STUDENT JOURNAL OF
TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
ISSN (Print): 2945-381X; (Online): 3082-5563 | VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2 (2026)

BEYOND POLICY AWARENESS: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS' AWARENESS AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS TO CHILD PROTECTION IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Article History:
Received: Aug. 31, 2026
Revised: Nov. 5, 2026
Accepted: Nov. 11, 2026

Keywords:
Child Protection Policy, teachers' awareness, institutional responsiveness, school-based child protection, public elementary schools, Philippines

DOI:
10.65141/sjter.v3i2n6



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Abstract

Effective child protection in schools requires not only teachers' awareness of relevant policies but also institutional mechanisms that ensure their consistent implementation. This study examined teachers' awareness of the Child Protection Policy, the level of school responsiveness to its provisions, and the relationship between these variables in public elementary schools in Quirino, Isabela, Philippines. Using a descriptive-correlational research design, the study assessed teachers' awareness and school responsiveness across 15 indicators and employed correlation analysis to determine their associations. Results revealed that teachers were very aware of the Child Protection Policy, particularly its provisions concerning bullying and the prevention of violence against children. Meanwhile, school responsiveness was rated as highly implemented, with the adoption and implementation of the policy receiving the highest rating. Correlational analysis demonstrated positive and statistically significant relationships between teachers' awareness and school responsiveness. The strongest association was observed in the School Child Protection Committee's system for identifying learners at risk of abuse or harm. However, three institutional indicators, namely policy adoption, external agency coordination, and specialized personnel training, were not significantly associated with teachers' awareness. These findings suggest that while teacher awareness is an important dimension associated with school responsiveness, institutional implementation also involves organizational arrangements and administrative support. It is recommended that schools strengthen continuous professional development, reinforce child protection protocols, and enhance institutional monitoring and interagency collaboration to ensure the consistent and effective implementation of child protection measures.

INTRODUCTION

A school may be equipped with classrooms, instructional materials, and qualified teachers, yet its purpose remains incomplete if learners cannot study in a safe and protective

environment. Beyond providing quality instruction, schools have the responsibility to safeguard children from violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of maltreatment. A safe learning environment is therefore essential not only to learners' physical and emotional well-being but also to their academic performance and holistic development (Gupta & Verma, 2025; Acoba & Ariola, 2025). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) recognizes every child's right to protection from all forms of violence and abuse, while the World Health Organization (2022) emphasizes the importance of coordinated interventions and supportive environments in preventing violence against children.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education institutionalized these responsibilities through DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, otherwise known as the Child Protection Policy. The policy provides guidelines for protecting learners from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of maltreatment. It also establishes the responsibilities of schools and school personnel in preventing violations, addressing reported incidents, and promoting child-friendly learning environments. However, the existence of a formal policy does not necessarily guarantee its consistent and effective implementation. Its success depends largely on how well teachers understand its provisions and how effectively schools translate these provisions into actual protective practices.

Teachers play a crucial role in child protection because their regular interactions with learners allow them to recognize possible signs of abuse, neglect, bullying, and other forms of vulnerability. Their awareness of the Child Protection Policy is important in understanding prohibited acts, reporting procedures, referral mechanisms, and appropriate interventions. Bayucca (2020) and Dela Fuente (2021) emphasized the importance of teachers' familiarity with the policy and the need for continuing orientation and professional development. Similarly, Asio et al. (2020), Antiza and Labitad (2024), and Esmillaren et al. (2024) reported a positive association between teachers' awareness and school responsiveness to child protection concerns. Moreover, Walsh et al. (2013) and Gün et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of teachers' knowledge of reporting responsibilities and their ability to recognize and appropriately respond to suspected cases of child maltreatment. These findings suggest that teachers' awareness is a fundamental consideration in ensuring that child protection responsibilities are properly carried out.

Nevertheless, effective child protection cannot rest solely on teachers' knowledge and individual efforts. Schools must also demonstrate responsiveness through functional Child Protection Committees, accessible reporting mechanisms, appropriate referral procedures, preventive activities, learner support services, and coordination with concerned agencies. Cohen et al. (2009), Thapa et al. (2013), and Wang and Degol (2016) emphasized that school safety, positive relationships, institutional support, and a favorable school climate are important in establishing protective learning environments. Similarly, Alazri and Hanna (2020) explained that reporting decisions are influenced not only by individual knowledge but also by organizational procedures and institutional conditions. Sahijuan et al. (2025) likewise identified inadequate training, limited awareness, resource constraints, and sociocultural considerations as challenges affecting child protection implementation. These findings demonstrate that school responsiveness requires clear institutional mechanisms, adequate

resources, administrative support, and shared responsibility among school personnel and stakeholders.

