Exploring the Lived Experiences of Child Protection Policy Implementers in BARMM Region

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the experiences of implementers of child protection policies in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), focusing on educational settings. The research employed a mixed-method design, utilizing a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of participants. Data was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with school heads, teachers, parents, and key stakeholders from Maguindanao Del Sur and the Special Geographic Area (SGA) within BARMM.

The findings revealed several key themes in the implementation of child protection policies. The first theme, Equitable and Inclusive Access to Education, highlighted efforts to ensure that all children, especially those from marginalized communities, had access to education through initiatives like community mapping and the adopt-a-reader program. The second theme, Inclusive Support Systems, focused on the importance of providing both material and emotional support to vulnerable children, with school feeding programs and community-based mentoring systems being integral to the child protection framework.

Additionally, Internal Dynamics emphasized the integration of child protection policies into the curriculum, empowering students with knowledge about their rights and safety. The role of administrative support was also significant, with strong leadership ensuring policy implementation and resource allocation. Finally, Immediate Protection and Prevention emphasized the importance of swift response and protective measures, including confidentiality and safe spaces for children. The study concluded that community-centered, proactive approaches and strong stakeholder involvement were critical to the effective implementation of child protection policies in the region.

INTRODUCTION

A child protection policy ensures the safety, well-being, and rights of children by establishing guidelines to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It outlines the responsibilities of individuals and organizations in creating a safe environment where children are protected from harm. This policy emphasizes accountability, vigilance, and the promotion of children's best interests in all actions and decisions.

Anent this, child protection in schools is an urgent and growing issue globally, with a staggering one in three children subjected to physical violence, often in the form of corporal punishment by their own parents. This form of violence disproportionately affects boys (Council of Welfare for Children [CWC], 2016). In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has instituted a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of abuse and violence against children, yet cases of abuse, both at home and in schools, persist unabated (CWC, 2016). In the 2013-2014 school year alone, the DepEd recorded approximately 1,700 reports of child abuse and bullying in schools (Jimenez, 2018). Despite the widespread awareness of the child protection policy, its actual implementation in schools remains inconsistent and inadequate (Cervancia et al., 2019).

While the implementation of child protection policies in schools has been the focus of growing research, significant gaps remain. A notable omission is the lack of research on the application of these policies within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), a region characterized by unique socio-cultural and political dynamics. The complexities of BARMM may influence the implementation of child protection policies in ways that differ from other regions, thus warranting closer examination (Casepe and Bete, 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of studies that propose or evaluate a comprehensive, best-fit model for child protection policy implementation, either within the broader Philippine context or specifically within BARMM. While existing literature points to the challenges and awareness surrounding these policies, no framework has been developed to serve as a standard for their effective implementation (Anderson, 2022).

This study aimed to address these gaps by examining teachers' attitudes and awareness regarding the implementation of the child protection policy in schools, with a focus on BARMM. By exploring the challenges and opportunities unique to this region, the study seeks to offer context-specific insights and develop a framework that can guide schools in the Philippines, particularly in BARMM, towards more effective and culturally appropriate policy implementation.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The general objective of this study was to delve into the experiences of implementers in BARMM region with regard to child protection policy. Specifically, this study sought answers to this question:

1. What themes emerged in the implementation of child protection policies in educational settings within the BARMM region?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a mixed-method design. In the qualitative phase, a phenomenological approach was utilized to explore the lived experiences of participants regarding the implementation of child protection policy. Phenomenology is defined as a research approach that focuses on understanding individuals' subjective experiences and the meanings, they attach to them (Moustakas, 1994). By capturing participants' first-hand experiences, phenomenology allowed researchers to gain deep insights into how participants perceived and interpreted child protection policies in their everyday roles.

