



STATUS OF BULLYING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 1 STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Bullying remains a significant concern in elementary schools due to its negative effects on learners' academic performance and well-being. This study examined the extent of bullying and its relationship with the academic performance of Grade 1 learners in the District of San Sebastian, Schools Division of Samar. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, using a validated questionnaire, with data analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and correlation analyses. The findings revealed that most learners came from low-income households, with 72.35 percent of families earning below ₱5,000 per month. Bullying was generally experienced to a low to moderate extent, although significant differences existed between teachers' and students' perceptions, particularly regarding physical bullying behaviors. These findings suggest that some bullying incidents may not be readily recognized by teachers, highlighting the need for improved awareness and reporting. The study concludes that strengthening school-based anti-bullying programs, enhancing teacher awareness, and promoting collaboration among schools, parents, and the community are essential to creating a safe and supportive learning environment for young learners.

Keywords: *Bullying, Academic Performance, Grade 1 Learners, Elementary Education, School Climate*

INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains one of the most persistent challenges affecting learners in educational institutions worldwide. It is recognized as a serious public health and educational concern because of its adverse effects on students' physical, psychological, social, and academic development. Although schools are intended to provide safe and supportive learning environments, bullying continues to occur in various forms, disrupting students' learning experiences and overall well-being. The rapid expansion of digital communication has further intensified the problem by extending bullying beyond school premises through cyberbullying, making victimization more pervasive and difficult to monitor (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019).

Bullying refers to intentional and repeated aggressive behavior directed toward an individual who has difficulty defending himself or herself because of an imbalance of power between the victim and the perpetrator. Three defining characteristics distinguish bullying from ordinary conflict: intentionality, repetition, and power imbalance (Smith et al., 2012). Bullying may occur through physical aggression, verbal harassment, relational or social exclusion, and cyberbullying. These behaviors negatively affect not only victims but also perpetrators, bystanders, families, and the overall school climate (UNESCO, 2019).

Research has consistently demonstrated that bullying is associated with numerous adverse educational outcomes. Students who experience bullying often exhibit decreased classroom participation, lower academic motivation, poor concentration, increased absenteeism, emotional distress, and declining academic achievement (Al-Raqad et al., 2017; Malquist, 2019; Rustholz, 2021). Persistent exposure to bullying may also contribute to anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, and school avoidance, all of which impede learners' cognitive and social development (Bandura, 1982; Hinduja & Patchin, 2019).

The prevalence of bullying remains a significant global concern. UNESCO (2019) estimated that approximately one in every three students worldwide has experienced bullying in school. Likewise, findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed that Filipino students reported one of the highest rates of bullying among participating countries, with approximately 65% of 15-year-old learners indicating that they experienced bullying at least a few times each month (OECD, 2019). These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that promote safer learning environments and protect children's rights to quality education.

In the Philippines, bullying continues to be a pressing educational issue despite the implementation of national policies designed to address it. The Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, also known as the Child Protection Policy, which established mechanisms for preventing and responding to bullying and other forms of abuse in schools. This policy was further strengthened through Republic Act No. 10627, otherwise known as the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, which requires all elementary and secondary schools to formulate and implement comprehensive anti-

bullying policies. These policies emphasize preventive education, reporting mechanisms, intervention programs, and disciplinary procedures for bullying incidents.

Despite these legislative efforts, bullying remains prevalent in many Philippine schools. Reports from UNICEF (2019) indicate that Filipino children continue to experience both traditional bullying and cyberbullying at alarming rates. While legal frameworks provide schools with guidelines for addressing bullying, challenges remain in their consistent implementation. Variations in reporting practices, limited guidance resources, inadequate teacher training, and the underreporting of incidents continue to hinder the effectiveness of anti-bullying initiatives (Hall, 2017; Hinduja & Patchin, 2019).

Although numerous studies have examined bullying among adolescents and secondary school students, relatively few investigations have focused on learners in the early grades of elementary education. Existing literature has predominantly concentrated on middle school and high school populations, where bullying behaviors are often more visible. However, bullying behaviors may emerge during the early years of schooling, making early identification and intervention critical for preventing long-term academic and psychosocial consequences. Understanding bullying among Grade 1 learners is particularly important because this developmental stage establishes the foundation for children's academic engagement, social relationships, and emotional adjustment.

