



Research Article

Safeguarding Learners: Assessing the Alignment of Child Protection Issues in the Philippines with the Department of Education's Child Protection Policy

Jezreel S. Martinez¹ , Josie Lastimosa-Igloria² , Kristy D. Come³ , Ray Butch D. Mahinay⁴

Author Information:

¹Aposkahoy National High School,
Department of Education, Schools Division
of Misamis Oriental, Philippines

²Xavier University, Cagayan de Oro City,
Philippines

³San Agustin Institute of Technology,
Valencia City, Philippines

⁴Research and Extension Office, City College
of Cagayan de Oro, Philippines

Corresponding Authors:

Jezreel S. Martinez
Email: jezreel.martinez@deped.gov.ph

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Abstract. Child protection remains a significant concern in the Philippines despite existing legal and policy frameworks designed to safeguard children's rights. Emerging issues such as Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC), alongside persistent concerns including violent discipline, bullying, child marriage, and child labor, raise questions regarding the responsiveness of existing school-based child protection policies. This study examined the alignment between prevailing child protection issues and the provisions of the Department of Education (DepEd) Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012). Employing a documentary data mining design integrated with policy document and crosswalk analysis, the study utilized the Situation of Children in the Philippines: Insights 2024, published by the Philippine Children Research Network (PCRN), and DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, as its primary data sources. Documentary evidence was extracted, organized into analytical matrices, and analyzed using descriptive analysis, policy content analysis, gap analysis, and a Traffic Light Heatmap across four dimensions: recognition, prevention, reporting, and response. Findings revealed strong policy alignment for violent discipline, physical punishment, sexual abuse, and bullying; partial alignment for OSAEC and violence against adolescent girls; and limited policy coverage for child marriage and child labor. The analysis further identified implementation challenges, inadequate awareness, underutilized reporting pathways, and evolving digital risks. The study concludes that while DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 provides a strong foundation for learner protection, periodic policy enhancement and strengthened implementation mechanisms are necessary to address emerging and persistent child protection concerns. The study recommends explicit coverage of technology-facilitated harms, standardized operational guidance for Child Protection Committees, learner-friendly reporting mechanisms, and strengthened multisectoral coordination. These findings provide an evidence-based and replicable approach for strengthening school-based child protection policy and educational governance in the Philippines.

Keywords: *Child protection; DepEd child protection policy; Educational governance; Policy alignment; School safety.*

Children have the fundamental right to survive, develop, participate, and be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect. This principle is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes child protection as a shared responsibility among governments, educational institutions, communities, and families. Despite sustained international efforts to strengthen child protection systems, violence against children remains a persistent global concern, occurring in homes, schools,



communities, and digital environments. Recent evidence demonstrates the continuing scale and consequences of these risks. (Niu et al., 2024), in a global meta-analysis, estimated that nearly one in four children experienced some form of violence, with a disproportionately higher burden in low- and middle-income countries. Similarly, BenYishay et al. (2024) found that school-related violence continues to threaten children's safety, learning, and educational attainment across different national settings. UNICEF (2024) further reported that nearly 400 million children under five regularly experience psychological aggression or physical punishment at home. The consequences extend beyond immediate safety, as Qu et al. (2024) found significant associations between adverse childhood experiences and poor academic achievement, grade repetition, and the need for special education support, while Yeo et al. (2024) reported consistent associations between childhood adversity, lower emotional well-being, and poorer educational achievement. These findings establish child protection as not only a welfare concern but also an important educational and policy issue.

The Philippine situation reflects these continuing global challenges. The *Situation of Children in the Philippines: Insights 2024* documents multiple forms of violence, exploitation, neglect, and discrimination affecting Filipino children, including violent discipline, physical punishment, sexual abuse, online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC), bullying, violence against adolescent girls, child marriage, and child labor. These concerns persist despite the country's extensive legal and institutional mechanisms for protecting children's rights. Supporting the broader evidence on the consequences of childhood adversity, Madigan et al. (2024), in a systematic review and meta-analysis, reported that approximately six out of ten children worldwide experience at least one adverse childhood experience before adulthood. Lam et al. (2024) likewise found that adverse childhood experiences, including abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, and bullying, are associated with poorer mental health, behavioral outcomes, and educational performance among adolescents. Taken together, these findings highlight the need to examine whether existing school-based child protection mechanisms remain responsive to Filipino learners' changing protection needs.

