
COMPLIANCE WITH CHILD PROTECTION POLICY IN SCHOOLS AND LEARNERS' MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the relationship between the level of compliance with the Child Protection Policy in schools and the learners' mental state in Impasug-ong I District, Division of Bukidnon, for the School Year 2024–2025. Specifically, it sought to assess the schools' compliance with the Child Protection Policy in terms of (a) duties and functions of school officials and personnel, (b) establishment of the Child Protection Committee, and (c) capacity building of school officials, personnel, parents, and learners. The study further examined whether a significant relationship exists between policy compliance and learners' mental state. The study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design. Data were collected and analyzed using frequency count, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Spearman's rank correlation. Findings revealed that the level of compliance with the Child Protection Policy was very highly compliant across all assessed areas, indicating strong implementation and adherence among schools in the district. The learners' mental state was described as flourishing, characterized by positive emotions, joy, gratitude, calmness, strong relationships, high resilience, and coping skills. However, statistical analysis showed no significant relationship between the level of compliance with the Child Protection Policy and the learners' mental state. The findings suggest that while compliance with child protection measures ensures that other factors beyond policy implementation may influence a safe and secure school environment, learners' mental well-being is also important. It is therefore recommended that schools complement their compliance efforts with holistic mental health and socio-emotional support programs to further enhance learners' overall well-being.

KEYWORDS: Child protection policy, mental state, compliance, learners' well-being.

INTRODUCTION

According to the 1987 Philippine Constitution, the State is mandated to protect the rights of children by ensuring they receive proper care, nutrition, and protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other harmful conditions (Article XV, Section 3). Additionally, the Constitution emphasizes that educational institutions have the responsibility to promote patriotism, nationalism, respect for human rights, love for humanity, appreciation of national heroes, and to teach civic duties. Schools are also tasked with strengthening moral values, promoting spiritual growth, fostering discipline, cultivating critical and creative thinking, imparting scientific and technological knowledge, and developing vocational skills (Article XIV, Section 3 [2]).

Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reinforces the duty to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including sexual abuse. It also upholds every child's right to education, urging governments to take action to promote regular school attendance and reduce dropout rates. In line with this, all forms of school discipline must be carried out in a manner that upholds the child's dignity and complies with the principles of the CRC.

The school environment plays a crucial role in shaping the overall well-being of learners, affecting not only their academic development but also their emotional, psychological, and social growth. As institutions entrusted with the care and education of children, schools carry a moral and legal responsibility to create a safe and nurturing space for every learner. In recognition of this, the Department of Education has established the Child Protection Policy (CPP). The measures set forth are to safeguard children from all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, and bullying within the school context.

However, while the existence of the Child Protection Policy provides a clear framework for protecting learners, the actual implementation and compliance with the policy vary across schools. The degree to which these policies are understood, embraced, and practiced by school personnel. It can also significantly affect not only the safety of the students but also their mental health. Learners exposed to unsafe or hostile environments may experience heightened levels of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and other mental health challenges. These challenges can hinder their academic performance and personal development.

This study seeks to explore the level of compliance with the Child Protection Policy in the target respondent schools and examine its relationship with the mental health status of learners. By identifying gaps in implementation and understanding the impact of protective measures on learners' well-being, this research aims to provide insights that can inform more

effective policy enforcement and mental health support mechanisms within educational settings.

The Department of Education (DepEd) has established the Child Protection Policy to safeguard children from all forms of violence, whether caused by adults, authority figures, or fellow learners, including acts of bullying.

To fulfill this goal, DepEd, in partnership with various stakeholders, is committed to making all schools safe, supportive, and child-friendly learning environments. In every decision or action concerning children—whether by schools, courts, government agencies, or social institutions—their best interest must always come first. This aligns with the principle of “First Call for Children” as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Teachers and learning facilitators, particularly in community learning centers, are viewed as second parents and are expected to carry out their responsibilities with that level of care. The Family Code grants schools, administrators, teachers, and childcare providers special parental authority over students during school hours and activities.

DepEd also recognizes that due to the pressures and difficulties faced by educators and school personnel, instances of child abuse may unfortunately occur. As such, the policy serves to provide enhanced protection for children who face serious risks to their development from situations beyond their control. It also aims to support government and partner agencies in the rehabilitation and recovery of affected children.