Within the District of San Sebastian, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the prevalence of bullying among Grade 1 learners and its relationship with academic performance. Available school records provide only a partial picture of bullying incidents, while many cases remain undocumented due to inconsistent reporting mechanisms and the limited availability of historical guidance records. Consequently, school administrators and teachers have insufficient local evidence to guide the development of effective intervention programs tailored to the needs of young learners.

Addressing this research gap is essential because early exposure to bullying may adversely affect learners' motivation, classroom participation, attendance, and academic achievement. Moreover, generating localized evidence can assist school leaders in evaluating the implementation of existing anti-bullying policies and developing context-specific strategies that promote safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments.

Therefore, this study investigated the prevalence of bullying and its relationship with the academic performance of Grade 1 learners in the District of San Sebastian. Specifically, it sought to provide empirical evidence to support school administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers in strengthening the implementation of anti-bullying programs, improving child protection practices, and enhancing the quality of elementary education.

Research Questions

This study investigated the status of bullying in elementary schools and its impact

on the academic performance of Grade 1 students in the District of San Sebastian, Schools Division of Samar, during the School Year 2022-2023. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

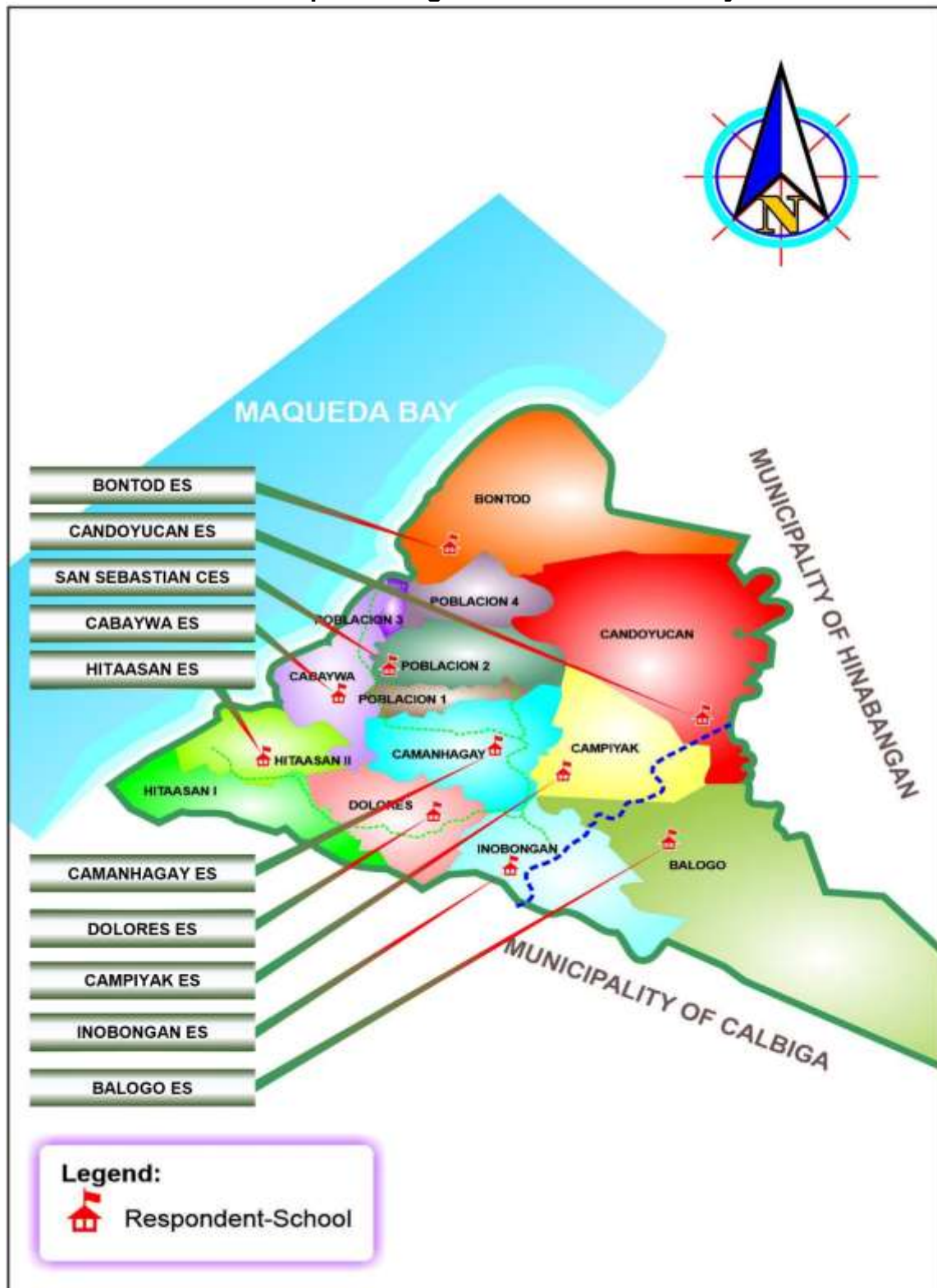
1. What is the profile of the student-respondents in terms of the following variates:
 - 1.1 age and sex;
 - 1.2 parents' highest educational attainment;
 - 1.3 parents' occupation; and
 - 1.4 gross monthly family income?
2. What is the profile of the teacher-respondents in terms of the following variates:
 - 2.1 age and sex;
 - 2.2 civil status;
 - 2.3 gross monthly family income;
 - 2.4 highest educational attainment;
 - 2.5 number of years in teaching;
 - 2.6 relevant in-service trainings; and
 - 2.7 latest performance rating based on IPCRF?
3. What is the status of bullying in elementary schools as assessed by the teacher- and student-respondents in terms of the following types of bullying:
 - 3.1 physical;
 - 3.2 verbal;
 - 3.3 social; and
 - 3.4 cyber?
4. Is there a significant difference in the assessment of the two groups of respondents relative to bullying in elementary schools?
5. What is the academic performance of the student-respondents based on their General Weighted Average (GWA) during the School Year 2022-2023?
6. Is there a significant relationship between the academic performance of the student-respondents and the following identified variates:
 - 6.1 student-related variates; and
 - 6.2 perceptions on status of bullying in elementary schools?
7. What intervention program may be derived based on the findings of the study?

