



THE FUNCTIONALITY OF CHILD PROTECTION POLICY IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE DIVISION OF ALBAY

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the level of functionality of Child Protection Policy (CPP) implementation in public secondary schools in the Schools Division of Albay during the school year 2024–2025. This study employed a descriptive-correlational quantitative research design. The respondents consisted of 92 designated guidance coordinators and guidance counselors, while 60 respondents participated in the survey on the challenges encountered in policy implementation. The gathered data were analyzed using frequency count, weighted mean, and F-test or Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed that CPP was generally partially functional across the five major categories used in assessing implementation processes. It was found that schools have already established basic structures and processes for the Child Protection Committees (CPCs); nevertheless, many other aspects were still in the initial developmental stages, especially in resource generation, child participation, monitoring, and capacity building. Components under service delivery, such as the referral system and case management, performed relatively better than others. There was no significant difference in the degree of functionality of CPP based on whether the schools are big or small, and based on the CPP focal person's position designation in the school. Problems that were reported included difficulties in conducting meetings in the CPC, insufficient policies and guidelines, inadequate budget provision, lack of skilled personnel, poor monitoring and evaluation, and inconsistent practices. However, the schools generally considered the need for strengthening the implementation process to protect and promote the welfare of their learners.

Keywords: *Functionality, Child Protection Policy, Child Protection Committee, policy implementation, public secondary schools, Division of Albay*

INTRODUCTION

Child protection in schools has emerged as a significant issue not only internationally but also within the nation, owing to the growing number of bullying, abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, and other types of harm experienced by students. Millions of children around the globe have been subjected to violence within their school premises, such as bullying and sexual harassment, affecting their educational attainment, participation, socialization, and psychological well-being (UNICEF, 2017). Likewise, one out of three students worldwide has experienced bullying in school. Within the Philippines, laws protecting children against abuse, exploitation, bullying, violence, and gender-based harassment include Republic Act No. 7610, Republic Act No. 10627, Republic Act No. 9344, and Republic Act No. 11313. To enforce the said policies, the Department of Education has issued DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 or the Child Protection Policy and DepEd Order No. 55, s. 2013, the Anti-Bullying Act. National reports have also shown the necessity of bolstering child protection systems in schools, as thousands of bullying, violence, and abuse cases have been reported each year (DepEd, 2025; Council for the Welfare of Children, 2024).

The related literature and studies underscore the significance of Child Protection Policies in ensuring that safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments are created. Bayucca (2020) pointed out the significance of the teachers' knowledge and awareness regarding the CPP in enhancing the success of policy implementation, especially in cases where there is a need to report and act against any abuse. According to Peralta and Poja (2025), having policy guidelines can enhance teachers' confidence in managing issues related to the learners' well-being and promote the adoption of positive discipline strategies. Bowers et al. (2021) observed that those schools that communicate their child protection policies clearly experience fewer incidents of abuse as well as enhanced confidence among the staff members in handling child protection matters. According to Lee and Park (2022), teacher education regarding child protection policy in South Korea led to reduced use of punishment in discipline strategies. Several studies also revealed the need for guidance counselors and coordinators to address issues of learners (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2021; Gorman, 2022). Research conducted in Australia, Canada, and other countries indicated that effective counseling approaches have helped improve the psychological well-being, social adjustment, and participation of students in their academics (Nguyen & Smith, 2020; Johnson et al. (2021). A study by Haight et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of collaboration among schools, community agencies, and other institutions in implementing effective child protection interventions and support systems for learners.

Although the existence of laws, policies, and intervention programs is well known, research findings have revealed issues and difficulties in implementing Child Protection Policies. A lack of training and understanding of positive discipline, along with a weak monitoring system, led to inconsistent implementation, despite teachers' awareness of

CPP (Bayuca, 2020). Castino (2023) found that teachers' professional profiles and experience affect the implementation of child protection. Similarly, Aguilar-Rahmat (2022) stressed the importance of counselors' training and professional competencies to ensure effective guidance programs. In particular, the barriers included a lack of resources, ineffective monitoring, inadequate referral mechanisms, teacher demotivation, and cultural differences in discipline (Sulaimon & Potokri, 2023; Eldred et al., 2025; Mwangi & Ochieng, 2023). At the local level, Recibe (2024), Natividad (2025), and Andaya et al. (2025) reported issues including a lack of funds and staff, poor coordination, and limited stakeholder engagement during the implementation process.