Furthermore, previous studies have shown that strengthening child protection implementation requires continuous capacity-building and institutional improvement. Dudley et al. (2022) demonstrated that school-based prevention interventions could improve teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward reporting suspected abuse. Mathews et al. (2017) similarly found that structured educational interventions improved participants' knowledge of reporting obligations and attitudes toward fulfilling their responsibilities. These findings highlight the importance of sustained professional development and institutional initiatives in ensuring that child protection policies are not merely documented requirements but are consistently practiced in schools.

Despite the existing policies and related studies, the continuing need to strengthen child protection implementation makes it important to examine both teachers' awareness and school responsiveness in specific educational settings. In public elementary schools, where learners are particularly dependent on teachers and school personnel for their safety and welfare, understanding these dimensions can help determine whether policy provisions are sufficiently understood and translated into appropriate institutional practices.

In view of these considerations, the present study seeks to determine teachers' awareness and school responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy in public elementary schools in the Municipality of Quirino, Isabela. Specifically, it aims to examine the extent of teachers' awareness and the level of school responsiveness as bases for developing a Policy Enhancement Plan. Through this initiative, the study intends to provide practical recommendations that may strengthen teachers' understanding, improve institutional mechanisms, and promote more consistent implementation of child protection measures. Ultimately, it seeks to contribute to the establishment of safer, more responsive, and child-friendly learning environments where the rights, dignity, and welfare of every learner are upheld.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research approach using a descriptive-correlational design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and subjected to appropriate statistical analyses to determine teachers' awareness of the Child Protection Policy and the extent of school responsiveness to the said policy. The descriptive component assessed the levels of both variables, while the correlational component examined the significance and strength of their relationship without establishing causal inferences.

Respondents and Locale of the Study

The study involved 62 public elementary school teachers in the Municipality of Quirino, Isabela, during School Year 2026–2027. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure adequate representation from the participating schools.

Research Instrument

The research instrument was adopted from the Survey Questionnaire on Awareness and Implementation of the DepEd Child Protection Policy in Schools developed by Macatimpag (2018). It underwent pilot testing to establish its reliability, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83, indicating good internal consistency. The instrument consisted of two parts: Part I assessed teachers' awareness of the Child Protection Policy through 15 indicators covering its legal foundations, teachers' responsibilities, protective measures, and reporting procedures; while Part II evaluated school responsiveness in implementing child protection measures based on the respondents' perceptions.

Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

The researcher obtained an institutional clearance from the Graduate School, followed by securing approval from the Schools Division Superintendent, Public Schools District Supervisor, and respective school heads. Upon receipt of the necessary approvals, arrangements were made with each participating school for the administration of the survey questionnaires. The respondents were oriented on the objectives and procedures of the study, after which their informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

The collected data were systematically organized, analyzed, and interpreted using appropriate statistical tools. Weighted Mean was used to determine the levels of teachers' awareness of the Child Protection Policy and school responsiveness to its implementation. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r) was utilized to examine the significant relationship between teachers' awareness and school responsiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that teachers demonstrated a very high level of awareness of the Child Protection Policy, as evidenced by the grand mean of 3.79. This suggests that teachers possess substantial knowledge and understanding of the policy's provisions, particularly those concerning the protection of learners from abuse, violence, neglect, exploitation, discrimination, and bullying. The consistently high ratings across all 15 indicators further suggest that awareness is not confined to a particular provision but extends to the policy's underlying principles, preventive measures, and responsibilities of school personnel.

