

Perceptions of Elementary Parents on Child Protection Policy: A Qualitative Inquiry

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore how elementary parents perceived the child protection policies at the Carmen Central Elementary School SPED Center, as well as their coping mechanisms and insights. This study used a phenomenological approach in a qualitative research design. Fourteen (14) participants were selected through purposive sampling and interviewed through in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that parents appreciate the policy, are aware of its provisions, and actively support the welfare of their children. Their coping mechanisms include engaging with teachers, participating in school activities, and managing emotions effectively. Insights emphasized the importance of the policy, parental roles, and its strong implementation. This study highlighted that parental awareness and involvement play a vital role in effective policy implementation. It is recommended that schools strengthen parent engagement, conduct regular orientations, and enhance support systems to promote child protection.

Keywords: *Child Protection Policy; Parental Awareness; SPED Education; Qualitative Inquiry; Philippines*

1. Introduction

Child protection plays a vital role in ensuring the safety and well-being of children, preventing abuse, and fostering a nurturing environment that supports their overall development. The Department of Education (DepEd) has recently stressed the importance of strictly implementing the government's child protection policy, empowering teachers and school personnel to actively safeguard the safety and welfare of learners. This renewed focus was prompted by concerning data presented by Vice President and Education Secretary Sara Z. Duterte, which showed a troubling increase in reported child abuse cases between 2019 and 2022 (Antiza & Labitad, 2024). In the Philippines, children are regarded as important members of society and are granted rights from birth, including the right to protection. Because they are vulnerable and dependent on adults, they require safe and supportive environments that promote their emotional and social development.

The World Health Organization (2022) includes all types of physical or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harm to the child's health, survival, and development considered Child Maltreatment. Moreover, the Provincial Government of Cavite (2018) recorded 22 cases of child sexual abuse, six of emotional abuse, and five instances of physical abuse. It was reported in 2016 that the City of Dasmariñas had the second most considerable shortage of police-to-population ratio and the lowest crime solution efficiency.

One of the apparent types of violence against children occurs in school, where it takes many different forms. Any act of physical aggressiveness by adults or other children to cause harm, such as physical bullying or corporal punishment, is considered violence. Corporal punishment is any discipline involving physical force to cause some level of pain or suffering. It is frequently applied to address misbehavior or to penalize students for subpar performance in school. Instances of violence, including physical aggression amongst students and physical aggression reinforced by educators and other staff, may occur in public areas where students are present, such as school sports facilities, playgrounds, or classrooms. Instructors might also be blind to bullying or the codes, words, and behaviors kids and teenagers use to torment one another. Additionally, bullying that occurs behind closed doors might be challenging to spot. Sometimes, educators condone or even participate in aggressive and harassing behavior. If children are not raised in a violent-free atmosphere, schools cannot fulfill their potential as centers of learning and socialization (Ferrara et al., 2019).

In the Philippines, there have been reported instances of teachers being involved in violence and abuse. In 2021, a case surfaced involving a teacher who posted an online video showing how he would react when a student passed by (PNA). In another case in 2016, a teacher was convicted of committing lascivious acts against three male students. Furthermore, in 2022, nearly 9,000 cases of child abuse were reported, including sexual abuse, bullying, and mental health-related concerns. In response to these issues, the Department of Education reminded teachers to consistently uphold the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct (Arcuino & Oclitaria, 2025)

The study of Casipe & Bete (2023) revealed that the school plays a vital role in ensuring that the Child Protection Policy is being instigated within its particular premises. The teachers' varying opinions towards the Department of Education's new policy is perceptible. Furthermore, numerous cases of abuse among students, teachers, and guardians are extensive in the media, ruining the reputation of the teachers being tagged as second parents and the institute as second home.