The conduct of the study was timely because cases of bullying, abuse, violence, and mental health concerns among learners continue to increase, requiring schools to strengthen their child protection systems and intervention mechanisms. The implementation of Child Protection Policies became even more significant following the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed weaknesses in reporting systems, psychosocial support services, and school-based protection mechanisms (Save the Children Philippines, 2020). In Region V, the Learners' Rights and Protection framework and the Department of Education's mental health policies further emphasized the need for schools to create safe, inclusive, and responsive learning environments for students. With the increasing demand for stronger child protection measures, schools are expected not only to comply with policies but also to ensure the operational effectiveness and accountability of Child Protection Committees, reporting systems, intervention programs, and stakeholder participation. The study, therefore, addressed a timely educational concern that directly affects learners' safety, welfare, and educational experiences.

The study also addressed a clear research gap in the existing literature. Although previous studies examined awareness, counseling services, policy implementation, bullying prevention, and school safety programs, limited studies specifically assessed the level of functionality of the Child Protection Policy in public secondary schools in the Division of Albay across the areas of organization and coordination, policies and guidelines, capacities and resources, service delivery, and accountability and performance. Most existing studies have focused only on awareness levels, challenges, or general implementation, without comprehensively examining how effective the Child Protection Policy is within school systems and how school characteristics, such as school size and focal person designation, influence implementation. Furthermore, limited localized studies have been conducted in Albay that specifically focus on public secondary schools and the experiences of guidance coordinators or guidance counselors, who are key implementers of the policy. This gap justified conducting the study to provide localized, evidence-based findings on the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of CPP implementation.

The study addressed the actual and potential problems schools encounter when implementing the Child Protection Policy. Insufficient numbers of trained first responders, poor coordination among Child Protection Committee members, weak documentation and reporting mechanisms, and insufficient stakeholder engagement were issues that may affect the ability of schools to respond effectively to cases of abuse, bullying, violence, and other child protection concerns. The study proposed practical, evidence-

based recommendations that could serve as innovations to improve the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in schools. The study highlighted the need for stronger organizational structures, regular capacity-building activities, enhanced reporting and referral systems, improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and better resource allocation.

Research Questions

This study determined the level of functionality the Child Protection Policy implementation in public secondary schools within the Division of Albay. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of functionality of Child Protection Policy Implementation in public secondary schools within the Division of Albay in terms of:
 - a. Organization and Coordination;
 - b. Policies and Guidelines;
 - c. Capacities and Resources;
 - d. Services Delivery; and
 - e. Accountability and performance?
2. Are there significant differences in the level of functionality of the Child Protection Policy implementation in terms of:
 - a. School size; and
 - b. Designation of Child Protection Policy Focal Person (Registered Guidance/Guidance Designate)
3. What are the challenges encountered by public secondary schools in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy, along with:
 - a. Organization and Coordination;
 - b. Policies and Guidelines;
 - c. Capacities and Resources;
 - d. Services Delivery; and
 - e. Accountability and performance?
4. What recommendations may be proposed to strengthen the functionality of the Child Protection Policy in the various areas of implementation?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational quantitative research design to determine the level of functionality of Child Protection Policy (CPP) implementation in public secondary schools within the Schools Division of Albay during the school year 2024–2025. The correlational component was used to determine whether significant differences existed in the level of CPP implementation functionality when respondents were grouped by school size and the designation of the Child Protection Policy focal person.

The locale of the study included public secondary schools situated in the fifteen (15) municipalities within the Schools Division of Albay. The respondents in the study were designated guidance coordinators, guidance counselors, and Child Protection

Policy focal persons who were directly involved in implementing child protection programs and policies in their respective schools. Purposive sampling was employed to select the respondents because they were considered the most knowledgeable about the implementation of the Child Protection Policy. A total of ninety-two (92) respondents participated in the assessment of CPP functionality, consisting of five (5) registered guidance counselors and eighty-seven (87) guidance designates. In terms of school classification, thirty-four (34) respondents came from large or mega schools, forty-seven (47) from medium schools, and eleven (11) from small schools. For the survey on the challenges encountered in implementing CPP, sixty (60) respondents participated through an online Google Form survey.