LOCALE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in the divisions of Maguindanao Del Sur and the Special Geographic Area (SGA) within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Maguindanao Del Sur, a province within BARMM, is known for its rich cultural heritage and predominantly rural communities. The province is characterized by a diverse population that engages in both traditional and modern livelihoods, ranging from agriculture to trade. Despite its cultural vibrancy, Maguindanao Del Sur faces challenges in infrastructure development, educational accessibility, and socio-economic disparities, making it a critical area for studying the implementation of child protection policies (Bangsamoro Information Office, 2019).

The Special Geographic Area (SGA) in BARMM is composed of 63 barangays that chose to join BARMM through a plebiscite in 2019. These barangays are geographically dispersed across six towns within the province of Cotabato, yet they administratively fall under the jurisdiction of BARMM. The SGA is distinct in that it encompasses rural and remote communities, with educational institutions that face unique challenges related to infrastructure, resources, and accessibility (Bangsamoro Information Office, 2019).

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The study utilized an interview guide that included a primary question and probing questions derived from the statement of the problem. This interview guide was assessed by experts for content validity to ensure that the questions were relevant and accurate. The themes identified in this phase informed the development of a questionnaire focused on the factors affecting child protection policy in BARMM.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The key participants consisted of two groups from the Schools Division of Maguindanao Del Sur and the Special Geographic Area (SGA). Each group was composed of 10 participants who engaged in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). These participants included school heads, key stakeholders, teachers, and parents, providing a comprehensive perspective on the implementation of the Child Protection Policy from a range of viewpoints within each division.

DATA ANALYSIS

To analyze the qualitative data, the researcher will employ thematic analysis, a widely recognized and effective method in qualitative research. This approach involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or "themes" within the data, providing a comprehensive understanding of participant experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to systematically examine the content of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), identifying recurring patterns that emerge from the discussions. These discussions will be conducted with key stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, parents, and community representatives, to gather in-depth perspectives on the implementation of child protection policies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this phase of the study, qualitative data were gathered to presents the findings from interviews with teachers, aimed at gathering insights into the lived experiences of teachers, school heads, and key stakeholders on implementing child protection policy in BARMM region. The participants shared their personal experiences through focus group discussions, which were recorded via phone with their consent.

Table 2a to 2c shows that the experiences shared by the teacher-participants which includes three (3) global themes revealed from the responses: Equitable and Inclusive Access to Education, Internal Dynamics, and Immediate Protection and Prevention.

Equitable and Inclusive Access to Education

Ensuring Equitable Access to Education for All Children. This emerged as a fundamental theme in implementing child protection policy in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The teacher-participants emphasized their commitment to ensuring that all children, regardless of socio-economic background, gender, or ethnicity, have equal access to quality education is a proof that they implement practices aligned

with child protection policy. They shared that this principle extends to children from remote areas and marginalized communities, underscoring the importance of reducing disparities in educational opportunities across the region.

One significant practice highlighted is the annual community mapping initiative, where elementary teachers systematically list all children aged 4-11 within their jurisdiction. This proactive effort ensures that every child is enrolled in an educational institution, aligning with the goal of leaving no child behind in education. This approach reflects the region's dedication to inclusivity and equity, forming a vital component of its child protection initiatives. In fact, teacher-informants shared that:

"As a teacher in the BARMM region, I am deeply committed to ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, has access to quality education. Through our community mapping initiative, we systematically identify all children in our area, particularly those in remote and marginalized communities, to ensure they are enrolled and given an opportunity to learn. This effort is a vital part of our child protection policy, ensuring no child is left behind." Participant 4

"Ensuring equitable access to education is a core value in implementing our child protection policy. We take pride in our annual community mapping, where we list every child aged 4-11 within our area. This proactive approach helps us identify those who need assistance in enrolling and guarantees that children from even the most isolated parts of BARMM are able to attend school and receive the education they deserve." Participant 1

The participants further shared their implementation of the adopt-a-reader program, wherein teachers take responsibility for supporting slow readers, thereby fostering child protection. This initiative includes providing these children with school supplies and food to keep them motivated in their studies. The school head-participants shared their best practices, including the adopt-a-child and adopt-a-reader programs, which aim to assist learners from less fortunate families.