Additionally, the Department of Education seeks to provide children with the necessary protection, care, and support to ensure their overall well-being. This is done while respecting the fundamental rights and responsibilities of parents, legal guardians, or other individuals who lawfully care for and have custody of the child. DepEd also upholds the right of children to participate in decisions and processes that affect them—whether they are victims or offenders—either directly or through a representative, especially in the creation and implementation of policies.

In line with its commitment to child safety, the Department of Education firmly upholds a zero-tolerance policy against all forms of child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, and bullying. This policy is formally established through this Department Order.

The 21st-century educational landscape emphasizes student-centered learning, where teachers serve as facilitators rather than the sole source of knowledge. With this shift, the need to ensure a safe, respectful, and supportive environment for learners becomes even more critical. According to DepEd (2012), child protection encompasses the systems, programs,

and procedures designed to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, discrimination, and violence.

Despite existing policies, challenges persist in addressing child protection concerns, particularly in responding to the needs of victims (Rahman & Sarip, 2020). These challenges are not exclusive to individuals—they are shared by educational institutions as well. Protecting children is a collective responsibility involving parents, educators, communities, and government agencies.

While the child protection policy has been mandated at the school level for over a decade, there remains a lack of systematic documentation on how complaints are handled. This gap limits policymakers' ability to assess effectiveness and improve implementation strategies.

Similarly, the institutionalization of child protection policy at the school level was mandated more than 12 years ago. Moreover, there is no record of how complaints about the school, in general, serve as a reference for policymakers on how to improve implementation.

The various concepts, ideas, generalizations, conclusions, and developments related to the study, from past to present, serve as the researcher's guide in developing the study. This chapter will also provide insights into the information essential for conducting the study.

Theoretical Framework

The research is anchored on DepEd Order No. 40, series of 2012, commonly known as the "DepEd Child Protection Policy."

Figure 1 portrays a schematic diagram of the research. The variables that were independent and dependent were shown. The dependent variable was represented by the box on the right, which indicated the learners' mental health. The independent variable comprises three separate areas: the first is the duties and functions of the School Official, the second is the Establishment of the Child