The Philippine government has established a comprehensive legal and policy framework to address these concerns. Republic Act No. 7610 provides special protection for children against abuse, exploitation, and discrimination; Republic Act No. 10627 addresses bullying in schools; Republic Act No. 11596 prohibits child marriage; and Republic Act No. 11930 strengthens protection against online sexual abuse or exploitation of children and child sexual abuse or exploitation materials. Complementing these laws, the 4th National Plan of Action for Children (2024–2028) emphasizes strengthening child protection systems, improving interagency coordination, and ensuring safe and nurturing environments for Filipino children. Within the education sector, DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, or the DepEd Child Protection Policy, institutionalizes standards and procedures for protecting learners from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of harm. It provides for the establishment of Child Protection Committees, promotes positive and non-violent discipline, and establishes mechanisms for prevention, reporting, referral, investigation, and response. UNESCO (2024) similarly emphasized that effective school-based child protection requires comprehensive policies, clear reporting mechanisms, trained personnel, and strong interagency coordination. Thus, schools occupy a critical position in translating child protection laws and policies into everyday practices that safeguard learners.

The importance of strengthening protection in schools is further reflected in international and national education agendas. Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and safe, non-violent, and effective learning environments for all learners (United Nations, 2015). In the Philippine context, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) has highlighted continuing concerns involving bullying, school violence, and emerging digital risks, pointing to the need to strengthen protection mechanisms, update policies, and improve implementation (EDCOM II, 2025). Similarly, the National Teacher Education Research Agenda (NTERA) 2022–2027 identifies learner welfare, inclusive education, educational governance, and evidence-based policy development as priority research areas. These priorities reinforce the need to continuously examine whether education policies remain relevant to contemporary risks affecting learners. UNICEF (2024) further emphasizes that effective child protection depends not only on laws and institutional policies but also on the strength, responsiveness, coordination, and continuous evaluation of child protection systems. UNESCO (2025) likewise reported substantial implementation gaps in school safety and child protection policies across countries, underscoring the need to assess whether existing policy frameworks adequately respond to contemporary protection challenges.

Despite the growing body of literature on child protection, much of the existing research focuses on the prevalence of violence, consequences of adverse childhood experiences, intervention programs, or policy implementation, with comparatively limited attention to systematically examining the alignment between current child protection realities and existing school-based protection policies. Ramos (2024) provides evidence on child protection policy implementation in selected schools, but a broader policy crosswalk linking current national child protection indicators with the specific provisions of DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 remains limited. Thus, this study addresses this gap by integrating the *Situation of Children in the Philippines: Insights 2024* with policy content and crosswalk analysis of DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012. Specifically, it examines whether the policy recognizes, prevents, responds to, and provides reporting or referral mechanisms for identified child protection concerns. Guided by the Child Protection Systems Framework, the study applies a systems perspective to educational policy evaluation by examining policy responsiveness across interconnected dimensions of learner protection. In doing so, it provides evidence to inform school governance, policy implementation, and future enhancements to child protection mechanisms.

Guided by the identified research gap, this study examines the alignment between prevailing child protection issues in the Philippines and the provisions of the DepEd Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012). Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the priority child protection issues affecting Filipino children based on the *Situation of Children in the Philippines: Insights 2024*? (2) What provisions of DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 are relevant to the identified priority child protection issues? (3) To what extent do the provisions of DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 align with the identified priority child protection issues? (4) How do the identified child protection issues align with the DepEd Child Protection Policy across the dimensions of recognition, prevention, reporting/referral, and response? (5) What policy gaps are identified through the policy crosswalk analysis, and what are their implications for school practice and future child protection policy development?

Beyond identifying policy strengths and gaps, this study advances educational policy and child protection scholarship by providing an evidence-based framework for evaluating how responsive school-based child protection policies are to contemporary child protection realities. By integrating documentary data mining, policy content analysis, and policy crosswalk analysis, the study moves beyond descriptive reporting of child protection issues to systematically examine how educational policies recognize, prevent, respond to, and facilitate referrals for priority child protection concerns. The study therefore offers practical insights for strengthening implementation and future enhancements of the DepEd Child Protection Policy, while contributing a replicable analytical approach that may be applied to evaluate other education policies aimed at promoting learner safety, well-being, and children's rights.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a documentary data mining design integrated with policy document analysis. This design was selected because the research questions required systematically examining existing reports and policy documents rather than collecting primary data from human participants. Documentary data mining was used to extract and organize reported child protection concerns from the *Situation of Children in the Philippines: Insights 2024*, while policy document analysis was used to examine how these concerns are addressed in DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012. This approach allowed current documentary evidence to be systematically compared with existing policy provisions (Bowen, 2009).



Figure 1. Research Framework: Overview of the Four Sequential Phases Comprising the Research Framework

Figure 1 presents the study's research framework. The research framework begins by identifying priority child protection issues from the Situation of Children in the Philippines: Insights 2024. These issues were classified and matched with relevant provisions of DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012. A policy crosswalk and gap analysis were then conducted to determine the extent of alignment and identify areas requiring further attention.