One school head-participant shared that:

"As part of our adopt-a-reader program, I take on the responsibility of supporting slow readers by providing them with the resources they need to succeed. I ensure that these students receive school supplies and food, which not only helps with their academic needs but also motivates them to stay engaged in their learning. This initiative is designed to offer both material and emotional support, ultimately improving their reading skills and academic performance." Participant 8

Another school head-participant narrated that:

"Through the adopt-a-child program, the school focuses on helping struggling readers by providing them with essential school supplies and food to keep them motivated. This program goes beyond just academic support; it aims to nurture these students' confidence and emotional well-being, creating a positive and encouraging environment for them to thrive." Participant 10

The finding reveals a significant challenge in advancing child protection policy within BARMM, particularly in achieving inclusivity and equity. It underscores the need for educational systems to move beyond superficial measures of access, driving meaningful reforms that dismantle systemic barriers and uplift marginalized communities. Such initiatives place a critical focus on education as a catalyst for empowerment and social justice, nurturing a generation equipped to overcome entrenched inequalities and transform their socio-economic realities.

This connects to the conclusion that education policy plays a critical role in promoting social justice and equity, particularly for marginalized groups. It emphasizes the need for reforms to address systemic barriers and inequalities in educational access and outcomes. Despite existing policies, such as reservations, marginalized communities still face stigmatization and lack sufficient institutional support, which hinders their academic progress (Meng, 2024).

Inclusive Support Systems. This theme emerged as a key dimension of child protection policy implementation in BARMM. School heads noted the provision of support services, including school-initiated feeding programs, which safeguard children's health and ensure their consistent attendance in school. Additionally, they emphasized the establishment of community-based systems, such as parent mentoring initiatives and partnerships with stakeholder-benefactors, to address the unique challenges faced by marginalized children. These efforts collectively build a robust framework to nurture vulnerable learners and foster their overall growth and sustained participation in education. These are all practical evidences that BARMM region gives significance to the protection of children through support systems.

In fact, school head-participants mentioned that:

"In terms of protecting children from any disease, our school feeding program through our Gulayan sa Paaralan ensures that children stay healthy and come to school regularly. I also work closely with parents through mentoring initiatives and collaborate with benefactors to provide support for marginalized children. These collective efforts help us create a nurturing environment where every child can thrive academically and personally." Participant 6

Moreover, when it comes to stakeholders, their active involvement plays a critical role in supporting children's education by ensuring the creation of safe spaces. These stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, local organizations, and benefactors, collaborate to foster environments where children feel secure, respected, and motivated to learn. Their efforts include initiatives such as helping to maintain the school cleanliness. improving school infrastructure, promoting inclusivity and diversity, and implementing policies or programs that address the well-being of learners. Taking shared responsibility ensures that educational institutions are not just centers for learning but also havens where children can grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

Also, the community promotes gender equity in education to ensure that girls and boys have equal opportunities to access education. They also implement programs that encourage modesty and chastity, discourage harmful or immoral behaviors, and providing safe spaces for girls to learn.

In fact, one stakeholder-participant said that:

"As a parent, I actively participate in maintaining the cleanliness of the school and ensuring it remains a safe and welcoming environment for all children. Collaborating with teachers and other stakeholders advocates for programs that promote gender equity, ensuring both boys and girls have equal chances to excel academically." Participant 17

The finding manifests that the implementation of inclusive support systems within the child protection policy in BARMM ensures that marginalized children receive both material and emotional support to thrive academically. Through initiatives like school feeding programs, community-based mentoring, and partnerships with stakeholders, such as parents, community leaders, and local organizations, children are provided with a secure and nurturing environment that fosters their growth. These efforts also include promoting gender equity in education, promoting good behavior and actions, and improving school infrastructure, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has equal opportunities to access education and succeed in a supportive and inclusive setting.