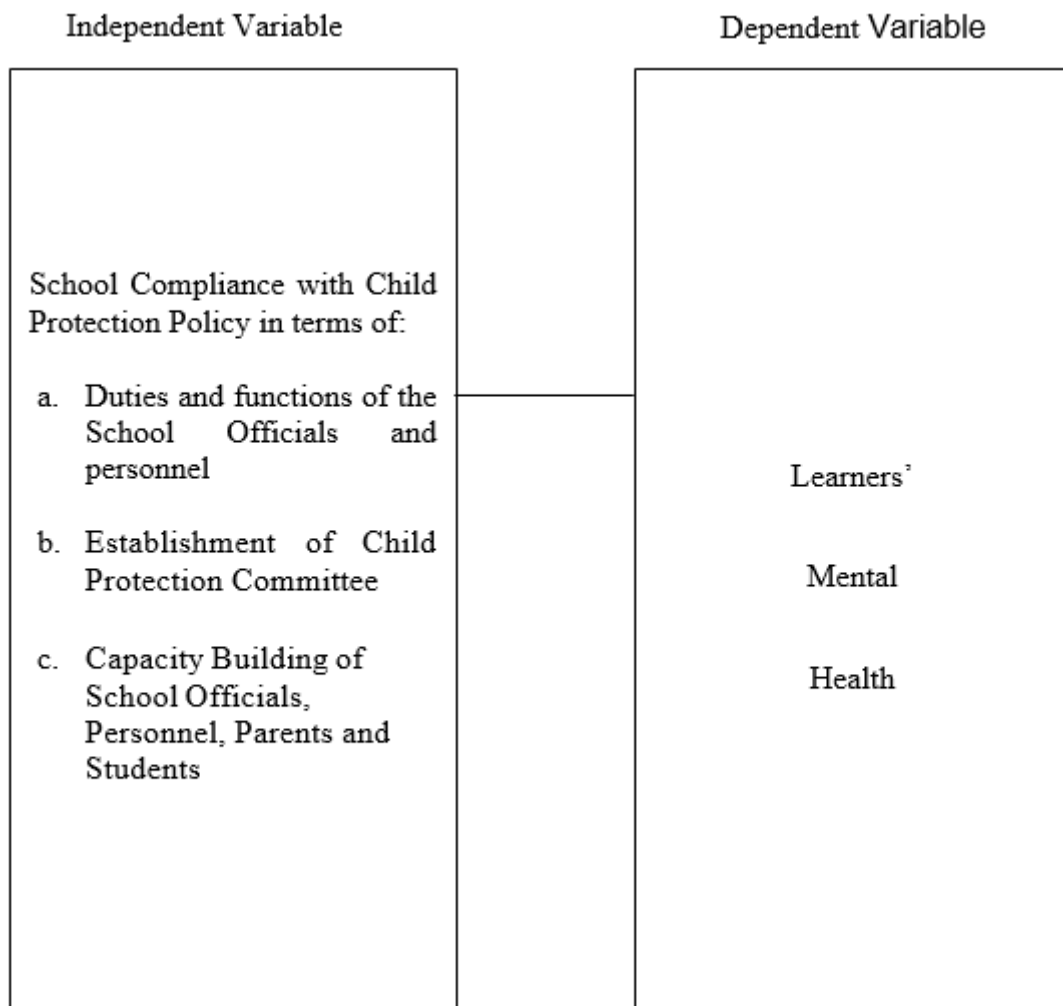


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the study showing the relationship between independent and dependent variables

Statement of the Problem

The study will determine the school's compliance with the child protection policy in discharging its duties and responsibilities as stipulated in DepEd Order No. 40, series of 2012.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of compliance with the child protection policy in schools in the following areas: duties and functions of the school officials and personnel, establishment of the child protection committee, capacity building of school officials, personnel, parents, and learners?
2. What is the learner's mental state?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of compliance with the child protection policy in schools and learners' mental State?

Significance of the Study

The result of this study will be a valuable basis for planning, and the results will be beneficial to the following.

For learners, it provides them with insights as the center of learning, making them aware of their responsibilities in improving cooperation with policy implementers, thereby benefiting the school in creating peace and order.

For teachers, the results of this study could serve as a basis for determining which areas of child protection policy need improvement.

To the School Administrator, the study's results may serve as a basis for planning better compliance and implementation of the child protection policy in their respective assignment stations.

To the Department of Education, the study's results may serve as a basis for planning adjustments. The practical implementation of the child protection policy in the country can lead to improved quality of education.

Delimitation of the Study

The study is delimited to determine the level of compliance with the child protection policy in schools in the areas of duties and functions of school officials and personnel, responsibilities of learners, establishment of a child protection committee, capacity building of school officials, personnel, parents, and learners for the school year 2024-2025. This study will be limited to school heads, teachers, and other school personnel as subject respondents, categorized into two groups to respond to the required data in the questionnaire.

It will be limited to 148 teachers and school head respondents from Impasug-ong I and II Districts of the Division of Bukidnon. The instrument was adapted from the DepEd Order No. 40, series of 2012, checklist requirements. The data gathered will be analyzed using statistical tools, with results limited to frequency counts, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and Spearman's Rho.

Review of the Literature

International research offers valuable insights into child protection policies, revealing diverse and relevant findings. For instance, Al-Qaysi (2018) identified notable differences in staff attitudes toward the implementation of child protection policies. Similarly, Drake et al. (2019) examined major child protection practices and policies, linking them to individuals and settings. Meanwhile, Heiman and Gupta (2020) proposed a critical framework that

connects child protection policies with practical application, demonstrating how theoretical perspectives can inform daily practice.

A national study on child protection reform in Israel revealed that limited child participation led to reduced cooperation in the implementation of protection practices (Alfandri, 2017). Meanwhile, research by Münger and Markström (2019) highlighted that many school professionals lack sufficient knowledge about domestic violence, including child abuse.

Devaney and McGregor (2016) emphasized the need for both students and practitioners to navigate the complex relationship between family support and child protection efforts. In terms of institutional response, Mustikasari and Rostyaningsih (2020) observed that while the implementation of child protection policies is progressing, it remains hindered by certain constraints. Ultimately, the studies reinforce that every child possesses inherent and legally recognized rights that must be upheld.