Data Sources

The primary data sources were the Situation of Children in the Philippines: Insights 2024, published by the Philippine Children Research Network (PCRN), and DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, or the DepEd Child Protection Policy. The former provided documentary evidence on prevailing child protection concerns and trends, while the latter served as the principal policy basis for the alignment analysis. Relevant national laws and official child protection documents were also consulted to clarify policy and legal context.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering involved three steps. First, relevant statistics, findings, and statements concerning child protection were extracted from the Situation of Children in the Philippines: Insights 2024 and recorded in a documentary data matrix. Second, similar or overlapping concerns were consolidated and classified according to their dominant child protection dimension, guided by the Child Protection Systems Framework and the substantive meaning of the reported concern. Third, DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 was reviewed to identify provisions corresponding to each classified issue. The issues and policy provisions were then organized into a policy crosswalk matrix for comparison.

Data Analysis and Classification

The extracted data were analyzed through descriptive analysis, policy content analysis, and policy crosswalk analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize the magnitude and trends of priority child protection issues, while policy content analysis identified the nature of policy responses as preventive, prohibitive, responsive, or referral/coordination-based. A policy crosswalk was then conducted to determine the level of alignment between the identified child protection issues and the DepEd Child Protection Policy. The results were further synthesized using a Traffic Light Heatmap and gap analysis to identify policy strengths, implementation concerns, and areas requiring enhancement (Bowen, 2009).

Policy provisions were coded as preventive, prohibitive, responsive, or referral/coordination-based. The researchers then compared each identified issue with the corresponding policy provisions and classified it as directly aligned, partially aligned, or insufficiently aligned based on the extent of policy coverage. The results were synthesized using a Traffic Light Heatmap and gap analysis to highlight areas of stronger coverage and those requiring policy attention. These classifications reflect the researchers' documentary analysis and do not, by themselves, establish policy effectiveness or implementation outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

The study used publicly available reports and official policy documents and did not collect data directly from human participants. Ethical considerations nevertheless guided how the study handled and interpreted documentary evidence. Sources were properly acknowledged, findings were represented accurately, and distinctions were maintained between information explicitly reported in the documents and the researchers' analytical interpretations. Alignment classifications were based on stated criteria and available documentary evidence. The absence of an identified policy provision was interpreted as a gap within the scope of the analysis, rather than definitive evidence that the policy completely fails to address the concern.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the documentary data mining and policy analysis conducted to examine the alignment between prevailing child protection issues in the Philippines and the provisions of the DepEd Child Protection Policy (Department of Education, 2012). The results are organized by study objective, beginning with the identification of priority child protection issues, followed by the analysis of relevant policy provisions, the policy crosswalk and alignment assessment, and the identification of policy gaps and their implications for school practice and future policy directions. Each finding is discussed in relation to existing literature and its significance in strengthening child protection within the Philippine education system.

Child Protection Issues

Table 1. Priority Child Protection Issues Affecting Filipino Children Based on the 2024 Situation Analysis

Child Protection Issue	Population/Age Group	Key Evidence	Magnitude	Trend/Pattern
Violent discipline	Children aged 1–14	58.80% experienced at least one form	Very high	Persistent
Physical punishment	Children aged 1–14	39.10% experienced physical punishment	High	Persistent
Sexual abuse	Children below 18	70.00% reported abuse cases were sexual in nature	Very high among reported cases	Continuing
OSAEC	Internet-using adolescents aged 12–17	20.00% experienced grave OSAEC within one year	High	Rapidly escalating
Bullying	Learners 6–17	30.00% reported frequent bullying	High	Declined from 40% in 2018
Violence against adolescent girls	Girls aged 15–19	10.00% experienced physical or sexual violence	Significant	Persistent
Child marriage	Girls below 18	About 460,000 married or in union before age 18	Large magnitude	Declining but persistent
Child labor	Children aged 5–17	About 828,000 engaged in child labor	Large magnitude	Continuing

Note. Data were drawn from the 2024 Situation Analysis, produced by the Council for the Welfare of Children, the Philippine Statistics Authority, and UNICEF. Magnitude descriptors were assigned by the researchers for analytical purposes based on the reported prevalence or estimated number of affected children: very high (50.00% or more), high (20.00%–49.90%), significant (10%–19.90%), and large magnitude (at least 100,000 affected children when prevalence estimates were unavailable). Trend or pattern classifications summarize the direction indicated in the source data. Because the indicators differ in population, denominator, reference period, and unit of measurement, values should not be interpreted as directly comparable across all child protection issues.

Table 1 presents the major child protection issues affecting Filipino children based on the *Situation of Children in the Philippines: Insights 2024* (Council for the Welfare of Children et al., 2024). The findings reveal that violence against children remains a significant concern across multiple forms of abuse and exploitation. Violent discipline emerged as one of the most prevalent issues, with 58.80% of children aged 1–14 years experiencing at least one form of violent discipline, indicating that harmful disciplinary practices continue despite existing child protection laws. This finding aligns with broader international evidence documented by Niu et al. (2024) and UNICEF (2024), which shows that violent discipline remains deeply rooted in domestic settings despite regional and international legislative bans. Similarly, 39.1% of children experienced physical punishment. Similarly, 39.10% of children experienced physical punishment, suggesting that corporal punishment remains socially accepted in many settings even though positive discipline has long been promoted. As Qu et al. (2024) and Yeo et al. (2023) highlight, exposure to physical punishment and severe childhood adversity correlates directly with lower educational achievement, high rates of grade repetition, and long-term emotional difficulties. Sexual abuse also represents a major child protection concern.