Table 1. Level of Teachers' Awareness of the Child Protection Policy

Items	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 protects learners from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse.	3.73	Very Aware
2. DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 contains the guidelines for implementing the Child Protection Policy in schools.	3.77	Very Aware
3. The 1987 Philippine Constitution protects children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and sexual abuse.	3.80	Very Aware

4. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) protects children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and sexual abuse.	3.69	Very Aware
5. The Child Protection Policy aims to provide a safe, secure, and child-friendly learning environment.	3.82	Very Aware
6. Teachers and learning facilitators serve as substitute parents while learners are in school.	3.79	Very Aware
7. The Child Protection Policy provides special protection to children whose safety and development are at risk.	3.82	Very Aware
8. The Child Protection Policy ensures that children receive the protection and care necessary for their well-being.	3.75	Very Aware
9. DepEd implements a zero-tolerance policy against child abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse.	3.80	Very Aware
10. Bullying can occur in different forms.	3.84	Very Aware
11. Bullying involves repeated acts that cause physical, emotional, psychological, or social harm to another learner.	3.84	Very Aware
12. Corporal punishment is prohibited under the Child Protection Policy.	3.82	Very Aware
13. Positive and non-violent discipline promotes appropriate behavior through respectful and constructive approaches.	3.77	Very Aware
14. The Child Protection Policy aims to prevent violence against children in schools.	3.84	Very Aware
15. Violence against children in schools may be committed by school administrators, teaching personnel, or non-teaching personnel.	3.79	Very Aware
Grand Mean	**3.79**	**Very Aware**

Among the indicators, the highest mean (M = 3.84) was recorded for three statements: the recognition that bullying can occur in different forms, the understanding that bullying involves repeated acts that cause physical, emotional, psychological, or social harm, and the recognition that the Child Protection Policy aims to prevent violence against children in schools. These results highlight teachers' strong awareness of bullying-related concerns and the preventive orientation of the policy. Meanwhile, the lowest mean (M = 3.69) was obtained for the statement concerning the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), although it was still interpreted as Very Aware. This relatively lower rating may suggest that teachers are slightly less familiar with the international legal framework underpinning children's rights compared with the specific provisions and applications of the Child Protection Policy in schools.

The remaining indicators also received consistently high mean ratings, ranging from 3.73 to 3.82. In particular, teachers demonstrated strong awareness of the policy's role in establishing a safe, secure, and child-friendly learning environment, protecting children at risk, prohibiting corporal punishment, and promoting positive and non-violent discipline. Their awareness of the responsibilities of teachers and learning facilitators as substitute parents while learners are in school (M = 3.79) likewise underscores their recognition of the duty of care entrusted to school personnel. Furthermore, the high rating concerning the involvement

of school administrators, teaching personnel, and non-teaching personnel in acts of violence against children (M = 3.79) indicates an understanding that child protection is a shared institutional responsibility.

Overall, the findings suggest that teachers have a comprehensive awareness of the Child Protection Policy and its fundamental provisions. However, awareness should not be equated with the actual implementation of protective practices. Thus, sustaining this level of awareness requires continuous professional development, policy orientation, and institutional initiatives that translate teachers' knowledge into consistent child-protection practices. Particular attention may also be given to strengthening teachers' understanding of the international foundations of children's rights, especially the UNCRC, to reinforce the broader legal and ethical principles underlying child protection in educational settings.

Table 2. Level of School Responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy

Items	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. The school adopts and implements a Child Protection Policy.	3.87	Highly Implemented
2. The school informs learners, school personnel, parents, and visitors about the Child Protection Policy.	3.85	Highly Implemented
3. The School Child Protection Committee is organized and functional.	3.70	Highly Implemented
4. The school follows proper procedures in handling disciplinary cases involving learners.	3.67	Highly Implemented
5. The school conducts training on child protection policies and procedures.	3.69	Highly Implemented
6. The school provides information campaigns and orientation on child protection for teachers and other school personnel.	3.80	Highly Implemented
7. The school implements a Student Code of Conduct.	3.69	Highly Implemented
8. The school coordinates with government agencies and other organizations on child protection concerns.	3.75	Highly Implemented
9. School personnel practice positive and non-violent discipline in dealing with learners.	3.79	Highly Implemented
10. The School Child Protection Committee conducts activities that promote child protection and learner safety.	3.80	Highly Implemented
11. The school provides training on positive discipline, classroom management, stress management, and gender sensitivity.	3.72	Highly Implemented
12. The school integrates children's rights into classroom teaching and learning activities.	3.80	Highly Implemented
13. Cases of bullying are properly documented and immediately reported to the School Head.	3.69	Highly Implemented
14. The School Child Protection Committee has a system for identifying learners who may be at risk of abuse or harm.	3.75	Highly Implemented
15. The School Child Protection Committee coordinates with the PNP, the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), and other partner agencies in handling child protection cases.	3.70	Highly Implemented
Grand Mean	**3.75**	**Highly Implemented**

The results in Table 2 reveal that the school demonstrated a high level of responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy, as indicated by the grand mean of 3.75, interpreted as Highly Implemented. This suggests that child protection measures are substantially integrated into school policies, administrative procedures, and learner-support mechanisms. The consistently high ratings across all indicators further indicate that the school has established institutional practices to promote learner safety and address child protection concerns.