Locale of the Study

Figure 1 presents the locale of the study, the District of San Sebastian Schools Division of Samar, specifically the 10 public schools.

The public schools included in this study were: Balogo Elementary School (ES), Bontod ES, Cabaywa ES, Campiyak ES, Camanhagay ES, Canduyocan ES, Dolores ES, Hitaasan ES, Inobongan Integrated School, and San Sebastian Central Elementary School.

Figure 1
The Map Showing the Locale of the Study



METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to determine the extent of bullying in elementary schools and its relationship with the academic performance of Grade 1 learners in the District of San Sebastian, Schools Division of Samar, during the School Year 2022–2023. A total enumeration technique was utilized, involving 170 Grade 1 learners and 73 elementary teachers from ten public elementary schools. Data were collected using researcher-developed questionnaires, which underwent expert validation and reliability testing through the test-retest method and Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.85$). The student questionnaire gathered information on respondents' profiles, attitudes toward bullying, and experiences with physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying, while the teacher questionnaire assessed perceptions of bullying in the school setting. Students' academic performance was obtained from their General Weighted Average (GWA) based on official school records. Ethical procedures were observed by securing approvals from the appropriate education authorities, obtaining parental consent for minor participants, and ensuring confidentiality in accordance with the Data Privacy Act. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, weighted mean, median, mode, and mean absolute deviation) and inferential statistics, including the independent samples t-test, Chi-square test, Cramer's V, Pearson's product-moment correlation, and Fisher's t-test, with all hypotheses tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following were the salient findings of the study:

1. The demographic analysis indicated that most respondents were 7 years old, comprising 68.82% of the sample, primarily representing early primary education students. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with a slight majority of females (52.35%) over males (47.65%), and a median age of 7 for both genders, suggesting minimal age variability (Mean Absolute Deviation of 0.40 years for males and 0.41 years for females). The slight leftward skew in age distribution (-0.179) suggested fewer younger students than older ones, providing important context for interpreting findings related to academic performance and social behaviors.

2. The analysis showed that a significant majority of respondents (97.06%) came from families where parents had only attained an elementary level of education, indicating predominantly low socioeconomic backgrounds. Only 1.76% of parents had completed high school, with none having pursued higher education, which limited the findings' generalizability to more diverse populations. These insights emphasized the importance of considering socioeconomic factors and parental education levels when interpreting the educational experiences and outcomes of the student-respondents.

3. The data revealed that farming was the primary occupation among parents (47.65%), followed by fishing (21.18%), underscoring the central role of agriculture and

natural resources in the local economy. With only 1.76% of parents employed in government positions and 8.24% engaged in business, limited access to higher-paying jobs and educational opportunities was apparent. This occupational distribution highlighted the socioeconomic challenges faced by student-respondents, influencing their educational aspirations and outcomes and underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

4. The study found a significant prevalence of low-income households, with 72.35% of respondents reporting a monthly income below Php 5,000.00, indicating substantial financial challenges. The income mode was Php 2,139.66, considerably below the national average, reinforcing the low-income status of these families. These findings highlighted the need for targeted interventions to improve educational access and quality, as limited financial resources could hinder students' academic performance and perpetuate poverty cycles.