The aforementioned implication accords to the finding of Glariana and Saniel (2022) that child protection policies in schools highlights the importance of inclusive support systems and stakeholder involvement. School Child Protection Committees play a crucial role in implementing policies, ensuring children's rights are respected and holistic development is achieved.

Internal Dynamics

Integration into Educational Practices and Curriculum. This theme which revolves around the integration of child protection policy into educational practices and the curriculum is a forward-looking approach that seeks to empower students with knowledge about their rights and responsibilities, while fostering a safe and supportive learning environment. Through responses gathered from participants, it became evident that embedding lessons on children's rights and safety within various subjects enhances both awareness and practical application among students.

Teacher-participants have shared inspiring narratives of how these lessons are seamlessly interwoven into subjects like Araling Panlipunan, Health, and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao. For instance, modules and activity sheets include discussions on the importance of personal safety, recognizing harmful situations, and understanding the steps to seek assistance. These initiatives ensure students are not only academically equipped but are also holistically prepared to navigate challenges beyond the classroom.

One teacher-participant responded that:

"As a Master Teacher and a guidance advocate, I need to innovate strategies to implement child protection policy. Also, in some instances, my practices in implementing the child protection policy involve integrating it into the curriculum. I incorporate lessons on children's rights, safety, and well-being across various subjects to ensure students understand their rights and responsibilities within the framework of the policy. This approach helps students become aware of how they can report incidents of abuse and seek help when needed, while also emphasizing the importance of a safe learning environment. As a result, learners are empowered to stand up for themselves and others in unsafe situations, fostering respect for their culture, their safety, and their awareness within the school community." Participant 15

This is reinforced by other teacher-participants who said that:

"As a teacher, integrating child protection education into my lessons has been both a responsibility and a privilege. In Araling Panlipunan, for example, I include topics on children's rights and responsibilities, linking them to our discussions on citizenship and governance. It empowers students to understand their role in society and the importance of personal safety. I've seen how these lessons open up meaningful conversations in class, helping students recognize harmful situations and equipping them to take action or seek help when needed." Participant 3

"Incorporating child protection education has truly transformed the way we teach. In Health and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, I integrate modules on personal safety and well-being. We discuss scenarios where students learn to identify risks and practice decision-making skills to safeguard themselves and others. The most rewarding part is seeing students become more confident and aware of their rights. This has created a more supportive classroom environment where students feel safe to share their concerns." Participant 4

The integration of child protection policy into educational practices and curriculum reflects a robust internal ecosystem that prioritizes the holistic development of learners. This dynamic approach ensures that positive discipline, values restoration, and culturally aligned teachings are seamlessly interwoven into everyday lessons, fostering an environment of safety, empathy, and mutual respect. Engaging teachers, ISAL educators, and school leaders in implementing these practices demonstrates a unified commitment to nurturing students' moral, academic, and social growth in alignment with both policy and cultural principles.

The finding confirms the findings of Moslimany et al. (2024), which state that the integration of child protection policies into educational practices is crucial for fostering safe and inclusive learning environments. Schools have implemented strategies such as educating students about their rights and providing opportunities for expression. Successful integration of child protection curricula involves establishing a moral purpose, building collaborative coalitions, and addressing resistance. In Islamic education, holistic curriculum design incorporates traditional teachings with modern subjects.

Administrative Support. The next theme under internal dynamics revolves around the significant role of administrative support in implementing child protection policies. The participants shared that leadership and decision-making are foundational to this support. Strong leadership from the administration sets the tone for the entire institution or community, ensuring that child protection policies are not only prioritized but also followed by all staff and stakeholders. This leadership provides clear direction and a model for others to follow, making it a key element in the policy's success.