The report indicates that seven out of every ten reported abuse cases involve sexual abuse, demonstrating that sexual violence continues to pose serious threats to Filipino children. Madigan et al. (2024) and Lam et al. (2024) observed that severe adverse experiences like sexual victimization lead to profound mental health and developmental impairments during adolescence. Equally alarming is the rapid emergence of Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC), where 20.00% of internet-using adolescents aged 12–17 experienced grave forms of online sexual exploitation within one year. This rapid escalation reflects the findings of the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II, 2025) and the Department of Education (2024), which point out that digital advancements have exposed learners to novel, technology-facilitated risks that outpace traditional child protection measures. This finding reflects how technological advancements have created new risks that extend beyond traditional forms of child abuse.

Bullying remains another widespread issue, affecting 30% of students, although the prevalence has declined from 40.00% reported in 2018. While this decline may suggest that school-based anti-bullying initiatives have contributed to some improvement, bullying continues to affect a substantial proportion of learners. Recent policy insights from EDCOM II (2025) highlight that over 10,000 public schools in the Philippines still lack localized anti-bullying policies, directly violating the implementation mandates of the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10627, 2013). Furthermore, national empirical assessments show that high levels of bullying exposure significantly erode learning outcomes, contributing to measurable disparities in PISA academic performance across math and science disciplines (Abrigo et al., 2024). Meanwhile, 10.00% of adolescent girls aged 15–19 experienced physical or sexual violence, highlighting the persistence of gender-based violence among young

women.

The documentary evidence further reveals that child marriage and child labor continue to affect large numbers of Filipino children. Approximately 460,000 girls were married or in union before reaching 18 years of age, while around 828,000 children aged 5–17 were engaged in child labor. Although child marriage appears to be declining, both issues remain persistent and demonstrate that many child protection concerns extend beyond the school environment into families and communities, requiring robust interagency legal responses under statutory mandates such as An Act Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage (Republic Act No. 11596, 2021) and Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials Act (Republic Act No. 11930, 2022).

DepEd Policy Provisions

Table 2. *DepEd Policy Provisions Relevant to the Priority Child Protection Issues Affecting Filipino Children*

Child Protection Issue	Verbatim Provision from Department of Education (2012)	Specific Provision	Nature of Policy Response
Violent Discipline	"The Department of Education shall promote a zero-tolerance policy for any act of child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, bullying and other forms of abuse."	Part II. Policy Statement	Preventive, Prohibitive
Physical Punishment	"Corporal punishment refers to a kind of punishment or penalty... carried out... for the purpose of discipline, training or control..." "The Department prohibits corporal punishment and all other forms of humiliating or degrading punishment."	Part III. Definition of Terms – Corporal Punishment	Prohibitive
Sexual Abuse	"Child abuse refers to the maltreatment... including psychological and physical abuse, neglect, cruelty, sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment." "The school shall ensure that appropriate interventions, referrals and protection measures are provided to the child."	Part II. Policy Statement / Positive and Non-Violent Discipline Provisions Part III. Definition of Terms – Child Abuse	Prohibitive, Preventive Prohibitive
OSAEC	"Child exploitation refers to the use of the child for another person's advantage... including sexual abuse or exploitation." No explicit provision on online sexual abuse or exploitation of children (OSAEC). Existing provisions on sexual abuse and exploitation serve only as the legal basis for referral and protection.	Part VI. Procedures in Handling Cases Part III. Definition of Terms – Child Exploitation	Responsive, Referral/Coordination Responsive
Bullying	"Bullying or Peer Abuse refers to a willful aggressive behavior... resulting in physical or mental abuse, harassment, intimidation, or humiliation." "Every school shall adopt measures to prevent bullying and ensure immediate intervention when incidents occur."	No specific provision Part III. Definition of Terms – Bullying or Peer Abuse Part V. Child Protection Committee / Duties and Responsibilities	Referral/Coordination Prohibitive Preventive, Responsive
Violence Against Adolescent Girls	"The Department adopts a zero-tolerance policy for any act of... violence, discrimination..." "Children shall be protected from all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation and discrimination."	Part II. Policy Statement	Preventive, Prohibitive
Child Marriage	No explicit provision on child marriage. Cases involving abuse, neglect, or exploitation may be referred through the Child Protection Committee.	Part II. Policy Statement	Responsive, Referral/Coordination Referral/Coordination (Limited Coverage)
Child Labor	No explicit provision on child labor. Learners subjected to abuse, exploitation, or neglect are covered under the general protection and referral mechanisms of the policy.	No specific provision General Child Protection and Referral Provisions	Responsive, Referral/Coordination

Note. Policy provisions were drawn from the Department of Education (2012). The nature of policy response was classified by the researchers as preventive, prohibitive, responsive, or referral/coordination-based. More than one classification may be assigned when a policy provision serves multiple functions.