Most parents lack comprehensive knowledge and awareness regarding the Child Protection Act, leading to gaps in understanding their rights and safety measures. Their attitude towards this act can improve through active participation in preventing child abuse and learning about their rights. Government officials well-versed in the law are responsible for safeguarding children. Still, students' adherence to school regulations can also contribute to a disciplined environment, though it doesn't entirely ensure their safety from potential violations or abuse (Ruelo et al., 2020). Parents need to be aware of how schools manage disciplinary actions, involve stakeholders in policy decisions, and address challenges related to child protection (Antiza & Labitad, 2024). Further, Asio et al. (2020) emphasized that the Child Protection Policy must be discussed among parents. A general assembly of parents and guardians also suggested educating them and sharing knowledge and understanding regarding the policy. Further, the Child Protection Policy must also include information about the environment in which a child interacts, such as the community.

Under the section 7 of DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, known as DepEd Child Protection Policy, the School Heads shall have the duties and responsibilities of Ensuring the effectiveness of child protection policies and procedures and monitoring its compliance, ensuring that the school adopts a child protection policy, ensuring that all pupils, parents, guardians, visitors, and guests are made aware of child protection policy and ensuring that all incidents of abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other similar acts are addressed by the provisions of this Department Order. Also, section 10 of the same DepEd Order establishes a child protection committee that assists parents, whenever necessary, in securing expert guidance counseling from the appropriate offices or institutions. This DepEd policy aims to provide specific safeguards for children facing serious threats or abuse that hinder their normal progress and over to inevitable circumstances, and also to support the relevant agencies for their rehabilitation.

The researchers were motivated to conduct a study that seeks to explore and understand the different perspectives of parents regarding the child protection policy. Additionally, the researchers consider this study

urgent for no studies have been conducted on the Perceptions of Elementary Parents on Child Protection Policy in Carmen Central Elementary School SPED Center. Despite the growing concern of abuse, bullying, and violence of learners in school, the child protection policy has not reached all the parents regarding the process of the said policy. The current study seeks to fill the gap by investigating the perceptions of elementary parents about child protection policy and gathering information about their experiences.

This study aims to answer the following questions: (1) What are the perceptions of parents in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy?, (2) How do the parents address their concerns in the implementation of Child Protection Policy?, and (3) What are the insights of parents about the implementation of the Child Protection Policy?

2. Methodology

This study used a qualitative research method specifically phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophy and inquiry method that focuses on understanding the lived world of humans at a conscious level. It involves interpretations and meaning-making, using bracketing to describe phenomena and gain insights. Phenomenological studies broaden the mind, improve thinking, and define researchers' posture. However, subjectivity and personal knowledge are central to phenomenological studies. Phenomenology can be used extensively in social sciences (Qutoshi 2018).

The participants of this study were the parents of elementary students at Carmen Central Elementary School SPED Center. Using purposive sampling, we interviewed fourteen (14) parents. Seven (7) in-depth interviews (IDI) with elementary parents and one focus group discussion (FGD) with seven (7) participants. We conducted a pre-interview in which we asked brief questions of the participants, who were idling around the school premises and in the parents' waiting area. The said school is the largest elementary school in the municipality of Carmen Davao del Norte and the only elementary school in town that offers a SPED Center. Most of the students here were the residents of the Poblacion Ising and nearby barangays, as this school was located in the heart of the municipality along the national highway.

During the last interview, they answered our queries with ease. The only people who can participate in the interview are those with children in elementary school, regardless of grade; they can be male or female. The researchers ask for their consent to join this interview willingly, and they can withdraw anytime. The researchers use of semi-structured interviews, a blend of structured and unstructured interviews, is thought to be less rigid than structured interviews. Compared to other research instruments, interviews provide more reliable results and allow the interviews to engage and connect with the participants.

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the responses provided by the participants. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing and reporting patterns or themes with data (Boyatzis, 1998). Using thematic analysis in this study is very helpful because it is a flexible and valuable research tool that can probably grant a substantial, complex, and rich data account. As Boyatzis (1998) suggested, to analyze the data, the researchers took the following actions: familiarize the data, produce initial codes, search for themes, examine the themes, define and identify themes, and design the report.