The participants shared that:

"As a school head, I ensure that leadership sets the tone for child protection policies. By prioritizing safety and making it clear to all staff and stakeholders, I create a culture where everyone follows the policies, fostering a safe environment for our students." Participant 7

"Leadership is key in implementing child protection policies. I make decisions that prioritize safety, allocate resources for training, and lead by example, ensuring that everyone in the school community takes these policies seriously and upholds them." Participant 9

The participants also highlighted resource allocation as a critical aspect of administrative support. The administration's ability to allocate adequate financial through their MOOE and human resources plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of child protection measures. This includes funding for staff training, establishing counseling services, and creating child-friendly school environments. Without sufficient resources, even the best policies can falter, so this administrative responsibility is essential for effective policy execution.

The implication of the finding is that effective administrative support is essential for the successful implementation of child protection policy. Strong leadership from school heads sets the tone and ensures that these policies are prioritized, followed, and upheld across the institution. Moreover, adequate resource allocation for training, counseling services, and a safe school environment, along with robust monitoring and evaluation systems, is crucial for the sustained effectiveness of child protection measures.

This supports the study of Zamora (2021) that school leaders, such as principals and administrators, are central to the successful implementation of Child Protection Policies (CPP) in educational settings. Their leadership shapes the school culture and sets the priorities for safeguarding students. These leaders are responsible for ensuring that child protection is integrated into the daily operations of the school, from policy development to execution. They play a key role in creating an environment where child protection is seen as a shared responsibility among staff, students, and the community.

Effective school leaders prioritize the safety and well-being of students by allocating necessary resources, such as funding for staff training, counseling services, and child-friendly infrastructure. They must ensure that teachers and staff members are equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to recognize and address potential child protection issues. This includes providing regular training on topics like recognizing signs of abuse, reporting mechanisms, and creating safe spaces for students to express concerns (Zamora, 2021).

Immediate Protection and Prevention

Response and Protective Measures. The first basic theme of response and protective measures under the global theme of immediate protection and prevention emphasizes swift and decisive actions to safeguard children facing protection concerns. Participants highlighted that prioritizing the child's safety begins with immediate acknowledgment of the incident and the assurance that the child is protected from harm. Key strategies include separating the child from potential risks and addressing both their emotional and physical well-being with urgency following the report.

Furthermore, confidentiality plays a critical role in these measures, as participants ensure that sensitive information is shared only with relevant personnel to protect the child's identity and privacy. Moreover, creating safe spaces for children is an integral practice. These spaces allow them to openly express their feelings and access emotional support, fostering recovery and resilience. These protective measures reflect a comprehensive approach that guarantees children are not only shielded from immediate harm but also supported holistically in a secure and empathetic environment.

Participants that are guidance advocates as well as CPP coordinators supported this theme with their responses:

"When child safety incidents are reported, the school strictly upholds confidentiality, ensuring that personal information and case details are shared only with authorized personnel directly involved in the resolution. Confidentiality protects the child's identity from stigma or harm, fostering a safe environment where children and families feel supported throughout the reporting process. All records are securely stored with restricted access, reinforcing the institution's commitment to respecting children's rights and privacy." Participant 16

"When an incident related to child safety is reported, as the designated CPP coordinator, I ensure immediate acknowledgment and assure the child and their family that the matter is being taken seriously. A detailed report is prepared, documenting the incident and actions taken while maintaining confidentiality to protect the child's identity. Immediate protective measures, such as relocation, psychological support, or involving relevant authorities, are implemented to safeguard the child's well-being." Participant 17

The profound implication of response and protective measures in child protection highlights a commitment to creating environments where children are not only safeguarded from immediate harm but are nurtured holistically. Prioritizing confidentiality, immediate protective actions, and emotional support, builds trust, empowering children to report concerns without fear. Engaging families through communication and decision-making fosters a collaborative approach that strengthens the protective network surrounding the child. Ultimately, these measures reflect a transformative ecosystem within schools, where safety, empathy, and shared responsibility become fundamental pillars, enabling children to thrive both academically and emotionally.