Despite the existence of these fundamental rights, many adults continue to violate them, leading to ongoing cases of child abuse. In response, Shewchuk (2016) noted in her review that most school boards have developed formal child protection policies and procedures, though the depth and detail of information vary across boards. Similarly, Smyth and Katz (2016) explored the broader concept of child protection, emphasizing the inclusion of school-based educational materials aimed at preventing child sexual abuse and addressing other forms of abuse and neglect. Additionally, Robles (2019) found a correlation between poor academic performance, higher Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scores, and lower Protective Factors (PF) scores, highlighting the impact of such experiences on learners.

Burr and Fay (2019) noted that school-based child protection programs are often limited in scope and may sometimes lead to unintended consequences. Additionally, research by Armfeld et al. (2020) highlighted the potential to reduce student absenteeism depending on the type and timing of a child's involvement in the child protection system. Despite significant improvements in the school environment, children remain vulnerable to abuse, bullying, and intimidation, which can result in severe emotional and psychological trauma.

The effective policies and practices that promote children's and families' involvement in maintaining regular school attendance are essential. Equally important are strategies aimed at preventing child maltreatment and addressing disadvantages faced by vulnerable children (Maclean, Taylor, & O'Donnell, 2016). Local studies on the Child Protection Policy reveal varied perspectives and outcomes regarding its importance, implementation, and how it is perceived by stakeholders. To ensure that all pupils, students or learners, school personnel, parents, guardians or custodians, and visitors and guests are made aware of the child

protection policy, the school searched for ways and means to resolve the gap. For instance, research by Segundo and Guia (2019) found that the level of implementation of the child protection policy in public high schools was only moderate.

However, this perception contrasts with the findings of Baronia (2020), who reported that both respondent groups showed similar views, particularly regarding the involvement of school executive managers in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities such as conduct appropriate training and capability-building activities on child protection measures and protocols, Give them love and affection, advice and counsel, companionship and understanding, exercise special parental authority and responsibility over the child while under their supervision, instruction, and custody. Authority and responsibility shall apply to all authorized activities, whether inside or outside the premises of the school, entity, or institution.

Estremera (2018) found that all members of the child protection committee demonstrated awareness in identifying cases of child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, and bullying.

In a related study, Bayucca (2020) highlighted that teachers were knowledgeable about the child protection policy implemented by the Department of Education, especially in schools participating in the program. Similarly, Roche (2017), in his literature review, offered significant insights into child maltreatment and the child protection framework in the Philippines. He also recommended further research on policies and programs that address the social, cultural, and structural factors influencing child protection.

Duties And Functions of the School Officials and Personnel in the Implementation of Child Protection Policy

DepEd Order No. 20, series of 2012, outlines the roles and responsibilities of school officials and personnel in enforcing the Child Protection Policy (CPP). Schools are mandated to establish and maintain effective child protection policies and procedures while regularly monitoring their implementation. It is essential that the school not only adopts the policy but also ensures that all stakeholders learners, school personnel, parents, guardians, visitors, and guests are fully informed about its provisions.

Zamora (2021) highlighted the various challenges faced by implementers of the CPP, including school heads, teachers, and parents. Her study also presented the strategies they used to overcome these difficulties, along with the valuable lessons learned from their experiences. Core responsibilities include organizing and convening the Child Protection

Committee, facilitating capacity-building activities for committee members and guidance personnel, and conducting disciplinary proceedings when learners commit offenses.

Duties And Functions of the School Officials and Personnel in the Implementation of Child Protection Policy

According to DepEd Order No. 20, series of 2012, school officials and personnel have key responsibilities in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy (CPP). Schools must establish clear and effective child protection policies and procedures, ensure their consistent enforcement, and regularly monitor compliance. It is also essential that the school formally adopts the policy and communicates it clearly to all concerned—learners, personnel, parents, guardians, custodians, visitors, and guests.

Hazel S. Zamora (2021) identified several challenges faced by CPP implementers, including school heads, teachers, and parents. Her study also outlined the strategies used to address these issues and the valuable insights gained through their experiences. Among the duties of school officials are organizing and convening the school's Child Protection Committee, conducting training and capacity-building sessions for committee members and guidance counselors or teachers, and initiating disciplinary proceedings when learners commit offenses.