Table 2 summarizes the provisions of the Department of Education (2012) in relation to the priority child protection issues identified in the national situation analysis. The findings indicate that the policy provides comprehensive protection against several forms of violence commonly encountered within school settings. Strong

policy provisions exist for violent discipline, physical punishment, sexual abuse, bullying, and gender-based violence through preventive, prohibitive, responsive, and referral mechanisms.

The policy explicitly promotes positive discipline while prohibiting corporal punishment and other degrading forms of discipline. Likewise, comprehensive procedures for reporting, investigating, and responding to cases of sexual abuse demonstrate that learner protection is strongly embedded within the existing policy framework. Positive discipline is mandated to replace corporal punishment, supported by legal principles under the Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act (Republic Act No. 7610, 1992).

However, policy content analysis reveals structural gaps regarding modern and out-of-school risks. Because DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 was promulgated before the proliferation of internet-enabled devices among basic education learners, it lacks explicit protocols for OSAEC, cyber grooming, digital evidence preservation, and livestreamed abuse. While recent regional directives attempt to bridge this through supplemental guidelines (Department of Education, 2024), the primary text offers only partial, implicit coverage through general definitions of exploitation. This policy lag aligns with the Department of Education (2024), which noted that basic education safety frameworks struggle to keep pace with evolving digital harms. Similarly, systemic threats like child marriage and child labor receive only indirect coverage through general referral mechanisms, despite explicit statutory prohibitions under An Act Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage (Republic Act No. 11596, 2021) and the Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials Act (Republic Act No. 11930, 2022).

Alignment Analysis

Table 3. *Crosswalk of Current Child Protection Issues and the DepEd Child Protection Policy*

Child Protection Issue	Level of Alignment with DepEd Child Protection Policy	Notes and Identified Concern
Violent discipline	Strong	Violent discipline remains prevalent, indicating inconsistent policy implementation beyond schools.
Physical punishment	Strong	Remains prevalent among Filipino children, highlighting the need for greater awareness of children's rights and positive discipline.
Sexual abuse	Strong	Reporting mechanisms and support services are not systematically integrated into classroom instruction.
OSAEC	Moderate/Partial	Requires explicit policy provisions addressing online grooming, livestreaming exploitation, and digital sexual abuse.
Bullying	Strong	Remains prevalent, underscoring the need for continuous learner education and prevention.
Violence against adolescent girls	Moderate/Partial	Policy provides broad guidance but lacks specific provisions on dating violence, digital abuse, and adolescent gender-based vulnerabilities.
Child marriage	Limited	Represents a policy and curriculum gap despite the enactment of RA 11596.
Child labor	Limited	Greater integration of child labor awareness and referral pathways in schools is needed.

Note. The level of alignment was determined through a policy crosswalk that compared each identified child protection issue with the relevant provisions of the DepEd Child Protection Policy and related issuances. Strong alignment indicates explicit recognition of the issue with clear prevention, reporting/referral, and response provisions; moderate/partial alignment indicates that the issue is addressed but coverage is broad, indirect, or incomplete; and limited alignment indicates minimal or no explicit policy coverage.

The policy crosswalk in Table 3 illustrates a clear dichotomy between policy text and operational reality. Issues categorized as having strong alignment—violent discipline, physical punishment, sexual abuse, and bullying—demonstrate comprehensive legal text, yet their persistent high prevalence in national surveys highlights an implementation gap. As Catahan et al. (2026) and Ramos (2024) pointed out, local school enforcement often suffers from stakeholder unawareness, limited capacity among guidance staff, and inconsistent execution by School Child Protection Committees (CPCs). Studies by Calma (2025) and Rivera et al. (2025) emphasize that classroom management and teacher professional development are crucial links for translating written zero-tolerance policies into classroom practice.

Issues categorized under moderate/partial alignment require urgent administrative updating. The Department of Education (2024) stressed that school safety measures must be modernized to give teachers clear protocols for

identifying online grooming and technology-facilitated abuse without compromising due process. Finally, issues with limited alignment (child marriage and child labor) reflect systemic isolation between educational institutions and social protection networks. As noted by UNESCO (2025), schools frequently operate in isolation from local social welfare units, limiting their ability to intervene early in community-driven risks like child labor and early union.