The finding is in harmony with the conclusion that implementing child protection policies in schools requires a comprehensive approach prioritizing children's rights and safety. School Child Protection Committees play a crucial role in fostering an environment conducive to policy implementation, focusing on respecting children's voices and continuously improving protection systems. The protective environment framework emphasizes preventive measures and addressing underlying systemic issues, rather than merely focusing on symptoms (Mann et al., 2024).

Preventive Strategies and Long-Term Support: This theme was formulated based on responses that emphasize the creation of a child-friendly school committee, which includes the school head, the teacher association president, the PTA president, the Kagawad for education, and other key stakeholders. The main goal of this committee is to plan and implement a series of activities that will promote the sustainability of the child protection policy.

Participants shared that some of their practices include "rekorida," wherein they visit communities to conduct home visits and awareness sessions on child safety, and they also promote a collaborative community approach to ensure that children are protected both inside and outside the school. Moreover, the members of this committee should maintain open communication through texts, calls, and online platforms to foster a culture of care where child safety is a priority. Everyone is encouraged to report concerns, ensuring that these issues are addressed promptly. This helps prevent cases of child maltreatment from escalating or going unnoticed.

The participants confessed that:

"As school head, I support the child protection committee's work through 'rekorida' visits to raise community awareness. We maintain open communication to quickly address concerns and prioritize child safety. This proactive approach ensures we're constantly vigilant in protecting our students." Participant 9

"As a Kagawad, I collaborate with the school to conduct home visits and promote child safety. Regular communication with parents and teachers allows us to address issues swiftly. Together, we work to safeguard children both at school and in the community." Participant 12

"As a parent, I value the school's 'rekorida' visits that educate us on child protection. The open communication channels ensure that we can quickly address any concerns. This reassures me that my child's safety is a priority." Participant 19

"I also actively participate in 'rekorida' and ensure open communication with parents. This allows us to address any concerns immediately, creating a safe environment for students. Child protection is a shared responsibility, and we're all committed to it." Participant 1

The implication of these efforts lies in the creation of a community-centered, proactive approach to child protection, where responsibility is shared across multiple sectors, leading to a more resilient and responsive system. Fostering an environment of continuous dialogue and collaboration transforms child safety from a policy to a lived practice, ensuring that child protection is not just a reactionary measure but a foundational element of community well-being. This integrated approach also challenges traditional boundaries of responsibility, encouraging all members of society to actively participate in safeguarding the next generation, thus breaking down silos and promoting holistic development.

The mentioned manifestation concurs the study of Wessells (2015) who emphasized that there is a shift towards community-centered approaches in child protection. These approaches focus on fostering collective responsibility and engaging local communities in decision-making processes. Moving away from top-down methods promotes higher levels of ownership, effectiveness, and sustainability in child protection systems. This approach recognizes the importance of community context in supporting positive child development and parenting.

Table 2a. Themes on the lived experiences of implementing child protection policy in BARMM region

Global Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Equitable and Inclusive Access to Education	Ensuring Equitable Access to Education for All Children	• Commitment to Equal Access • Community Mapping Initiative • Adopt-a-Reader Program • Merienda and Snacks in Summer Reading Camp • Flexibility in Learning • Community and Stakeholder Involvement • Barriers to Inclusivity
	Inclusive Support Systems	• Support Services for Children • Community-Based Systems • Active Stakeholder Involvement • School Cleanliness and Infrastructure • Gender Equity in Education • Safe Learning Spaces for Girls • Material and Emotional Support • Holistic Approach to Child Protection

Table 2b. Themes on the lived experiences of implementing child protection policy in BARMM region

Global Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Internal Dynamics	Integration into Educational Practices and Curriculum	• Empowering Students with Knowledge • Holistic Education Approach • Integration of Islamic Values in Education • Positive Discipline Focus • Role of ISAL Teachers in Child Protection • Promoting Cultural and Religious Respect • School-wide Support for Child Protection • Need for Permanent ISAL Teacher Positions
	Administrative Support	• Leadership and Decision-Making • Resource Allocation • Training and Capacity Building • Collaboration and Advocacy • Monitoring and Evaluation