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were gathered directly from the respondents through the administration of survey questionnaires and assessment tools. Books, journals, government issuances, legal documents, school reports, and credible online sources related to child protection, bullying prevention, school safety, and educational policy implementation were considered secondary sources.

The first instrument was the Child Protection Committee Functionality Assessment Tool provided by the Department of Education, and the researcher obtained the accomplished results of the tool from the Schools Division Office of Albay. The tool measured the level of functionality of the Child Protection Committee across five dimensions: organization and coordination, policies and guidelines, capacities and resources, service delivery, and accountability and performance. The researcher also used a self-developed survey questionnaire to determine the challenges schools face in implementing the Child Protection Policy. The questionnaire consisted of fifty (50) items distributed across the identified implementation domains. The researcher used a 5-point Likert scale. To ensure clarity, relevance, coherence, and alignment with the study's objectives, the researcher submitted the questionnaire to three (3) subject-matter experts for content validation. After incorporating the validators' recommendations, the researcher pilot-tested the instrument among twenty-four (24) guidance designates who were not included in the actual respondents of the study. The researcher then conducted reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the instrument's internal consistency. Based on the pilot test results, the researcher revised, merged, and reworded several items to eliminate redundancy and improve the questionnaire's reliability and consistency before administering the final version to the respondents.

The researcher followed systematic procedures in gathering the data. Before the study was conducted, permission was secured from the Graduate School Dean, the Schools Division Superintendent, the Education Supervisor, and the school heads concerned. After the request was approved, informed consent was obtained from the respondents to ensure voluntary participation. The validated questionnaires were then distributed personally and through Google Forms. Clear instructions regarding the study's purpose and the procedures for completing the instruments were provided to the respondents. After respondents completed the questionnaires, the completed forms were retrieved, organized, tabulated, and prepared for statistical analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools. A frequency count was used to determine the distribution and number of responses from the respondents. A weighted mean was employed to determine the level of functionality of Child Protection Policy implementation and the extent of challenges encountered by schools in its implementation. A F-test or Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether significant differences existed in the level of CPP implementation functionality when respondents were grouped by school size and the designation of the Child Protection Policy focal person. These statistical treatments enabled the researcher to interpret the findings systematically and determine patterns, similarities, and differences among the variables included in the study.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research. The respondents were informed regarding the objectives and purpose of the study and were assured that their participation was voluntary. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by ensuring that respondents' and schools' names were not disclosed at any point in the study. All gathered data were treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for academic and research purposes, in accordance with ethical standards and data privacy regulations.

The study was limited to public secondary schools within the Schools Division of Albay during the 2024–2025 school year. The study's findings were based on the responses of the selected respondents and on documentary records obtained from the Schools Division Office. Private schools, elementary schools, and educational institutions outside the Schools Division of Albay were excluded from the study. Furthermore, the results depended on the honesty, accuracy, and objectivity of respondents' answers, as well as on the completeness and availability of the documentary data used in the research.

RESULTS

The results of the study are presented according to the sequence of the problems stated in the study. This chapter discusses the level of functionality of the Child Protection Policy (CPP) implementation in public secondary schools within the Schools Division of Albay. It also presents significant differences in the level of functionality of CPP implementation when grouped according to school size and designation of the Child Protection Policy focal person. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the challenges encountered by schools in implementing the Child Protection Policy and the proposed recommendations to strengthen the functionality and effectiveness of CPP implementation in public secondary schools.

Level of Functionality of Child Protection Policy Implementation. Table 1 presents the level of functionality of the Child Protection Policy within the Division of Albay as assessed across schools of varying sizes—mega/large, medium, and small. The table highlights the extent to which key policy dimensions are implemented, including organization and coordination, policies and guidelines, capacities and resources, service delivery, and accountability and performance.