Among the indicators, the highest mean (M = 3.87) was recorded for the adoption and implementation of a Child Protection Policy, followed by the dissemination of information about the policy to learners, school personnel, parents, and visitors (M = 3.85). These findings highlight the school's emphasis on institutionalizing child protection and ensuring stakeholder awareness of its provisions. Similarly, the integration of children's rights into classroom instruction, the conduct of information campaigns, and the implementation of activities promoting child protection and learner safety (all M = 3.80) demonstrate efforts to translate policy commitments into school-based practices.

In contrast, the lowest mean (M = 3.67) was observed in the school's adherence to proper procedures in handling disciplinary cases involving learners. Although still classified as Highly Implemented, this result identifies an area requiring further attention, particularly in ensuring the consistent application of appropriate and policy-compliant disciplinary procedures. The implementation of the Student Code of Conduct, the provision of training on child protection policies and procedures, and the immediate reporting of bullying incidents (all M = 3.69) also received comparatively lower ratings. These findings suggest that strengthening personnel capacity, reinforcing reporting protocols, and ensuring consistency in the handling of learner-related concerns remain important considerations.

Other indicators reflect the school's efforts to establish a coordinated child protection system. The provision of training on positive discipline, classroom management, stress management, and gender sensitivity (M = 3.72), together with coordination between the School Child Protection Committee and external agencies, including the Philippine National Police and the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (M = 3.70), underscores the importance of institutional collaboration in addressing child protection concerns. Such mechanisms provide a framework for responding to cases that require coordinated intervention and specialized support.

Overall, the findings indicate that the school has established substantial mechanisms for implementing the Child Protection Policy. Nevertheless, the comparatively lower ratings for disciplinary procedures, personnel training, and incident reporting point to specific areas for institutional improvement. These results suggest the need for sustained capacity-building, consistent enforcement of established protocols, and regular monitoring of child protection practices. While the overall rating reflects a high level of reported implementation, continued attention to these operational areas is necessary to ensure that institutional commitments are translated into consistent and responsive child protection practices.

Table 3. Correlational Analysis Between Teachers' Awareness and School Responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy

School Responsiveness	Teachers Awareness	
	r-value	p-value
1. The school adopts and implements a Child Protection Policy.	.149	.252
2. The school informs learners, school personnel, parents, and visitors about the Child Protection Policy.	.327*	.010
3. The School Child Protection Committee is organized and functional.	.332*	.009
4. The school follows proper procedures in handling disciplinary cases involving learners.	.264*	.039
5. The school conducts training on child protection policies and procedures.	.428*	.001
6. The school provides information campaigns and orientation on child protection for teachers and other school personnel.	.443*	p<.001
7. The school implements a Student Code of Conduct.	.289*	.024
8. The school coordinates with government agencies and other organizations on child protection concerns.	.183	.158
9. School personnel practice positive and non-violent discipline in dealing with learners.	.431*	.001
10. The School Child Protection Committee conducts activities that promote child protection and learner safety.	.424*	.001
11. The school provides training on positive discipline, classroom management, stress management, and gender sensitivity.	.240	.063
12. The school integrates children's rights into classroom teaching and learning activities.	.465*	p<.001
13. .Cases of bullying are properly documented and immediately reported to the School Head.	.421*	.001
14. The School Child Protection Committee has a system for identifying learners who may be at risk of abuse or harm.	.574*	p<.001
15. The School Child Protection Committee coordinates with the PNP, the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), and other partner agencies in handling child protection cases.	.486*	p<.001

Table 3 presents the correlation between teachers' awareness and the different indicators of school responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy. The findings reveal that teachers' awareness was positively and significantly correlated with 12 out of the 15 indicators of school responsiveness, with correlation coefficients ranging from weak to moderate positive relationships ($r = .264$ to $.574$, $p < .05$). This suggests that higher levels of teachers' awareness tend to be associated with stronger implementation of specific child protection mechanisms within schools.