Traffic Light Heatmap on Alignment

Table 4. *Traffic Light Heatmap on the Alignment of Priority Child Protection Issues with the DepEd Child Protection Policy*

Issue	Child Protection Areas				Overall
	Recognition	Prevention	Reporting	Response	
Violent discipline	●	●	●	●	●
Physical punishment	●	●	●	●	●
Sexual abuse	●	●	●	●	●
OSAEC	●	●	●	●	●
Bullying	●	●	●	●	●
Violence against adolescent girls	●	●	●	●	●
Child marriage	●	●	●	●	●
Child labor	●	●	●	●	●

Note. Green indicates strong alignment; yellow, moderate or partial alignment; and red, limited alignment. Ratings were based on the extent to which each issue is explicitly addressed in the DepEd Child Protection Policy across recognition, prevention, reporting/referral, and response. Overall alignment represents the consolidated assessment across these dimensions.

Table 4 synthesizes how the DepEd Child Protection Policy addresses the eight priority child protection issues across four operational dimensions: recognition, prevention, reporting/referral, and response. The predominance of green ratings confirms the policy's continuing structural relevance for traditional school-based risks, while yellow and red ratings highlight areas requiring targeted updates to remain responsive to emerging and out-of-school risks. The green ratings for violent discipline, physical punishment, sexual abuse, and bullying reflect a robust policy architecture characterized by definitional clarity, prohibitive provisions, positive discipline mandates, and procedural due process under DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 (Department of Education, 2012). However, these structural strengths coexist with persistent implementation gaps. Comparative regional research indicates that while the Philippines has codified explicit anti-bullying statutes and child protection frameworks, uneven prohibition of corporal punishment and varied capacity hinder school-level enforcement (Adlit et al., 2024; Department of Education, 2012). Multi-country longitudinal evidence demonstrates that legal bans shift caregiver behavior only when backed by public education, teacher training, and institutional mentoring (Gershoff & Font, 2016; Lansford et al., 2016; Pace, 2022), while De Freitas et al. (2025) note that zero-violence mandates fail without continuous professional development. Philippine empirical studies confirm that strong positive discipline implementation requires institutional support, manageable class sizes, and ongoing teacher training (Dayagbil & Alda, 2024; Escobal et al., 2023; Marasigan, 2023; Oyangorin, 2024; Salado & Lacostales, 2026). Moreover, despite statutory mandates (Republic Act No. 10627, 2013), over 10,000 public schools still lack localized anti-bullying policies, demonstrating that anti-bullying success depends heavily on school climate, classroom management, and structured pathways rather than purely reactive discipline (Abrigo et al., 2024; BenYishay et al., 2024; Cardona et al., 2021; Herrin et al., 2025; Manla, 2024; Sanopa, 2017; Taroma & Sevilla, 2025).

Meanwhile, yellow ratings for Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and violence against adolescent girls expose critical limits within the current framework. While generic exploitation clauses exist, the primary policy lacks explicit protocols for online grooming, cyberbullying, livestreamed abuse, and digital evidence handling, even as structural drivers like poverty and technology access accelerate OSAEC (Hernandez et al., 2023; Manipud, 2024; Roche et al., 2023; Teves, 2025). Operational directives like Regional Memorandum No. 1015, s. 2024, also struggle in practice because of resource constraints, capacity gaps, and low School Child Protection Committee engagement in policy review and early referral (Aceron, 2025; Cervancia et al., 2019; Cubio & Bagnol, 2025; Glariana, 2022). Furthermore, adolescent girls face distinct vulnerabilities that require safe spaces

and gender-responsive programming (David et al., 2017; Engel et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2025; Noble et al., 2017; Valdez et al., 2022). Finally, red ratings for child marriage and child labor mark the widest gap between legal prohibitions and school-level operational mandates. Statutory bans under Republic Act No. 11596 (2021) often drive child marriage underground due to persistent cultural and economic pressures, requiring community engagement, youth leadership, and school-based life-skills education to effectively counter early union (Mehra et al., 2018; Pagayao-Laba & Brigoli, 2025; Tagorda, 2024; Yanti et al., 2026). Similarly, because poverty strongly correlates with child labor and school non-attendance, school-based monitoring paired with social safety nets like conditional cash transfers remains vital to keep child labor interventions connected to educational systems (De Hoop et al., 2019; Fernandez & Abocejo, 2020; Lanzona et al., 2017).