Qualitative research has criteria that can be utilized to evaluate the quality of the research. To ensure trustworthiness of this study, the researchers adhered to the criteria suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1985). To develop the trustworthiness of a qualitative inquiry, four criteria were followed: Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, and Transferability. Guba and Lincoln's criteria are considered the "gold standard" for qualitative research (Alexander, 2019).

The researchers ensured the credibility of the study by having multiple sources of data, debriefing, triangulation, and continual interactions with our participants. In achieving confirmability, the researchers secured the audio-recorded interviews, transcripts, and taking notes. To establish the dependability, the

researchers are systematically involved in collecting and analyzing data through a coding-recoding system. Throughout data reduction, the researchers ensured that only pertinent information was encoded. Also, the researchers provided a thorough description of our research's assumptions and research context to address transferability. The researchers ensured that the data were precise and correct.

3. Results and Discussion

Presented in table 1 the participant's information. All participants involved in both the focus group discussion and in-depth interviews responded to the same set of interview questions to ensure consistency in data collection. To uphold ethical standards and protect the confidentiality and privacy of the key participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

Table 1. Participants' Information

Pseudonyms	Sex	Parents' Children's Grade Level	Study Group
IDI_1 Sapphire	Female	GRADE 5	In-depth Interview
IDI_2 Emerald	Female	GRADE 2	In-depth Interview
IDI_3 Opal	Female	GRADE 3	In-depth Interview
IDI_4 Ruby	Female	GRADE 1	In-depth Interview
IDI_5 Pearl	Female	GRADE 2	In-depth Interview
IDI_6 Garnet	Female	GRADE 4	In-depth Interview
IDI_7 Beryl	Female	GRADE 1	In-depth Interview
FGD_1 Cleopatra	Female	GRADE 2	Focus Group Discussion
FGD_2 Amytis	Female	GRADE 1	Focus Group Discussion
FGD_3 Cornelia	Female	GRADE 3	Focus Group Discussion
FGD_4 Eva Anna	Female	GRADE 2	Focus Group Discussion
FGD_5 Germaine	Female	GRADE 1	Focus Group Discussion
FGD_6 Ada Lovelace	Female	GRADE 1	Focus Group Discussion
FGD_7 Elizabeth	Female	GRADE 5	Focus Group Discussion

Perceptions of Elementary Parents in the Implementation of Child Protection Policy

Presented in table 2 the themes and core ideas reflecting the perspectives of elementary parents on the implementation of the Child Protection Policy. Based on the data gathered from the participants, three major themes emerged from the analysis. These include parents' appreciation of the policy, their awareness and understanding of its provisions, and their role in promoting and ensuring the welfare of their children. The theme on appreciation highlights how parents recognize the importance and benefits of the policy in safeguarding learners. Meanwhile, awareness of the policy reflects parents' knowledge of its guidelines, procedures, and the appropriate actions to take when concerns arise. Also, providing welfare for children emphasizes the active role of parents in supporting their children's safety, well-being, and development within the school environment.

Table 2. Essential Themes and Core Ideas on the Perceptions of Elementary Parents in Implementing Child Protection Policy

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Appreciating the Policy	• Giving us peace of mind that our children are safe in school. • Lessen our worries for the safety of our children. • The policy gives more protection to our children, such as putting security guards in school. • Give us clear information about the policy.
Having Awareness of the Policy	• Safeguarding our children from any forms of harm. • Protection of our children against a bully at school. • This policy helps us secure our children and protect their well-being. • The school is giving us information about the policy.
Providing Welfare for the Children	• Providing rules to create a safe environment for our children. • Giving clear measures for child protection. • A policy that protects our children in the school setting. • Providing children's rights as human rights.