The duties and functions of school officials and personnel in implementing the Child Protection Policy, as stated in DepEd Order No. 20, series of 2012. First, the institution must ensure that it has effective child protection policies and procedures in place and regularly monitors compliance. Ensure that the school adopts a child protection policy and that all relevant parties, including pupils, students, learners, school personnel, parents, guardians, custodians, visitors, and guests, are aware of it.

The challenges encountered by Child Protection Policy (CPP) implementers, school heads, teachers, and parents were presented, along with the strategies they employed to address these challenges, as well as the insights gained from their experiences (Hazel S. Zamora, 2021). Organize and convene the Child Protection Committee for the school. Conduct capacity-building activities for the members of the Child Protection Committee and Guidance Counselors/teachers. Conduct disciplinary proceedings in cases of offenses committed by pupils, students, or learners.

Ensure that children's participatory rights and other fundamental rights are recognized and upheld in all procedures and decisions that impact their well-being. Keep detailed records of all incidents involving bullying or peer abuse and submit the required reports, along with the

corresponding intake forms (Annexes "A" and "B"), to the Division Office at the end of each school year.

Conduct relevant training and capacity-building sessions focused on child protection measures and established protocols. Schools must also implement a Student Code of Conduct that applies to all learners on school premises, during travel to and from school, at school-sponsored activities, and even during lunch breaks, whether held on or off campus.

In addition, adopt conflict resolution mechanisms that honor Indigenous peoples' rights, provided these practices align with the provisions of this Department Order and fully protect the rights of the child.

Collaborate with the appropriate offices, agencies, or entities to provide necessary support and interventions in carrying out child protection responsibilities. Coordinate specifically with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), other relevant government bodies, or accredited non-government organizations in managing a Child Protection Hotline for reporting incidents of abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and similar offenses, as well as for providing counseling services.

Ensure that all reported cases involving abuse and related acts are handled by the provisions outlined in this Department Order. Furthermore, Article 218 of the Family Code of the Philippines outlines the duties and responsibilities of school administrators, both academic and non-academic personnel, in safeguarding the welfare of children under their care.

School personnel are expected to exercise special parental authority and responsibility over children while they are under their supervision, instruction, or custody. This authority extends to all sanctioned school activities, whether conducted on or off school grounds.

Under Articles 220 and 233 of the Family Code of the Philippines, Presidential Decree No. 603, and other relevant laws, school officials and staff are entrusted with the following duties toward the children in their care: to keep them under their guidance and provide appropriate support, education, and instruction through both moral teaching and positive example; to offer love, affection, sound advice, companionship, and understanding; and to promote and safeguard their physical and mental well-being at all times.

Provide children with appropriate and wholesome educational materials, and closely monitor their activities, recreational pursuits, and social interactions. Safeguard them from negative influences and prevent the development of habits that may harm their health, academic performance, or moral values.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed the descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the relationship between the level of compliance with child protection policies in schools in the following areas: a) duties and functions of school officials and personnel, b) Establishment of the Child Protection Committee, c) Capacity Building of School Officials, Personnel, Parents, and Learners for Academic Achievement in Impasug-ong District I for the School Year 2023-2024.

Research Locale

The study will be conducted in Impasug-ong District I of the Division of Bukidnon, covering the period of the school year 2023-2024.

To learn more about the area of study, it will be described and cited, including some important details, technical descriptions, facts, and figures about the locality under study.

Impasug-ong, a municipality in Bukidnon, Philippines, spans 105,117 hectares, encompassing 13 barangays and 53 sitios, with a population of 53,863 in 2020. It is renowned for its natural beauty and is home to a significant population of the Higaonon Indigenous People.

Impasug-ong, one of Bukidnon's oldest towns, has a rich history intertwined with the cultural heritage of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon people. While specific events in the town's educational history are not extensively documented in the available sources, the cultural practices and traditions of the indigenous communities have played a significant role in shaping the educational landscape.