Implications

Table 5. *Key Findings and Implications for Child Protection in Philippine Schools*

No.	Analytical Finding	Nature of Concern	Implication for Schools	Policy/Practice Direction
1	Violent discipline remains prevalent, indicating inconsistent policy implementation beyond schools.	Implementation gap	Strengthen positive discipline practices.	Enhance policy implementation and monitoring.
2	Physical punishment remains prevalent among Filipino children, highlighting the need for greater awareness of children's rights and positive discipline.	Awareness gap	Promote child rights and non-violent discipline.	Expand learner and parent education programs.
3	Reporting mechanisms and support services are not systematically integrated into classroom instruction.	Reporting and awareness gap	Improve learners' knowledge of reporting channels.	Integrate reporting mechanisms into school programs.
4	Requires explicit policy provisions addressing online grooming, livestreaming exploitation, and digital sexual abuse.	Emerging policy gap	Strengthen digital child protection initiatives.	Update policies to address online risks.
5	Bullying remains prevalent, underscoring the need for continuous learner education and prevention.	Prevention gap	Foster a safe and inclusive school climate.	Strengthen anti-bullying education and intervention.
6	Policy provides broad guidance but lacks specific provisions on dating violence, digital abuse, and adolescent gender-based vulnerabilities.	Policy coverage gap	Enhance protection for vulnerable adolescents.	Expand policy guidance on gender-based violence.
7	Represents a policy and curriculum gap despite the enactment of RA 11596.	Policy and curriculum gap	Increase awareness of child marriage prevention.	Integrate child marriage education into school initiatives.
8	Greater integration of child labor awareness and referral pathways in schools is needed.	Referral and coordination gap	Improve identification and referral of at-risk learners.	Strengthen school-community referral networks.

Note. Findings correspond to rows 1–8 of the alignment crosswalk and the Traffic Light Heatmap. The nature of concern and the implication for schools were derived by the researchers from the alignment analysis; the policy/practice direction summarizes the recommended course of action for each finding.

Table 5 synthesizes the findings across priority child protection issues, translating them into actionable school-level implications and concrete policy directions. Regarding violent discipline and physical punishment, persistent prevalence rates (58.80% and 39.10%, respectively) demonstrate that statutory bans such as Republic Act No. 7610 (1992) and DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 (Department of Education, 2012) are insufficient without sustained capacity-building and public information campaigns. Specifically, Brehm and Boyle (2018), Gershoff and Font (2016), Lansford et al. (2016), and Pace (2022) established that legal bans require active educational reinforcement to shift underlying caregiver beliefs. Escobal et al. (2023), Freitas et al. (2025), and Salado and Lacostales (2026) emphasized that sustainable non-violent discipline requires continuous professional development, manageable workloads, and institutional mentorship for educators. Oyangorin (2024) further stressed that effective elementary school discipline relies on coordinated efforts among teachers, parents, administrators, and the broader community. Consequently, schools must implement multi-tiered restorative discipline systems, integrate child rights and emotional literacy into homeroom programs as recommended by Caube et al. (2025), align professional development with teaching standards (Dayagbil & Alda, 2024; Marasigan, 2023), and partner with barangay child protection committees during parent conferences. To address low disclosure rates despite high sexual abuse prevalence, schools must overcome reporting barriers such as fear, stigma, and family loyalty (Alaggia et al., 2017; Lemaigre et al., 2017; Paine & Hansen, 2002), which McPherson et

al. (2024) noted often outweigh reporting facilitators. As Asaolu and Oladepo (2025) show, engaging adolescent leaders is vital to dismantling these barriers. Schools should therefore establish anonymous digital channels and train faculty in trauma-informed responses (Fernandez & Adajar, 2026; Mabawad, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025).

For emerging and specialized risks, targeted policy updates and proactive interventions remain essential. Documenting cases of livestreaming and digital abuse, Roche et al. (2023) identified that Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) is driven by poverty, technology access, and limited harm awareness. Teves (2025) highlighted local protection gaps and stakeholder consensus on insufficient government measures, while Manipud (2024) and Blancaflor et al. (2022) advocated for multi-agency collaboration, law enforcement involvement, and integrated digital safety education. DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 should thus be updated to address online grooming, livestreamed abuse, and digital evidence handling under Regional Memorandum No. 1015, s. 2024. Addressing bullying and violence against adolescent girls demands shifting from reactive punishment toward positive school climates, peer support councils, and specialized programming. Sanapo (2017) critiqued purely reactive measures, whereas Manla (2024) proved that school climate directly predicts performance and bullying outcomes, complementing global findings by BenYishay et al. (2024) and risk assessments by Cardona et al. (2021). Regarding gender-based violence, Valdez et al. (2022) and David et al. (2017) highlighted severe help-seeking barriers and high victimization among Filipino girls, while Engel et al. (2022), Noble et al. (2017), and Nguyen et al. (2025) collectively argued for tailored, adolescent-specific interventions. Furthermore, countering underground child marriage despite prohibitions under Republic Act No. 11596 (2021) requires life-skills education, youth-led advocacy, and digital health tools. Pagayao-Laba and Brigoli (2025) observed that legal fears drive child marriage underground, whereas Tagorda (2024) and Mehra et al. (2018) established the efficacy of youth participation venues and school-based life-skills training, with additional support from Arsini et al. (2025) and Yanti et al. (2026) regarding mobile health awareness models. Similarly, mitigating child labor involves combining attendance monitoring with social safety nets. Fernandez and Abocejo (2020) and Lanzona et al. (2017) documented the heavy trade-offs poor families make between schooling and short-term survival, while De Hoop et al. (2019) demonstrated that conditional cash transfers successfully reduce child labor only when paired with active school-side monitoring.

