of Education, Jimenez District (2024) revealed a number of reported child protection cases within the past school year, including bullying, psychological abuse, and violations of students' rights committed by both peers and adults. One notable case involved the suspension of a teacher for six months due to a confirmed violation of the DepEd Child Protection Policy, underscoring the need for stronger training and accountability systems among school personnel. While policies exist, many schools in Jimenez still face gaps in implementing preventive programs, conducting proper case documentation, and facilitating coordination between schools, barangays, and the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO). This data-driven gap highlights the central problem that this study seeks to address: the disparity between the existence of child protection policies and their consistent, context-sensitive enforcement at the local level.

The primary objective of this study, titled “An In-Depth Analysis of Child Protection Implementation in the District of Jimenez: Policy and Practice,” is to analyze how national child protection policies are being localized and operationalized within the schools and communities of the district. Specifically, it aims to identify the existing child protection mechanisms, assess the challenges encountered in policy enforcement, and document best practices and stakeholder initiatives that contribute to child safety. In Article XV, Section 3 (b) of the Philippine constitution states that “The state shall defend the right of children to assistance, including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, and conditions prejudicial

to their development.” This section means that the Philippine government has a duty to protect children namely the Department of Education and ensure their-being. It must provide children with care, support, and protection they need to grow up healthy and safe. The state should also guard children against harm such as neglect, abuse, exploitation, or any situation that could negatively affect their physical, emotional, or moral development. This mandate supports study’s theoretical framework that shows that child protection is not only a social responsibility but also a constitutional obligation in the Philippines. Meanwhile, Republic Act no. 7610 titled “An act providing for stronger deterrence and special protection against child abuse, exploitation and discrimination, and for other purposes.” describes that RA 7610 is a child protection law that gives special protection, and it provides penalties for those who harm or exploit children. As DepEd order no. 40, s. 2012 titled “DepEd Child Protection Policy” orders to keep students safe in schools. It lays out clear rules and responsibilities for teachers, school staff, parents, and students to make sure that every child learns in a safe, caring, and respectful environment with its purpose is to protect children from all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other harmful acts that could affect their learning or well-being whether it happens inside or outside the school.

Furthermore, the study seeks to evaluate the coordination between institutions such as schools, CPCs, and local government units, and to propose strategic recommendations to strengthen the alignment between policy and practice. By focusing on the lived realities of implementers and beneficiaries, this research aims to bridge the knowledge gap on how rural contexts affect the success of child protection initiatives. Thus, the expected outcome of this study is to generate evidence-based recommendations that can enhance policy implementation and promote a more responsive and sustainable child protection system in the District of Jimenez and similar rural settings. The findings are expected to serve as a guide for school leaders, policymakers, and local stakeholders in developing capacity-building programs, strengthening inter-agency coordination, and institutionalizing monitoring mechanisms. By providing an in-depth understanding of how policies function or fail in actual practice, this research aims to contribute to the national discourse on child welfare and protection. It is anticipated that the study will not only highlight the challenges but also recognize the successful strategies that can be replicated elsewhere, ultimately fostering a safer, rights-based, and child-centered educational environment for all Filipino learners.

Methods

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to provide an in-depth understanding of the implementation of child protection policies and practices in the District of Jimenez, Misamis Occidental. It involved key stakeholders, including school heads, guidance counselors or advocates, teachers, parents, and barangay officials, who were purposively selected based on their relevant experience and involvement in child protection initiatives. Data were gathered through an adopted and contextually modified questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide, which were subjected to expert validation and pilot testing to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. The data-gathering process followed proper ethical procedures, including securing institutional permissions, obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and protecting participants’ rights and welfare. The collected qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, focusing on existing policies, implementation challenges, best practices, and recommendations. Throughout the study, the researcher adhered to the principles of privacy, informed consent, beneficence, respect for persons, academic integrity, credibility, confirmability, and transferability, ensuring that the findings were grounded in participants’ actual experiences and that their identities and sensitive information were adequately protected.

Results and Discussions

1. Institutionalization of Child Protection Policies and Practices

The findings revealed that child protection policies in the District of Jimenez were substantially institutionalized through the implementation of DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, anti-bullying programs, functional Child Protection Committees (CPCs), guidance and counseling services, preventive awareness activities, parent engagement, and formal reporting and case-management procedures. The establishment of CPCs chaired by school heads and supported by teachers, parents, barangay representatives, and learners demonstrated that child protection had become a shared institutional responsibility. This finding supports Reyes (2023), who emphasized that rural schools often serve as the first line of defense for children experiencing abuse, neglect, and exploitation, making school-based child protection mechanisms particularly important in communities where access to specialized services may be limited. The presence of formal reporting procedures, documentation, confidentiality measures, and referrals to the LGU, MSWDO, and PNP further indicates that

schools in Jimenez were attempting to translate national child protection mandates into localized practices. Dela Cruz (2024) noted that the effectiveness of child protection mechanisms depends significantly on inter-agency coordination and consistent monitoring of child-related cases, which is reflected in the present findings showing the involvement of schools, barangays, local government units, and social welfare agencies. Similarly, the use of anti-bullying initiatives and positive discipline demonstrates that the schools did not rely solely on reactive measures but also emphasized prevention and the promotion of learners' rights and welfare. The findings therefore suggest that institutionalization is evident when policies become embedded in organizational structures, school routines, reporting systems, and collaborative practices rather than remaining merely as written mandates.