Appreciating The Policy. The findings revealed that all participants expressed a positive perception of the Child Protection Policy, indicating a strong sense of appreciation toward its implementation. Parents consistently shared that the presence of the policy provides them with a sense of security and reassurance, knowing that measures are in place to safeguard their children while in school. This feeling of safety reflects not only their trust in the policy itself but also in the school's commitment to enforcing it effectively.

This theme is similar to the study of Kemp et al. (2014) which highlighted that parents strongly believe in the school policy when it comes to the safety of their children. They are all confident that the school is doing its best to protect them from any abuse or violence. Having a strong, good relationship with parents and professionals has been identified as an essential factor in attaining the desired changes in the lives of children and the finest outcomes for children.

Similarly, the study by Arcuino and Oclinaría (2025) found that knowing children in school are safe from any form of violence, harm, or malicious incidents provides a rewarding sense of assurance and represents the highest level of satisfaction with the implementation of child protection policies. They also emphasized that fulfilling basic human needs, including education, clothing, sanitation, safety, and security, is essential for human well-being. When these needs are not met, it results in injustice and a significant violation of fundamental human rights and security. The Child Protection Policy responds to one of these crucial needs by promoting the safety and security of children within schools. Consequently, stakeholders feel satisfied and

confident that the policy adequately addresses these concerns and better supports the learners it is intended to serve.

Having Awareness of the Policy. This theme revealed that parents demonstrate a clear awareness of the Child Protection Policy implemented in the school. This awareness is reflected in their understanding of the basic provisions of the policy, including the procedures for reporting concerns, identifying appropriate school personnel to approach, and recognizing situations that require immediate attention. Such knowledge indicates that the school has effectively disseminated information regarding the policy to parents, enabling them to become informed stakeholders in the protection of their children.

This theme aligns with the study of Casandig and Rufino (2025) which accentuated that parents have awareness on the child protection policy of the school. The study also noted that having awareness of the Child Protection Policy enhances the understanding and commitment of parents, teachers, and stakeholders, which are essential for its successful implementation.

Providing Welfare for the Children. This theme reveal that participants consistently expressed strong concern for the protection and overall welfare of their children, highlighting the central importance of the Child Protection Policy in ensuring student safety. Parents view the policy as a critical safeguard that addresses potential risks and vulnerabilities that may negatively affect their children's normal development within the school environment. This indicates that their understanding of the policy goes beyond basic awareness, extending to a deeper recognition of its protective function in promoting learners' well-being.

The study of Goldschmidt-Gjerløw (2019) highlighted that the DepEd Child Protection Policy defines the roles and responsibilities that schools are required to fulfill in order to protect children from harm, abuse, and neglect. It emphasizes that educational institutions must be dedicated to preventing child abuse and acknowledges the important role of all personnel who work closely with learners.

The Coping Mechanism of the Parents in Addressing Concerns in the Implementation of Child Protection Policy

Based on the data gathered from the participants' responses to the interview questions, several essential themes emerged regarding how parents cope with concerns related to the implementation of the Child Protection Policy. The analysis revealed three key coping mechanisms: parents' engagement with teachers, parents' participation in school activities, and parents' understanding in dealing with emotions, as presented in Table 3. These themes reflect the various strategies employed by parents in managing challenges and supporting the effective implementation of the policy within the school setting.

Table 3. Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Mechanism of the Parents in Addressing Concerns in the Implementation of Child Protection Policy

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Parent's Engagement with the Teachers	• Directly communicate their concerns to the teachers. • Parents value the teacher's prompt attention to their inquiries. • Technology makes it possible for parents and instructors to connect directly.

Parent's Participation in School Activities

- Parents must attend meetings to discuss school policies and be educated about them.
- Participating in meetings and having conversations with other parents.
- Participation in school activities is beneficial for parents to understand their children's needs and concerns.

Parent's Understanding in Dealing with Emotions

- Sets a strong emphasis on treating teachers with respect.
- Encourages calmness and respectful communication to address concerns and questions.
- Encourages parents to not let their emotions overshadow their concerns.
- Advocates for calm communication and understanding of the problem before addressing it.