Weighted means were computed to determine the overall implementation rating for each indicator, along with their corresponding verbal interpretations and ranks. The data provide a comprehensive view of how effectively Child Protection initiatives are being operationalized in the division and identify areas of strength as well as components requiring further enhancement. Mega and large schools earned higher scores on organization and coordination, policies and guidelines, and service delivery, with a weighted mean of 3.79, 3.73, and 3.71, respectively, although these areas of the Child Protection Policy are only partially functional. Medium schools earned their highest on service delivery, with a weighted mean of 3.86, and organization and coordination, with a weighted mean of 3.63, while small schools earned their highest on service delivery, with a weighted mean of 3.73, but earned relatively lower scores with a weighted mean of 3.45 on policies and guidelines, and a weighted mean of 3.50 on organization and coordination. Capacities and Resources of all types of schools are still in the early stage of development, earning the lowest scores with a weighted mean of 2.64, 2.67, 2.76, and 2.77. The scores show the Child Protection Policy is partially functional, earning a weighted mean of 3.45 for mega and large, 3.48 for medium, and 3.39 for small.

Table 1. Summary of the Level of Functionality of Child Protection Policy within the Division of Albay

Extent of Implementation Indicators	Weighted Mean			WM	VI	Rank
	Mega/ Large	Medium	Small			
Organization and Coordination	3.78	3.63	3.50	3.64	PF	4
Policies & Guidelines	3.82	3.82	3.82	3.82	PF	1
Capacities and Resources	2.65	2.73	2.77	2.72	ESD	3
Service Delivery	3.71	3.86	3.73	3.77	PF	2
Accountability and Performance	3.39	3.49	3.48	3.45	PF	5
Total	3.47	3.51	3.46	3.48	PF	

Legend: 4.20-5.00-Fully Functional (FF); 3.40-4.19-Partially Functional (PF); 2.60-3.39- In Early Stage of Development (ESD);1.80-2.59-Planning Stage (PS); 1.00-1.79-Not Yet in Place/Non-Functional (NF)

Significant Difference in the Level of Functionality of Child Protection Policy Implementation. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results presented in the table indicate a thorough examination of the implementation of the Child Protection Policy across three distinct groups in public elementary schools: School Heads, Guidance Coordinators, and Teachers. This section presents an analysis of the significant differences in the extent of implementation of the Child Protection Policy (CPP) in public secondary schools within the Division of Albay. The differences are examined according to school size and the designation of the Child Protection Policy Focal Person.

School Size. Table 2 presents the analysis of variance (ANOVA) results determining whether there is a significant difference in the level of functionality of Child Protection Policy implementation across selected parameters. Specifically, the table examines the areas of Organization and Coordination, Policies and Guidelines, Capacities and Resources, Service Delivery, and Accountability and Performance. The results indicate that for Organization & Coordination, the computed F-value of 7.096 is

less than the tabulated F-value of 9.552, with a p-value of 0.072. This means the null hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that school size does not significantly affect Organization & Coordination. For Policies and Guidelines, ANOVA was not applicable due to insufficient data per group. For Capacities and Resources, the computed F-value of 0.022 is much lower than the tabulated F-value, with a very high p-value of 0.979, indicating no significant difference across school sizes. Similarly, Service Delivery (F=0.290, p=0.755) and Accountability and Performance (F=0.084, p=0.920) show that differences among small, medium, and large schools are not statistically significant.

Table 2. Significant Difference in the Level of Functionality of Child Protection Policy Implementation in terms of School Size

Parameters	Computed F-value	Tabulated F-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Organization & Coordination	7.096	9.552	0.072	Accept H_0	No SD
Policies and Guidelines	ANOVA NOT APPLICABLE				
Capacities and Resources	0.022	9.552	0.979	Accept H_0	No SD
Service Delivery	0.290	4.256	0.755	Accept H_0	No SD
Accountability and Performance	0.084	5.143	0.920	Accept H_0	No SD

***Decision Rule:** Reject the null hypothesis (H_0) if the p-value ≤ 0.05 or F-computed $>$ F-critical; otherwise, fail to reject H_0 .

Designation of Child Protection Policy Focal Person. Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) conducted to determine whether there is a significant difference in the level of functionality of Child Protection Policy implementation when respondents are grouped according to the designation of the Child Protection Policy Focal Person.