Table 2c. Themes on the lived experiences of implementing child protection policy in BARMM region

Global Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Immediate Protection and Prevention	Immediate Response and Protective Measures	• Immediate Acknowledgment and Action • Confidentiality and Privacy Protection • Creating Safe Spaces for Emotional Support • Family Involvement and Support • Psychological and Emotional Support • Holistic and Collaborative Protection Network
	Preventive Strategies and Long-Term Support	• Establishing a Child-Friendly School Committee • Proactive Community Engagement through "Rekorida" • Open Communication Channels for Swift Action • Building Strong Partnerships with Community Stakeholders • Shared Responsibility for Child Protection • Sustainable, Community-Centered Approach

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study concluded that the implementation of child protection policies in the BARMM region is significantly shaped by three emerging themes. First, Equitable and Inclusive Access to Education was highlighted as a core value among educators and stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that all children, regardless of background or socio-economic status, have equal access to quality education. This was exemplified through initiatives like the annual community mapping and the adopt-a-reader program, which ensure that marginalized and remote communities are not excluded from educational opportunities. The study concluded that such practices align with the goals of child protection by actively working towards educational inclusivity.

Second, Internal Dynamics emerged as a key component in the implementation of child protection policies, where educators integrated child protection principles into the curriculum. Teachers actively included lessons on children's rights, safety, and emotional well-being across various subjects, creating a comprehensive educational experience that extended beyond academics. This theme reinforces the idea that child protection is not merely a reactive measure but a proactive, integral part of the educational framework.

Lastly, the theme of Immediate Protection and Prevention was crucial, with the study concluding that swift actions and confidentiality are central in handling child protection incidents. The involvement of families and open communication between parents, teachers, and school staff were emphasized as essential strategies for ensuring children's safety. These findings point to the importance of a well-coordinated, responsive system for child protection, one that balances immediate intervention with long-term prevention strategies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are for the Teachers: Integrate child protection principles into your daily teaching practices and curriculum. Ensure that lessons on children's rights, safety, and emotional well-being are consistently incorporated across subjects. Actively participate in initiatives that promote equitable access to education, such as community mapping and programs like adopt-a-reader, to reach marginalized and remote communities. Foster a supportive environment where students feel safe to express concerns and seek help.

For the School Heads: Support the implementation of child protection policies by providing leadership and clear direction in prioritizing children's safety and well-being. Facilitate ongoing professional development for teachers to better understand and address child protection issues. Establish and promote open lines of communication with parents, communities, and local organizations to ensure a coordinated, collaborative approach. Create and maintain safe, child-friendly school environments with adequate resources and support for both academic and emotional needs.

For the Stakeholders: Collaborate actively with schools, local government units, and community organizations to create a comprehensive child protection framework. Engage in initiatives such as community visits and workshops to raise awareness and promote child safety. Support and advocate for equitable access to educational resources for all children, particularly those from marginalized communities. Assist in maintaining a strong safety net for children by contributing to school-based programs, offering material support, and reinforcing policies that protect children's rights.

For the Policymakers: Institutionalize multi-sectoral collaboration by ensuring that child protection efforts are coordinated across educational institutions, local government units, and community organizations. Develop policies that integrate child protection into educational frameworks, including curriculum changes and teacher training programs. Strengthen community-based monitoring systems to track the progress of child protection initiatives and identify areas for improvement. Implement clear mechanisms for reporting and enforcing child protection policies with accountability and transparency.

For the Future Researchers: Explore the long-term impact of child protection policies on student outcomes, particularly focusing on marginalized groups in conflict-affected areas. Investigate the effectiveness of multi-sectoral collaborations in child protection and identify best practices for scaling successful models. education, contribute to the overall safety and well-being of students.

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