5. Weighted means analysis revealed a prevailing sentiment among student-respondents against bullying in school, with a grand weighted mean of 1.36, indicating "Strongly Disagree." This suggested that students largely rejected bullying as acceptable or enjoyable, laying the foundation for fostering a positive school environment through anti-bullying initiatives promoting empathy and respect.

6. The data indicated a predominantly female teaching workforce, with 83.56% of respondents being female and a notable representation of younger teachers, particularly in the 25-29 age bracket. Median ages differed by gender, with male teachers averaging 31.25 years and female teachers 37.19 years, reflecting trends in hiring and career longevity. The positive skewness in age distribution suggested an influx of younger educators, potentially impacting teaching practices and the educational environment.

7. The data showed that 69.86% of teachers were married, indicating that the profession attracted individuals in stable relationships, which might influence work-life balance and professional commitments. The presence of single teachers added diversity to the teaching staff, enriching the educational environment with varied perspectives. Understanding civil status distribution was crucial for analyzing the study's findings and could inform strategies supporting teacher retention and professional development.

8. The study found that 67.12% of teachers earned a modest income, ranging from Php 27,000.00 to Php 31,999.00, with a mode of Php 29,000.00, suggesting that lower to moderate income levels were prevalent among teaching staff. This financial context could influence teachers' stability, job satisfaction, and access to professional development, underscoring the need for strategies to support teachers and enhance the educational environment.

9. Teachers demonstrated diverse educational backgrounds, with 50.68% having pursued postgraduate studies, indicating a commitment to professional development. Only 10.96% held postgraduate degrees, while a small minority (8.22%) had only a

bachelor's degree. This distribution highlighted the role of advanced education in improving teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.

10. The data showed a concentration of relatively new teachers, with 34.25% having between 2 to 6 years of experience and a median tenure of 9 years. The lower representation of highly experienced teachers suggested a need for mentorship and professional development to support newer educators. Understanding this distribution was essential for developing strategies to enhance teaching effectiveness and the overall educational environment.

11. Teachers attended an average of 1.99 in-service trainings, with the majority at the school (4.89 on average) and district (4.15) levels, indicating strong engagement in professional development. However, participation in higher-level trainings (division, region, national) was significantly lower, suggesting potential barriers to broader training opportunities. Recognizing these patterns is crucial to identifying areas for additional support and resources for teachers' professional growth.

12. Individual Performance Commitment and Review Form (IPCRF) data showed predominantly positive teacher performance assessments, with 53.42% rated "Outstanding" and 46.58% as "Very Satisfactory," suggesting strong teaching effectiveness. The absence of lower ratings and a median in the "Outstanding" category underscored the teaching staff's commitment to quality education.

13. There was a significant gap in perceptions of physical bullying between teachers and students. Teachers rated its prevalence as "Sometimes" (1.90), while students reported experiencing it "Often" (3.33). For example, students rated "Hitting or kicking" at 3.39, whereas teachers rated it much lower (2.32). This disconnect, particularly in "Damage of property," where teachers rated it as "Never" (1.44) compared to students' "Regularly" (3.16), highlighted the need for improved teacher-student communication to develop effective anti-bullying strategies.

14. Significant differences in perceptions of verbal bullying were also evident, with teachers perceiving it as "Sometimes" (1.93) and students reporting it "Often" (3.26). For instance, students rated "Inappropriate sexual comments" at 3.38, while teachers rated it as "Never" (1.33). This discrepancy underscored the need for improved communication to address bullying behaviors effectively.

15. Perceptions of social bullying also diverged, with teachers rating its occurrence as "Sometimes" (1.98) and students as "Often" (3.35). Students reported frequent exclusion from activities and sharing secrets, highlighting a need for open communication to foster a supportive school environment.

16. The data revealed a significant disparity in perceptions of cyberbullying, with teachers rating it as "Never" (1.08), while students reported it "Often" (3.65). Students indicated frequent occurrences of behaviors like "Posting embarrassing photos" and "Spreading rumors," highlighting the need for greater awareness and communication

among teachers, students, and parents to prevent cyberbullying.