Parent's Engagement with the Teachers. Almost all of the participants in in-depth and focus group discussions revealed their thoughts on addressing their concerns. They appreciate the teachers' fast responses, direct communication made possible by modern technologies, and the ability to discuss concerns in meetings. Approaching the teacher first is best for classroom issues.

This theme is parallel to the study of Price-Robertson et al. (2020) which found that protecting children from abuse and neglect requires teamwork. They explained that when people work together in a coordinated way, it leads to better results and more positive experiences. This means that stakeholders should cooperate and work together in carrying out, managing, and addressing concerns about child protection policies in schools. In addition, Willis (2013) stated that parental involvement enhances engagement with teachers by fostering mutual understanding, trust, and professionalism in parent-teacher relationships. This strengthened collaboration ultimately contributes to improved student achievement in the classroom.

Parent's Participation in School Activities. The parents should be educated about school policies, participate in meetings, and discuss them with teachers and staff. Participation in school activities and attending meetings provide insights and help understand children's needs and concerns.

This theme is consistent with the study of Asio et al. (2021), which emphasizes the importance of involving parents in discussions about the Child Protection Policy. Schools can organize general assemblies where teachers engage with parents and guardians, helping them gain a clearer and comprehensive understanding of the policy. Moreover, the study by Peñano (2025) found that the implementation of child protection policies in schools is highly effective when practices such as conducting seminars or symposiums on children's rights, preventing humiliation during classroom discussions, providing targeted parenting orientation sessions for parents and caregivers, ensuring that teachers do not misuse their authority by threatening students with grades as punishment, and protecting children from public ridicule or repeated verbal abuse are consistently observed.

Parent's Understanding in Dealing with Emotions. Parents emphasize the importance of calmness, communication, respect for teachers, understanding of problems, not letting emotions overshadow concerns about school policy, and not letting anger hinder problem-solving.

This theme is similar to the study of Schreiber et al. (2013), which revealed that effective engagement among child protection professionals, teachers, and parents is strengthened when professionals are perceived as emotionally supportive and competent. Their findings highlight that positive relationships and meaningful collaboration among stakeholders enhance trust, communication, and the overall effectiveness of child protection efforts. Moreover, the study of Arcuino and Oclitaria (2025) highlighted that the stakeholders expressed a sense of connection with one another in relation to the child protection policy. They noted that although discipline can be expressed in different ways, they still feel satisfied as they are able to understand and relate it to their own lives. Parents relate their experiences to teachers and students, while teachers extend their connection with learners beyond the school setting into their homes. Through this, stakeholders are able to establish positive relationships with learners by providing support and encouragement both in school and at home.

Insights of Parents About the Implementation of Child Protection Policy

Presented in Table 4 are three major themes that emerged from the data gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions based on participants' insights regarding the implementation of the Child Protection Policy. Through thematic analysis, the findings revealed key themes, including the importance of the Child Protection Policy and the roles and responsibilities of parents.

Table 4. Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of Parents About the Implementation of Child Protection Policy

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
The Importance of the Child Protection Policy	• Child Protection Policy is important for the safety of the children. • Their children must be safe because parents are also busy with their work. • The child Protection Policy is helpful not only in school but also outside school. • It is not only for school-going children but also protects them from bad things.
The Role and Responsibilities of the Parents	• To protect them whatever happens. • To protect and guide the children and not rely on the school at all times. • To keep their children safe. • We are the first protector of our children, whether inside or outside the school.

The Strong Implementation of the Child Protection Policy

- We need to improve the implementation of this policy so that our children are secure.
- This policy should be improved on how to implement it.
- It is right that this policy should be implemented more since we cannot watch over our children all the time.
- Their safety measures should be tightened more.