Among the indicators, the strongest positive correlation was observed between teachers' awareness and the School Child Protection Committee's system for identifying learners who may be at risk of abuse or harm ($r = .574$, $p < .001$). This was followed by coordination with the Philippine National Police, the Local Social Welfare and Development Office, and other partner agencies in handling child protection cases ($r = .486$, $p < .001$), as well as the integration of children's rights into classroom teaching and learning activities ($r = .465$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that teachers' awareness is particularly associated with

institutional mechanisms that require recognition of child protection concerns, coordinated responses, and the integration of children's rights into instructional practices.

Other significant relationships were observed in the provision of information campaigns and orientation activities ($r = .443$, $p < .001$), the practice of positive and non-violent discipline ($r = .431$, $p = .001$), the conduct of training on child protection policies and procedures ($r = .428$, $p = .001$), and activities promoting child protection and learner safety ($r = .424$, $p = .001$). Significant correlations were also established with the proper documentation and immediate reporting of bullying cases ($r = .421$, $p = .001$), dissemination of policy information to stakeholders ($r = .327$, $p = .010$), the functionality of the School Child Protection Committee ($r = .332$, $p = .009$), implementation of the Student Code of Conduct ($r = .289$, $p = .024$), and adherence to proper disciplinary procedures ($r = .264$, $p = .039$). Although these relationships vary in magnitude, their positive directions consistently indicate that greater teacher awareness is associated with stronger school responsiveness across several operational and preventive dimensions.

However, three indicators did not demonstrate statistically significant relationships with teachers' awareness: the adoption and implementation of a Child Protection Policy ($r = .149$, $p = .252$), coordination with government agencies and other organizations on child protection concerns ($r = .183$, $p = .158$), and the provision of training on positive discipline, classroom management, stress management, and gender sensitivity ($r = .240$, $p = .063$). These findings suggest that certain institutional practices may operate independently of teachers' individual levels of awareness. In particular, the formal adoption of school policies and external coordination mechanisms may be influenced by administrative directives, institutional arrangements, and established partnerships rather than teachers' awareness alone. Similarly, the provision of specialized training may depend on institutional resources and administrative priorities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that teachers' awareness is significantly associated with most dimensions of school responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy. The results highlight the importance of teacher awareness in supporting the implementation of child protection initiatives, particularly those involving identification, reporting, prevention, and the promotion of children's rights. Nevertheless, the absence of significant relationships in three indicators indicates that school responsiveness is not solely dependent on teachers' awareness but may also involve broader institutional and organizational factors.

The findings are consistent with recent empirical investigations demonstrating a positive association between teachers' awareness of child protection policies and their implementation in schools. Manginlaud and Baguio (2026) reported a moderate positive and significant relationship between teachers' awareness of the Child Protection Policy and their implementation practices. Similarly, Alcala and Cornelia (2025) established a moderate positive association between teachers' awareness and school responsiveness, while Aguilar and Carbonell (2024) reported a strong positive relationship between awareness and policy implementation. These findings reinforce the results of the present study, in which teachers' awareness was significantly associated with 12 of the 15 indicators of school responsiveness.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORKS

The study established that teachers possess a high level of awareness of the Child Protection Policy, accompanied by a high level of school responsiveness in its implementation. The significant positive correlations observed in 12 of the 15 indicators demonstrate that

greater teacher awareness is associated with stronger school responsiveness, particularly in identifying learners at risk of abuse or harm, integrating children's rights into instruction, and strengthening child protection initiatives. However, the absence of significant relationships in three institutional dimensions suggests that policy implementation is not solely associated with teachers' awareness but may also involve organizational structures, administrative support, and institutional resources. These findings emphasize the importance of complementing teacher awareness with functional school-based mechanisms, consistent implementation procedures, and sustained institutional commitment to child protection.

Future studies may employ mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs to examine how teachers' awareness translates into actual child protection practices over time. Further investigations may also explore the influence of school leadership, institutional resources, professional development, and the functionality of School Child Protection Committees on policy implementation. In addition, comparative studies across different school divisions and educational levels may establish whether the observed relationships are consistent across diverse institutional contexts. Direct assessments of policy implementation, including documentary reviews, interviews, and observations, are also recommended to complement self-reported measures and provide a more comprehensive understanding of school responsiveness to child protection concerns.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the conduct of this study, its analysis, and the publication of its findings. No financial, personal, or professional relationships influenced the research process or the interpretation and reporting of the results.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

The author declares the use of ChatGPT and Grammarly solely for grammar checking and language improvement. These tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, or interpret the findings. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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