Table 3. Significant Difference in the Level of Functionality of Child Protection Policy Implementation in Terms of School Size and Designation of Child Protection Policy Focal Person

Parameters	Computed F-value	Tabulated F-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Organization & Coordination	6.760	18.512	0.122	Accept H_0	No SD
Policies and Guidelines	ANOVA NOT APPLICABLE				
Capacities and Resources	10.976	18.513	0.080	Accept H_0	No SD
Service Delivery	4.491	5.987	0.078	Accept H_0	No SD
Accountability and Performance	7.760	7.709	0.050	Accept H_0	No SD

***Decision Rule:** Reject the null hypothesis (H_0) if the p-value ≤ 0.05 or F-computed $>$ F-critical; otherwise, fail to reject H_0 .

The results of the one-way ANOVA presented indicate that there is no significant difference in the level of functionality of Child Protection Policy implementation across the measured parameters. For Organization & Coordination, the computed F-value of 6.760 is less than the tabulated F-value of 18.512, and the p-value is 0.122, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. This suggests that the manner in which schools organize and coordinate activities related to child protection is fairly consistent across the groups being compared. For Policies and Guidelines, ANOVA could not be computed due to insufficient data per group, meaning no conclusion can be drawn for this dimension. In terms of Capacities and Resources, the computed F-value (10.976) is below the tabulated F-value (18.513), with a p-value of 0.080. This implies that schools do not differ significantly in their available resources and capacity to implement child protection policies. Similarly, Service Delivery (F=4.491, p=0.078) and Accountability and Performance (F=7.760, p=0.050) show no statistically significant differences.

Challenges Encountered by Schools in the Implementation of the Child Protection Policy (CPP). Table 4 presents the challenges encountered by schools in implementing the Child Protection Policy. This overview highlights the general weighted averages, interpretations, and major issues identified across the five domains—organization and coordination, policies and guidelines, capacities and resources, service delivery, and accountability and performance. The table provides a clear comparative picture of which areas schools find most difficult, serving as the basis for understanding the overall extent of challenges in CPP implementation.

Table 4. Summary of Challenges Encountered by Schools in the Implementation of the Child Protection Policy (CPP)

Domains	General Weighted Average	Verbal Interpretation	Summary of Key Challenges Identified
Organization and Coordination	3.67	Agree	Difficulty convening CPC meetings; unclear roles; inadequate training; task distribution issues; high turnover; poor coordination and communication among CPC members and stakeholders.
Policies and Guidelines	3.75	Agree	Challenges in drafting compliant policies; weak policy review processes; difficulty identifying policy gaps; inconsistent updating; limited dissemination and stakeholder understanding.
Capacities and Resources	4.23	Strongly Agree	Severe budget limitations; insufficient financial support; limited technical assistance; challenges in capacity-building; difficulty rolling out training; weak stakeholder contribution to sustainable funding.
Service Delivery	3.38	Neutral	Lack of trained first responders; inconsistent recording/referral; limited monitoring; insufficient agency collaboration; weak confidentiality protocols; delayed parent notifications.
Accountability and Performance	3.53	Agree	Lack of monitoring tools; irregular reporting; weak documentation; inconsistent evaluation; limited recognition and external validation; insufficient leadership support.

The data suggests that while some foundational systems are in place, the organization faces significant challenges—particularly in resource adequacy and policy management. Most domains received an "Agree" interpretation, signaling consistent recognition of system-level issues. The strongest concern lies in Capacities and Resources, highlighting the urgent need for increased funding, technical support, and training investments. Meanwhile, the more neutral rating in Service Delivery reflects inconsistent implementation rather than unanimous dissatisfaction. These findings collectively underscore the importance of strengthening coordination mechanisms, improving policy processes, securing sustainable resources, enhancing service delivery protocols, and reinforcing accountability systems.

DISCUSSION

Level of Functionality of Child Protection Policy Implementation. These results indicate that despite the establishment of basic CPC organizational structure, policies, and service delivery mechanisms, there are still gaps in capacity building and resource allocation, especially in smaller schools. Variations in the number of school sizes indicate that bigger schools have more institutional support and established mechanisms, and smaller schools might have challenges with resource constraints and lack of skilled workers. Thus, this arises an importance of targeted efforts to build capacities, streamline procedures, and ensure that capacities to implement CPC policies effectively are achieved in all schools, irrespective of their sizes. Training, budget allocation, and resource mobilization will thus strengthen the functional capacities of the Child Protection Committees to ensure constant protection of learners.