The Bukidnon-Tagoloanon community, residing in areas such as Sitio Kibuwa, Impalutao, and Impasug-ong, has rich oral traditions and cultural practices that have been integral to their identity. These traditions encompass various aspects of life, including rituals related to birth, marriage, and death. The preservation and transmission of these practices have been challenged by modernization and external influences, yet they remain a cornerstone of the community's cultural education. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge systems into formal education.

Efforts to document and incorporate the cultural practices of communities like the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon into educational curricula aim to enrich the learning experience and preserve Indigenous heritage. While specific milestones in Impasug-ong's formal educational development are not detailed in the available sources, the town's commitment to preserving

its cultural heritage suggests an educational endeavor deeply rooted in community values and traditions.

FINDINGS

Based on the data gathered, the major findings are the following:

The level of compliance with the child protection policy in schools in the areas of duties and functions of the school officials and personnel, the establishment of the Child Protection Committee, and the Capacity Building of school officials, Personnel, Parents, and Learners was very highly compliant.

The learner's mental State was flourishing (positive emotions, joy, gratitude, calmness, strong relationships and social connections, high resilience, and coping skills)

There was no significant relationship between the level of compliance with the child protection policy in schools and the learner's mental state.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings, the following conclusions were formulated.

The level of compliance with the child protection policy in schools was very highly compliant. The findings indicate that the schools demonstrate a strong commitment to safeguarding the learners' rights and welfare. The very high level of compliance with the Child Protection Policy reflects effective implementation of guidelines, consistent monitoring, and active participation of teaching and non-teaching personnel in creating a safe and supportive learning environment.

The findings indicate that the level of mental state was flourishing, signifying that they exhibit positive psychological well-being, resilience, and satisfaction with life. This result suggests that learners possess adaptive coping mechanisms, healthy social relationships, and a supportive learning environment that nurture their emotional and mental well-being.

The findings revealed that there was no significant relationship between the level of compliance with the child protection policy in schools and the learners' mental state. This suggests that while schools have effectively implemented child protection policies, these measures alone may not have a direct influence on the mental well-being of learners. The result implies that learners' mental state is shaped by a broader set of factors such as family environment, peer relationships, socio-emotional support, and individual resilience beyond policy compliance. Hence, maintaining a safe school environment remains vital, but it should

be complemented by comprehensive mental health programs and psychosocial interventions to support learners' holistic well-being. The null hypothesis was hereby accepted.

In view of the findings and conclusions, the researcher formulates the following recommendations:

Given that the level of compliance with the child protection policy in school was found to be very highly compliant, it is recommended that schools continue to sustain and institutionalize these best practices. Regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to ensure that compliance remains consistent and effective. Additionally, schools may enhance their programs by integrating continuous professional development on emerging child protection issues, strengthening collaboration with local government units and child welfare agencies, and expanding awareness campaigns for parents and learners. These initiatives will help maintain a culture of safety, responsiveness, and shared accountability in promoting child protection within the school community.

Since the learners' mental state was found to be at a flourishing level characterized by positive emotions, joy, gratitude, calmness, strong relationships, and high resilience, it is recommended that schools sustain and strengthen programs that promote socio-emotional well-being. Initiatives such as mindfulness activities, peer-support programs, life skills training, and values education integration should be continuously implemented to nurture these positive traits. Teachers and guidance personnel may also be encouraged to provide consistent mentoring and counseling to maintain learners' emotional balance and resilience, especially during challenging times. Furthermore, collaboration among parents, community partners, and mental health professionals should be enhanced to create a holistic and supportive environment that continually fosters learners' mental wellness and overall development.

Since the study revealed no significant relationship between the level of compliance with the child protection policy in schools and the learners' mental state, it is recommended that schools and education stakeholders adopt a more holistic approach to promoting learners' well-being. While maintaining strong compliance with child protection policies remains essential for ensuring safety and security, schools should also focus on complementary interventions that directly address mental health. These may include the integration of mental health education into the curriculum, regular psychological assessments, counseling services, peer support initiatives, and parent engagement programs. Further research may also be conducted to explore other variables such as family dynamics, social environment, or

academic stress that may have a stronger influence on learners' mental health. Through these efforts, schools can develop a more comprehensive framework that safeguards both the physical protection and psychological well-being of every learner.

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