The institutionalization of child protection was further strengthened by preventive and awareness-based activities designed to empower learners, parents, and the wider school community. Classroom rules, behavior agreements, child protection orientations, school assemblies, posters, bulletin boards, peer mentoring, student leadership activities, parent orientations, and PTA meetings were identified as important mechanisms for promoting awareness and encouraging shared responsibility for learner safety. These practices are consistent with Villanueva (2024), who explained that local beliefs, norms, and community relationships can either facilitate or hinder the reporting and handling of child-related concerns. In the context of Jimenez, close community relationships and the cultural value of bayanihan created opportunities for collaboration among school officials, parents, barangay leaders, and other stakeholders, although these same relationships could sometimes contribute to hesitation in reporting sensitive cases. The findings also indicate that schools were beginning to respond to emerging digital risks through online safety reminders, regulation of learner photographs and videos, data privacy practices, and social media advocacy. This expansion of child protection from physical school environments to digital spaces demonstrates the need for policies to remain responsive to changing circumstances. Dela Cruz (2024) further supports the importance of coordinated and continuously monitored child protection mechanisms, while Villanueva (2024) highlights the role of community culture in shaping how protection policies are understood and practiced. Thus, the findings demonstrate that effective institutionalization requires both formal structures and a supportive culture in which learners are informed of their rights, stakeholders understand their responsibilities, and schools maintain accessible mechanisms for reporting, intervention, and referral.

2. Challenges in the Implementation of Child Protection Policies

Despite the presence of established child protection mechanisms, the findings revealed several challenges that constrained their effective and consistent implementation. These included insufficient professional training, limited refresher orientations, inadequate awareness of reporting procedures, heavy teaching workloads, competing administrative responsibilities, limited time for documentation and follow-up, and difficulty prioritizing child protection tasks. The findings suggest that the existence of policies and committees does not automatically guarantee effective implementation because personnel must also possess the knowledge, skills, time, and institutional support necessary to carry out their responsibilities. Reyes (2023) emphasized the important role of rural schools in protecting vulnerable children, but this responsibility becomes particularly demanding when schools operate within limited-resource environments. The problem is further compounded when teachers must simultaneously perform instructional, administrative, and child protection functions. The findings also identified underreporting as a significant concern because teachers, learners, and witnesses may hesitate to report incidents due to fear of retaliation, confidentiality concerns, embarrassment, or fear of being judged. Villanueva (2024) provides an important explanation for this situation by noting that community beliefs and social relationships can influence the willingness of individuals to report child-related concerns. In close-knit communities, social familiarity may encourage cooperation, but it may also create pressure to settle sensitive matters privately. Consequently, strengthening child protection implementation requires more than disseminating policies; it requires continuous capacity-building, clear reporting procedures, protection of confidentiality, and the creation of safe and trusted reporting environments where learners and adults can report concerns without fear.

The findings further showed that resource constraints, administrative difficulties, parental resistance, and inter-agency coordination problems presented additional barriers to effective child protection implementation. Schools reported limited funding, inadequate awareness materials, insufficient guidance personnel, reliance on personal funds for some activities, complex reporting requirements, delays in case follow-up, and difficulties

coordinating with external agencies. These challenges are significant because child protection cases frequently require specialized services that schools cannot provide independently. Dela Cruz (2024) emphasized that effective child protection mechanisms depend on inter-agency coordination and consistent monitoring, making delays in referrals and responses a serious concern for schools responsible for protecting learners. Parental and community resistance also emerged when families preferred private settlement, misunderstood the difference between discipline and abuse, or feared social stigma. This finding is particularly relevant to Villanueva (2024), whose discussion of local beliefs and norms suggests that cultural expectations can influence how child protection concerns are interpreted and reported. In addition, the emergence of cyberbullying, online risks, and concerns about social media use demonstrates that child protection challenges are no longer confined to the physical school environment. Schools therefore need clearer digital safety guidelines and stronger capacity-building for teachers, parents, and learners. The combination of resource limitations, workload pressures, reporting barriers, cultural factors, inter-agency delays, and emerging digital risks suggests that sustainable implementation requires stronger institutional support, adequate resources, simplified procedures, continuous training, and coordinated responses among schools, families, communities, and government agencies.