The CPP implementation in the Division of Albay is partially functional is a finding that is consistent with national and international studies where similar results were observed in school-based child protection systems. Masekela et al. (2024) found, for example, that school safety policies in South Africa were only partially functional, attributed to a lack of communication, poor involvement, and unpredictable adoption. These results strongly tend toward Albay, where only partial functionalization is attributed by lack of coordination, poorly conducted prevention, and a lack of accountability. Recibe (2024), Natividad (2025), and Alda et al. (2024) also reached a similar finding where, though Child Protection Committees have been created in most schools, the implementation is still only partially functional, attributed to a lack of training, a lack of clear policy, and a lack of resources. That CPP implementation is only partially functional, as also observed in Albay, is additionally supported by studies led by Cervancia et al. (2019) and Aguilar-Ramat (2022), indicating that although schools have achieved notable familiarity with child protection, their implementation remains administratively challenged in achieving full functionality.

Significant Difference in the Level of Functionality of Child Protection Policy Implementation. The result demonstrates that the level of functionality of Child Protection Policy implementation is consistent across schools of different sizes, suggesting that school size does not significantly influence its implementation in the Division of Albay. The ANOVA results showed no significant difference in the degree of implementation of the Child Protection Policy across school sizes. For Organizing and

Coordination, Capacities and Resources, Providing of Services, and Holding of Accounts and Performance of Duties, the calculated F-scores were all lower than the tabular F-scores, where the probability results were greater than the significance of 0.05, implying the acceptance of the null hypothesis. ANOVA for Policies and Guidelines could not be conducted due to the absence of enough data, but the results of the study proved the notion of the absence of notable variations with regard to the size of the school and the implementation of the child protection policy, implying the presence of uniformity of child protection policy within the settings of small, medium, and large schools, thus implying the universality of the strategies to improve the implementation of the child protection policy within the Division of Albay. This finding is consistent with the policy framework of the Department of Education, which, through DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 mandates a standardized implementation of child protection mechanisms across all public schools, regardless of size. The policy emphasizes uniform compliance in the establishment of Child Protection Committees (CPCs), reporting systems, and safeguarding procedures, which may explain the absence of significant differences across school categories.

Designation of Child Protection Policy Focal Person. The acceptance of the null hypothesis across all testable dimensions implies that designation, among other factors, does not have a significant effect on the successful implementation of the Child Protection Policy. Moreover, the fact that the null hypothesis was accepted across all dimensions may indicate that Child Protection Policy has been effectively implemented in a consistent manner within the Division, given that training was a crucial aspect of the entire process.

Sulaimon and Potokri (2023) found that in Nigeria, teachers' awareness of child protection policies did not differ by gender or experience, suggesting that systemic and institutional factors outweigh demographic or structural differences. On the other hand, Hilts et al. (2023) expressed that student outcomes depended less on organizational structure and more on support systems, training, and manageable caseloads. Recibe (2024) further pointed out that while small schools faced more resource-related barriers, larger schools also struggled with inconsistent training and blurred policy interpretations, proving size does not automatically translate to effectiveness. Evaluor and Villacruz (2025) insisted that effective CPP implementation calls for solid reinforcement at the institutional level rather than the mere designation of focal persons.

Challenges Encountered by Schools in the Implementation of the Child Protection Policy. The data on the challenges suggest that while some foundational systems are in place, the organization faces significant challenges—particularly in resource adequacy and policy management. Most domains received an "Agree" interpretation, signaling consistent recognition of system-level issues. The strongest concern lies in Capacities and Resources, highlighting the urgent need for increased funding, technical support, and training investments. Meanwhile, the more neutral rating in Service Delivery reflects inconsistent implementation rather than unanimous dissatisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening coordination mechanisms, improving policy processes, securing sustainable resources, enhancing service delivery protocols, and reinforcing accountability systems.