The Importance of the Child Protection Policy. Based on the results of this study, it was revealed that the Child Protection Policy is very helpful to parents in ensuring that their children are safe inside or outside the school. Also, some working parents will feel at ease with their children because they are not always on the side of their children. Some of their responses are presented below.

This result is parallel to a study of Pecora et al. (2018) which indicated that of the child protection policy is essential in preventing and addressing discrimination, ensuring that all children are given equal protection, support, and opportunities in schools and other environments. Additionally, Dela Fuente (2021) expressed that the policy ensures children's holistic well-being and safeguards them from all forms of abuse and exploitation, including violence, discrimination, and bullying.

The Role and Responsibilities of the Parents. The participants in both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions revealed their insights that the parents have a big role in protecting their children, whatever happens. It is their responsibility to keep their children safe and protected. Furthermore, parents should give parental support and guidance to their children and not only rely on teachers.

This result is parallel to a study by Vassallo et al. (2009) which cited that parents play a crucial role in shaping the foundations of children. In addition, the study of Korkmaz (2007) stated that parents feel responsible for their children's education and for meeting their basic needs, as they are expected to show love, respect, and care for their children.

Moreover, the study of Arcuino and Oclinaria (2025) revealed that parents and teachers should serve as positive motivators, encouraging children to perform well in school and to become responsible citizens in the future. They also emphasized that community members, teachers, and other stakeholders have a professional responsibility to protect children from harm. Also, the study of Ulhaq (2021) emphasized that children are considered highly vulnerable members of society, and parents naturally hold the responsibility of caring for and protecting them. In the same way, teachers, community members, and other stakeholders are also professionally obligated to ensure children's safety. This indicates that through the Child Protection Policy in schools, the duty to protect children is a shared responsibility that becomes more effective through the combined efforts of society and professionals.

The Strong Implementation of the Child Protection Policy. The results of this study revealed that parents wish that the child protection policy was implemented more. It has been indicated in their statements that they have doubts about the implementation. They observe that there are things to improve. Furthermore, some parents are happy about the implementation of the child protection policy.

This theme is parallel to the study by Ungar et al. (2019) which highlighted the important role of schools in preventing child abuse by promoting resilience among children, especially those who are experiencing significant disadvantages. In addition, Zamora and Madrigal (2018) which stressed that schools should observe a very high level of implementation. Also, the successful implementation of the child protection policy calls for the commitment of all stakeholders of the educational institution.

Further, adherence to child protection measures in schools is crucial in creating a safe, supportive, and nurturing learning environment. The formulation and implementation of a strong Child Protection Policy is an effective approach to minimizing incidents of child abuse (Pesimo, 2025).

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of the study reveal that parents of children in the SPED Center of Carmen Central Elementary School have a clear understanding of the Child Protection Policy, including their roles, responsibilities, and the proper channels for addressing concerns. Their awareness reflects the school's effective dissemination of information and commitment to safeguarding children's welfare. Moreover, parents recognize the importance of the policy in creating a safe and supportive learning environment for their children.

Furthermore, the study highlights that parents employ various coping mechanisms such as active engagement with teachers, participation in school activities, and emotional resilience in handling challenges. These practices demonstrate that parents are not only informed but also actively involved in supporting the implementation of the policy. Their insights emphasize the significance of strong collaboration between parents and the school in ensuring the protection and well-being of learners.

It is recommended that the school continue to strengthen its implementation of the Child Protection Policy by sustaining regular parent orientations, enhancing communication channels, and encouraging greater parental involvement in school programs. It is also recommended that schools further strengthen parent engagement, conduct regular orientations, and enhance support systems to better promote child protection. Additionally, providing continuous support systems, such as counseling and parent education initiatives, can further empower parents to effectively fulfill their roles in protecting and promoting the welfare of their children.

For future research, it is suggested that similar studies be conducted in different schools or educational settings with a larger number of participants to validate and expand the findings. Researchers may also explore the perspectives of teachers and students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation and effectiveness of child protection policies.

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