3. Best Practices for Strengthening Child Protection

The findings identified preventive, learner-centered, and awareness-based strategies as important best practices for strengthening child protection in the District of Jimenez. Schools implemented classroom rules and behavior agreements, child protection orientations, assemblies, posters and bulletin boards, student leadership, peer mentoring, anti-bullying campaigns, and positive discipline approaches to prevent harmful behavior and promote a culture of safety, respect, and accountability. These practices demonstrate a shift from a purely reactive approach toward preventive child protection, where schools attempt to address risks before they develop into serious incidents. Reyes (2022) is particularly relevant because the study from which the present research instrument was adopted examined the implementation of child protection policies in selected public schools in Northern Mindanao, including the extent of implementation, challenges, and best practices in schools and communities. The present findings reinforce the importance of examining child protection not simply in terms of policy compliance but also in terms of how policies are translated into actual preventive and supportive practices. The use of student leaders and peer mentoring is especially significant because it positions learners as active participants in promoting safety rather than merely as recipients of adult protection. Similarly, continuous orientations and visible advocacy materials help reinforce child rights and reporting mechanisms throughout the school year. Villanueva (2024) further supports the importance of considering community beliefs and relationships when developing child protection strategies because interventions are more likely to succeed when they are sensitive to the social and cultural context in which they are implemented.

Another important best practice identified in the findings was the strengthening of guidance, counseling, referral, parent, community, and inter-agency support systems. Confidential counseling, accessible guidance offices, psychosocial support, and referral mechanisms enabled schools to provide more comprehensive assistance to learners experiencing child protection concerns. One participant specifically noted that serious cases were coordinated with the LGU, MSWDO, or PNP to ensure the child's safety, illustrating that child protection requires a multi-agency response rather than school-based intervention alone. Dela Cruz (2024) emphasized that the effectiveness of child protection mechanisms depends on inter-agency coordination and consistent monitoring of cases, which strongly corresponds with the findings of the present study. The participants also stressed the need for adequate staffing, continuous training, and sustained collaboration with external agencies to improve guidance and referral services. In addition, parent orientations, PTA meetings, barangay partnerships, and community awareness programs reinforced the principle of shared responsibility for child safety. The findings suggest that these partnerships should be strengthened through clear referral pathways, regular coordination, case monitoring, and defined responsibilities among participating agencies. At the same time, digital child protection should be incorporated into existing programs through online safety education, responsible social media use, data privacy awareness, and clearer guidelines for the posting of learners' photographs and videos. Villanueva (2024) reinforces the importance of contextual and community-sensitive approaches, while Reyes (2022) provides a relevant local research basis for examining child protection implementation, challenges, and best practices within Philippine public-school settings. Overall, the findings support a whole-school and whole-community approach in which prevention, reporting, counseling, intervention, referral, monitoring, and follow-up are jointly supported by school personnel, learners, parents, barangay officials, local government units, and specialized agencies.

Conclusions

This study concluded that child protection policies in public schools within the District of Jimenez were actively implemented and aligned with national mandates, particularly DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, through structured mechanisms such as functional Child Protection Committees, anti-bullying and positive discipline programs, guidance and counseling services, formal reporting protocols, and preventive advocacy activities. However, the effectiveness of policy implementation was constrained by challenges including limited capacity-building opportunities, heavy workloads, fear of reporting, parental and community resistance, resource limitations, administrative and coordination difficulties, and emerging digital-related risks. Despite these challenges, schools demonstrated resilience by adopting best practices such as continuous awareness initiatives, strengthened school-based structures, learner-centered guidance services, restorative approaches, community collaboration, and multi-sectoral partnerships. Overall, the findings underscored that while child protection systems were in place, sustained support, enhanced capacity-building, strengthened collaboration, and adaptive strategies were essential to ensure consistent, effective, and responsive child protection implementation within the district.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed: Teachers are encouraged to strengthen their competence in child protection policies through regular training, orientations, and refresher courses on child protection protocols, reporting procedures, positive discipline, case management, and digital safety, while fostering safe, supportive, restorative, and child-centered classroom environments that encourage learners to confidently report concerns; school administrators are encouraged to provide sustained institutional support by strengthening School-Based Child Protection Committees (CPCs), ensuring accessible and adequately staffed guidance services, reducing unnecessary non-teaching workload associated with documentation, and establishing clear procedures for reporting, digital child protection, and data privacy; the Department of Education (DepEd) may strengthen policy implementation by providing dedicated resources for child protection programs, expanding division-wide capacity-building initiatives, increasing the availability of guidance counselors or designates, and enhancing coordination with LGUs, MSWDO, PNP, and other relevant agencies to ensure timely and consistent responses to cases; parents and community stakeholders are encouraged to actively participate in child protection orientations and school activities, support positive discipline at home, respect established reporting mechanisms, and work with barangay officials and schools to reduce stigma and strengthen community awareness regarding the shared responsibility of safeguarding children; and future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies using larger samples, other districts or divisions, and additional stakeholders, as well as explore digital child protection initiatives, inter-agency coordination, and mixed-method approaches to generate broader evidence on the long-term effectiveness of child protection policies and practices in promoting learner safety and well-being.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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