Recommendations to Strengthen the Functionality of Child Protection Policy Implementation. It is, therefore, clear from the study that public secondary schools within the Division of Albay have taken steps to start the implementation of the Child Protection Policy, but there are some challenges in major areas of concern: organization and coordination, policies and guidelines, capacities and resources, service delivery, and accountability and performance. Recommendations for strengthening the Child Protection Policy (CPP) implementation focus on enhancing school systems, personnel capacity, and accountability mechanisms. First, organizational structures and coordination should be strengthened through regular scheduling of CPC meetings, clarification of roles and responsibilities, continuous orientation and training, generation of strategic plans, and improvement of communication among CPC members and stakeholders. Second, policies and guidelines must be strengthened through technical support on the drafting of school-based CPP policies, regular review of the policy, integration of various DepEd mandates into one unified document, and developing clear guidelines on conflict resolution and positive discipline, with an updated CPP handbook serving as a guide. Third, capacities and resources should be enhanced through targeted capacity-building activities to ensure that financial sustainability is duly supported, access to technical assistance from DepEd and partner organizations is provided, full participation in training is promoted, and the integration of CPP needs into school improvement and financial plans is carried out. Fourth, service delivery may be enhanced by the development of case-handling mechanisms, training first responders, referral and documentation systems, partnership building with external organizations, and mechanisms for confidentiality and feedback. Finally, accountability and performance may be strengthened by the development of monitoring tools, enforcing CPC reporting systems, feedback mechanisms, recognition of good CPC practices, and evaluation and validation. An evaluation will validate the effectiveness of CPP.

Conclusions

The implementation of the Child Protection Policy (CPP) in public secondary schools is generally partially functional across key areas such as organization, coordination, policies, resources, and responsiveness. While some structures are in place, schools face challenges in task distribution, policy updating, resource allocation, and timely response, with many trained first responders lacking. Moreover, there is no significant difference in the level of functionality of Child Protection Policy implementation across schools of different sizes or based on the designation of the Child Protection Policy focal person, indicating that policy implementation is consistent and depends on system-wide practices rather than school size or focal person role. The major difficulties that exist in all areas include failure to organize CPC meetings, lack of policy guidance, significant budget restraint, inconsistent service delivery, and poor monitoring frameworks.

Recommendations

Schools should strengthen the effectiveness of their CPCs in establishing a system of regular meeting schedules and clear work division, and ensuring that all members participate actively. Reducing scheduling conflicts, work overload, and communication breakdowns will enhance coordination at large. Uniformity in operational procedures

within schools can also avoid partial implementation and facilitate closer coordination among stakeholders.

DepEd and school administrators should give more technical support for drafting, revising, and harmonizing school-based CPP policies with national directives. Schools should establish systematic policy review cycles and more effective dissemination strategies to ensure that teachers, learners, and parents understand the provisions under CPP. The reinforcement of policy coherence, together with regular updating of CPP handbooks, would enhance compliance and raise the quality of its implementation.

Given that the capacities and resources are still developing, schools can focus on allocating their budgets to support the activities and services of CPP. Capacity development activities can target training first responders, CPC members, and teachers on child protection protocol and case management. Collaboration between schools and other organizations, such as LGUs, NGOs, and child protection organizations, can help complement resource gaps and support services.

If effective service delivery and accountability have to be realized, schools must adhere to appropriate case-handling guidelines, develop and enhance monitoring and evaluation strategies, and provide feedback options. Regular reporting and evaluation will help schools meet their objectives of safeguarding children. Preventive strategies, quick response, and proactive identification, even within prevention components, are necessary to safeguard children effectively.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researchers ensured that the study complied with all ethical standards throughout the conduct of the research. Informed consent was properly obtained from the respondents before their participation, and they were informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary. The respondents were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or disadvantage. The anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were strictly maintained, and all information gathered was handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act. The researchers also safeguarded the well-being, dignity, and rights of the participants throughout the research process. Furthermore, no conflict of interest existed in the conduct of the study. Plagiarism was strictly avoided by properly acknowledging all sources used, and the interpretation of the findings was carried out objectively and without bias. The results of the study were used purely for academic and research purposes. In addition, artificial intelligence (AI) tools were utilized only to assist in grammar checking, language improvement, and organization of ideas, and their use was fully disclosed to ensure transparency and ethical compliance.

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