17. There were no significant differences in bullying assessments between teachers and students across physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying categories. Despite students reporting higher levels of bullying, t-tests revealed negative t-values for all categories, supporting the null hypothesis and suggesting overlapping perceptions. This finding emphasized the importance of enhancing communication and awareness to foster a supportive environment.

18. The distribution of General Weighted Average (GWA) scores showed that a significant portion of students performed at or above expectations. However, a notable percentage scored below expectations, indicating a need for targeted interventions for struggling students. The median GWA of 86 and Mean Absolute Deviation of 16.97 suggested moderate variability in performance, with a slight negative skew (-0.172) towards higher scores.

19. All profile variables exhibited very weak associations with academic performance, as indicated by statistically insignificant correlation coefficients and Cramer's V values at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level. This suggested that demographic factors and family background did not significantly influence academic outcomes, implying that teaching quality or individual motivation may play a more crucial role.

20. The findings showed a very weak correlation coefficient ($\rho = 0.016$) between academic performance and perceptions of bullying, with no significant relationship. The low Fisher's t-value (0.208) and p-value (0.836) led to the acceptance of the null hypothesis, indicating that bullying perceptions did not significantly influence academic results, pointing to other factors as determinants of academic achievement.

Conclusions

This study concludes that although Grade 1 learners generally demonstrated negative attitudes toward bullying, bullying behaviors, particularly physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying, were still perceived by students to occur more frequently than recognized by teachers. The findings highlight notable disparities in teachers' and students' perceptions, suggesting the need for strengthened awareness, reporting mechanisms, and communication among teachers, learners, and parents to ensure the timely identification and management of bullying incidents. While most respondents came from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, neither demographic characteristics nor perceptions of bullying were found to have a significant relationship with students' academic performance. This indicates that academic achievement may be influenced more by other factors beyond family background and bullying experiences. Overall, the study underscores the importance of reinforcing school-based anti-bullying programs, enhancing teacher capacity to detect and respond to bullying, and fostering a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment for young learners.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study findings, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Strengthen the monitoring of the functionality of the Child Protection Policy (CPP) at the school level to ensure its effective implementation and to foster a safe learning environment for students.
2. Strengthen the implementation of the Homeroom Guidance Program to provide students with structured support and guidance on social, emotional, and academic matters.
3. Develop and implement targeted support programs for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to enhance their academic performance and address the unique challenges they face.
4. Create initiatives aimed at increasing parental engagement and education, particularly focusing on the importance of educational attainment, to improve the overall educational environment for students.
5. Address barriers to accessing higher-level professional development opportunities for teachers by providing resources and support for participation in division, regional, and national training programs.
6. Establish mentorship programs that pair less experienced teachers with veteran educators to enhance teaching practices, provide support, and improve the overall educational environment.
7. Develop comprehensive anti-bullying initiatives that focus on improving communication between teachers and students, ensuring that both groups have a shared understanding of bullying behaviors and their implications.
8. Implement awareness campaigns that educate students, teachers, and parents about the signs and impacts of cyberbullying, promoting a safer online environment through proactive prevention strategies.
9. Conduct regular assessments of teacher performance and student outcomes to identify areas for improvement and to ensure that teaching practices align with student needs and educational goals.
10. Conduct further studies to explore the impact of socioeconomic factors on student achievement, focusing on how these factors interact with educational practices and student motivation.
11. Investigate additional factors influencing academic performance, such as

teaching quality, classroom environment, and individual student motivation, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of student success.

12. Initiate longitudinal studies to track changes in perceptions of bullying over time among students and teachers, assessing the effectiveness of implemented anti-bullying strategies and their impact on academic performance and school climate.

13. Further studies may be conducted to validate the findings of the study and explore additional factors influencing educational outcomes, especially those related to the effectiveness of school policies.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study adhered to established ethical standards throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies of Samar College and the appropriate authorities of the Schools Division of Samar, including the Schools Division Superintendent, the Public Schools District Supervisor, and the school heads of the participating elementary schools. Because the study involved Grade 1 learners who were minors, informed consent was secured from their parents or legal guardians, while participation by teachers was voluntary. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, assured that their participation was voluntary, and advised of their right to decline or withdraw at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by assigning codes instead of using participants' names, and all information gathered was used solely for research purposes. The researcher also complied with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) in handling respondents' personal information and obtaining students' General Weighted Averages (GWA) from official school records, ensuring that all collected data were securely stored, treated with strict confidentiality, and reported only in aggregate form.

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