Across all priority areas, three cross-cutting operational principles emerge to guide policy execution. First, establishing a positive school climate marked by psychological safety, trust, and clear behavioral expectations independently predicts positive learner outcomes in both higher education (Musni, 2025) and basic education contexts (Manla, 2024). Second, multisectoral coordination serves as the operational hinge. Andaya et al. (2025) and Herrera et al. (2022) confirmed that local government leadership and inter-agency collaboration drive implementation success at scale, whereas Razonabe and Quirubin (2024) and Roche and Flynn (2021) cautioned that relying on informal community actors fragments referral pathways, underscoring the need for the robust evaluation infrastructure proposed by Cruz et al. (2025). Third, policy written "on the books" must align with operational execution "on the streets" (Atilano-Tang, 2026; Stowe & Turnbull, 2001). As Fuente (2021) and Han-Awon (2025) demonstrated, policy awareness alone does not guarantee enforcement without dedicated resources, functional Child Protection Committees, and continuous teacher training (Aceron, 2025; Cervancia et al., 2019; Cubio & Bagnol, 2025; Glariana, 2022; Sapul, 2022). Adopting structured frameworks such as the CARE model—Creating community partnerships, Asking for parent participation, Regularizing committee meetings, and Establishing emergency hotlines—offers a practical roadmap for school-level compliance. Ultimately, this synthesis supports national research agendas by offering a replicable, evidence-based policy crosswalk methodology that integrates data mining with structured content analysis methodologies (Huo, 2023; Stowe & Turnbull, 2001) for future educational policy evaluations.

Conclusion

This study contributes to child protection policy and educational governance in the Philippines through three interlocking contributions: methodological, policy-related, and practice-oriented. Methodologically, the study developed and demonstrated a replicable Evidence-based Policy Crosswalk design that integrates documentary data mining, policy content analysis, gap analysis, and a Traffic Light Heatmap to evaluate how an education policy recognizes, prevents, responds to, and provides reporting or referral mechanisms for priority child protection concerns (Department of Education, 2024); (Education, 2012); (Stowe & Turnbull, 2001). Because the design relies exclusively on publicly available documentary sources, it can be adapted by researchers, teacher education institutions, and education agencies to evaluate other policies promoting learner safety, well-being, and

children's rights — a contribution directly aligned with the priority research areas of the National Teacher Education Research Agenda (Quality, 2022).

From a policy perspective, the study generated concrete directions for enhancing the DepEd Child Protection Policy (Department of Education, 2012). These include explicit provisions on technology-facilitated harms — online grooming, livestreamed sexual abuse, cyberbullying, online harassment, dating violence, and digital evidence preservation — paired with digital citizenship education and digital referral pathways in coordination with specialized agencies such as those mandated under the Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials Act 2022. They also include a standardized School Child Protection Committee operating manual specifying membership, meeting frequency, case documentation templates, referral workflows, and annual self-assessment tools, with dedicated time, resources, and transition planning to ensure continuity despite leadership or personnel turnover. Implementation proposals include quarterly Child Protection Committee monitoring, school-level reporting audits, and a national accountability dashboard to close the persistent implementation gap, along with a mandatory three-year policy review cycle to keep policy responsive to evolving risks. These provisions directly address the structural pattern identified in the analysis: strong foundational mandates that require capacity and resource support, partial coverage of digital and gender-related risks, and limited school-based coverage of community-driven concerns such as child marriage in accordance with (An Act Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage, 2021) and child labor.

From an implementation and practice standpoint, the study underscores two enabling conditions that must accompany any policy revision. First, continuous professional development—on positive discipline, trauma-informed teaching, child rights literacy, and confidential case handling—is essential if existing prohibitions are to translate into consistent classroom practice. Second, visible, confidential, multilingual, and accessible reporting channels embedded in homeroom and co-curricular programs are urgently needed; national baseline evidence indicating that fewer than 10.00% of victimized children disclose their abuse or seek professional help underscores this priority.

Finally, DepEd should formalize multisectoral coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Philippine National Police, local government units, healthcare providers, and community organizations through a national referral framework with defined roles, timelines, and case-sharing protocols. Future empirical, mixed-method, and longitudinal research involving teachers, learners, parents, and community stakeholders is strongly encouraged to validate policy implementation, examine the effectiveness of the proposed mechanisms, and generate deeper evidence for continuous policy enhancement, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16.2, national child protection frameworks, and EDCOM II directions.

Contributions of Authors

Author 1: abstract, introduction, conceptualization
Author 2: data analysis, conclusion, recommendation
Author 3: data gathering, data analysis
Author 4: editing, conceptualization

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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